

-The Hollow-

By Cathy McCarthy

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Please note: British spelling conventions have been used throughout this work.

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To Nanny McCarthy

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Table of Contents

[Glossary](#) [Character Names](#)

[Prologue](#) [Chapter One](#) [Chapter Two](#)

[Chapter Three](#) [Chapter Four](#) [Chapter Five](#)

[Chapter Six](#) [Chapter Seven](#) [Chapter Eight](#)

[Chapter Nine](#) [Chapter Ten](#) [Chapter Eleven](#)

[Chapter Twelve](#) [Chapter Thirteen](#) [Chapter Fourteen](#)

[Chapter Fifteen](#) [Chapter Sixteen](#)

Glossary of Terms

Aaniin "Aanen" (Ojibway) -- Hello

Anishinaa'beg "Anishinaa'be" (Ojibway) -- The name the Ojibway call themselves. Ani, means from whence, nishina means lowered, abe means male of the species. The Ojibway believed that they were created then lowered to the earth by the Creator (Edward Benton- Benai). It is also translated to mean the good beingd, those who derive their goodness from their intent to do good. (Basil Johnson)

Asin'ipwa'gun (Ojibway) - Ceremonial pipe

The Battle of Greasy Grass (English) - The Lakota name for the Battle of the Little Bighorn

Daebaudj'imoot (Ojibway) - storytellers

Debwe (Ojibway) -- Truly, I tell the truth

Djibe'nak (Ojibway) -- grave markers

Djibe'gumig (Ojibway) -- grave huts

Domine non sum dignus (Latin) - Lord I am not worthy

Dominus vobiscum -- (Latin) God be with you

Fenian (English) - An Irish terrorist organization formed in the mid-nineteenth century to overthrow the English and re establish Irish rule. Branches of this organization flourished among Irish immigrants in Northeastern North America.

Gaihiwi'yo (Iroquois) -- The Code of Handsome Lake

Gan-e-e-ar-tehgo'wii (Iroquois) head of, chief

Geezhigo-Quae (Ojibway) - Sky Woman

Gitchi-Manitou (Ojibway) -- The Great Mystery. This is the name given to the Creator of all life.

Gitchi-Ojibway-Gameeng (Ojibway) -- Lake Superior

Ghost Dance (English) -- a ritual that may have been passed to the Ojibway from the Lakota in the late nineteenth century. It was said that performing the Ghost Dance would bring all those who had died back to life. All the animals that had been decimated with the coming of the White man would return and together they would drive the White man out of North America back to their homeland across the sea.

Ina'bandumo'win (Ojibway) - medicine dream, vision dream. Dreams are considered the principle means through which deceased ancestors and the Creator speak to an individual. Their interpretation defines the concept used to describe them. If the dream sheds light on the path an individual must take to fulfill the Sacred Circle, then it is an ina'bandumo'win.

K'zaug-in (Ojibway) - I love you

Maajaan (Ojibway) -- It's time to go

Makwa (Ojibway) -- Bear

Manomin (Ojibway) -- wild rice, also a wild rice dish prepared with dried blueberries

Mide (Ojibway) -- member of the Ojibway Grand Medicine Society, part shaman, part healer. The Ojibway believe that an illness is an imbalance of the physical, the psychological and the spiritual existences of an individual. In order to affect a cure, all aspects must be brought back into balance. This is done through herbs and medical practice (physical), interpretation of dreams (psychological) and ritual (spiritual). A Mide-in-training is guided through four levels of learning tied to each of the abovementioned levels of existence by an individual teacher. Recognition as a Mide is only granted when the teacher passes on.

Midewagon (Ojibway) -- ceremonial hut

Midewiwin (Ojibway) -- Grand Medicine Society

Miigwech (Ojibway) - I have had my fill, thank you

Mi' in (Ojibway) -- enough

Miniconjou (Lakota) -- A Lakota tribe. The people killed at Wounded Knee in 1890 were primarily from this tribe

Miskwagikino (Ojibway) -- marking in red dye

Mojagi'jig (Ojibway) -- Always day

Myeengen (Ojibway) - wolf

Needjee (Ojibway) - friend

Ni'bowin (Ojibway) - death

Nindede (Ojibway) -- father

Ninga (Ojibway) -- mother

Nookomis (Ojibway) -- grandmother

Muk-a-day'i-konayayg (Ojibway) -- Blackrobe, Jesuit priest, member of the Society of Jesus.

Odjicag (Ojibway) -- Spirit of a person

Papa'gine (Ojibway) -- Grasshopper

Pater noster, qui tolis peccata mundi, Miserare nobis (Latin) - Our father who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.

Seven Fires Prophecy (English) -- the lynchpin story of Ojibway culture. Prophets came to the people instructing them to migrate inland from the Atlantic Ocean to escape destruction and establish themselves at the western and northern shores of the Great Lakes. The prophets also foresaw the coming of the White man and the loss and destruction of Ojibway culture and land. The final prophecy (Seventh Fire) predicted the revival of Ojibway people and life along with renewed prosperity.

Sganyodae:yoh (Iroquois)- Iroquois Handsome Lake, the Iroquois name for Lake Ontario as well as the name of an important holy man and prophet who lived in upstate New York at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century. He established a Code of behaviour for his people based on the old ways of the Iroquois and advocated complete separation from the White and his ways.

Sundance (English) -- This is a Lakota ritual that may have found its way into the rituals of neighbouring tribes including the Western Ojibway whose territory was adjacent that of the Lakota. It was done primarily by men in order to dedicate themselves to the welfare and protection of their community. Bone awls were pushed through the skin overlaying the pectorialis major. Leather thongs were knotted around the awls and then attached to a bent sapling in the centre of the dance area. The dancer would move around the tree, leaning against the thongs at intervals so that the awls would eventually tear free of the skin.

Ultra-vires (Latin) -- Beyond the scope

Wa'abizheshi (Ojibway) -- Marten Clan

Wabos (Ojibway) - Rabbit

Waginogon (Ojibway) -- Round lodge constructed of bent poles covered in bulrush matting or bark.

Wanda'wasud (Ojibway) -- Name giver

Wayaabishkiiwed (Ojibway) -- White man

White Buffalo Calf Pipe Woman (English) -- an important prophet to the Lakota people. These beings were shared among tribes. She is said to have brought the medicine pipe to the people and, through it, taught them the lesson of the sacred circle (all creation is alive and is related and interdependent to each other). She also brought the buffalo to the people, a gift from the Creator through which all the people's needs would be satisfied.

Windigo (Ojibway) -- Soul killer, eater of spirits. It was said the Windigo prowled the perimeter of the village at night and would destroy the spirits of people who had done something against their community.

Winonah (Ojibway) -- to nourish, mythological daughter of N'okomis. She was so beautiful that the Manitou, Aepungishimuk ravished her four times. As a result, she gave birth to four sons.

Yuwipi (Lakota) -- Prophet.

Character Names English and Ojibway

Cathleen (Kate) McCaffrey - Wase'ya -- Light

Annie (Graham) McCaffrey - Meya'wigobiwik -- She who stands strong

Vincent Landreville - Gidagaakoons -- Spotted Deer

Elijah Landreville - Weza'wange -- Yellow wing

Delia Landreville - Mitig'wakik -- Spirit Drum

Papa'gine -- Grasshopper

No'dinens -- Little Wind

Ickwe'saigun -- Spinning Stone

Gi'wita'wisek -- Wanders around checking things out

Douglas Fairchild - Miskwagikino -- Marking in Red Dye

Prologue

Breckenridge Quebec, summer 1957

Searing pain, the smell of blood. The child cried out, a sound that seemed familiar yet unfamiliar. She grasped her hand and stared at the blood as it oozed out of the gash made by the rust-red nail in a precious piece of weathered wood. In a white flash she heard the same cry uttered in her dead mother's voice. She felt the searing pain in her dead mother's pelvis and smelt her dead mother's blood as it had poured out like water, from the same warm place that she had been only moments before. Another cry invaded her mind, the same scream of searing pain from another place, another time, a cold place, and the smell of blood. This time though it was mixed with the smell of a lit match, the smell of dirty clothes, and the cold smell of snow.

The visions left as swiftly as they had come. But the child was not afraid of them anymore. No, she had gotten used to them, expected them even, especially when something like this happened. Running feet. She looked in the direction of the sound.

Nana. She stood up to meet her, to show her the tear in her hand the blood dripping into the sweet-smelling grass.

"Cathleen McCaffrey, what have you done?" Nana's voice was sweet, like the breeze that caught her hair. She would fix her up, with her plant mush and bandages. Then she would stroke the pain away and make her brave again, tell her a story from the deep forest, one that would be perfect for cut hands. Nana took a generous handkerchief from her apron pocket and wrapped it tightly around the wound. The handkerchief was edged in lace and smelled of lavender, Nana's smell. The bleeding stopped as soon as the fabric touched her. The pain stopped as soon as Nana scooped her up into her strong arms and carried her to the gaping maw of the shed.

As she leaned into her grandmother's abundant breast watching her clean the gash in her hand another vision flashed into her mind. This time it was a hand raised, palm facing her. It was drenched in dripping red from fingertip to wrist but no one was attached to it. Something was forming in the middle of it, a hole of some kind, like the ones in the pictures of Jesus, only bigger. A word formed in the back of her mind. Hollow.

"Nana, is the hollow where you live?" It seemed the exact right question now, as she lay against the soft curve that smelled of lavender and lunch and of the ever-burning woodstove in the kitchen.

"Yes, dear."

Nana looked puzzled and sad at the same time as if she could see the visions as they bubbled up behind her eyes.

"But what is a hollow, Nana?" She had heard the word used before and of course it was the name of the farm where Nana and Aunt Lilith and Auntie Bridget and she lived. But then she had also heard it in another context. Auntie Lilith would say it when Nana was feeling sad.

"It's many things to many people." Nana sighed. "Most of all it's a place; it's a home, Cathleen."

"What's a home, then?" She knew very well what the word "home" meant, but at this point she just wanted to stay there, locked in a safe place. She needed the closeness, the feeling of being loved just because she was there and she was who she was. It was like a sugar craving.

"Some people go there to live, to find out what's important, who they are, where they come from. Some people go there to hide, to cover themselves up and never live."

The little girl thought about the red hand again. There was some kind of connection here, but she didn't understand it. Maybe she needed to ask a better question.

"Do I live in the hollow too, Nana?"

"Yes, we all live in a hollow, a place, of our own making."

She pulled herself up to cuddle into Nana's soft cheek. There was something very sad here, she could see it behind Nana's eyes. It was like the loneliness she felt when she lay listening for daddy's return in the dark, knowing that he would put his mouth to the telephone rather than her waiting lips.

"Can I live with you, in your hollow, Nana?"

"Maybe someday, Cathleen. Now it's time for you to go lie down."

Chapter One

Ni'bowin (death)

The Present: Ottawa, Canada February, 1973

God, what's happening to me? She lay her head down on the cold gray Formica table to ease the throbbing in her chest. It was as if someone had their hand around her heart and was squeezing the life out of it. Suddenly the image of another place flashed into her mind, a small familiar place. But the colours were wrong, the angle wrong. There was a smell of blood and a searing pain and a strangled cry. The vision bathed her in a sense of foreboding.

"You're name Cathleen McCaffrey?" She could barely hear his voice across the table in the interrogation room of the Waller Street Police Station. She squinted in the direction of the speaker. He was hazy, on the other side of her dissolving vision. A vision or the dregs of the hashish Julian had brought over last night, she asked herself. What had Julian called it? Black Leb, best hash on the market. A bunch of them had smoked it from a hookah at their Glen Avenue flop house. Was it Julian who had screwed her or someone else? She couldn't remember. Best stuff made you forget everything.

"Miss McCaffrey, I am Corporal Hooper of the RCMP Fraud Investigation Unit and this is Constable Bedard. We would like to ask you a few questions."

"I know my rights. You may have me on possession, but we didn't have enough for trafficking." Reality was fanning away the haze. Think straight, Kate, she cautioned herself, or you'll dig yourself in deeper.

"Says here this is your third trip to Waller Street and the charges were dropped on both priors by order of the Police Chief. Maybe you won't be so lucky this time." The one named Hooper smirked as he spoke.

"You're the Narc, you tell me."

"We're not from Narcotic, Cat'leen. Fraud Investigation, remember?" The other one spoke this time in a lilting Quebecois accent.

"B'en Qu'es-que tu veux?" she shot back in an accent from the streets.

"Ton pere. Ses affaires. "

"Va t'en bas." She stood up, made her way to the door and pounded her fist into the metal. "Someone let me out of here."

"You may as well talk to us, Cat'leen. No one will come until we finish 'ere."

"What makes you think I know anything about my father's business?" she spat back after returning to her chair.

"Come now, you must know something. You're still living with him, more-or-less, when you're not with your loser friends at Glen Avenue. We've been eavesdropping on your phone conversations for the last couple of months. Sounds like you're a real good listener." Hooper replied quietly.

She felt the adrenaline rise in her gut. Fight or flight, the memory of her anthropology professor lecturing on the subject at Carleton University popped into her head as she sat listening to the words of Dudley-Do-Right.

"You have no right violating my privacy or my father's privacy."

"We have a warrant to tap your father's phone." Hooper smiled apologetically.

His words leapt down her throat, burned at the pit of her stomach. Jesus what had they said to each other in the past while, beyond his pleading with her to come back home and her insistence that he get the hell out of her life? She looked deeply into the English one's eyes and thought she detected fear, the smell of blood.

"I have nothing to say to you." she hissed back.

"Pas une bonne idee, ma chere." The Frenchman whispered. "Aiding and abetting, not reporting what you know, it's all the same to a judge. Tu es complice d'un crime, an accomplice, hein? It will go bad for you when we catch him."

"Bedard is right, Cathleen. You'll be charged and tried as if you had committed the crimes yourself. Think about it. It's the right thing to do. You know that. A lot of good people have suffered because of your father. Maxwell Hendry killed himself. I wouldn't want that on my conscience." Corporal Hooper handed her his business card and reached for a button under the table.

"You're free to go, Miss McCaffrey, it seems your father is still a force to be reckoned with in this city, but for how much longer?"

Bedard lit up a Gitaine as they watched the woman disappear down the hall. "Maudit Irlandais! The only thing worse is a Limey slut. Think they own the goddammed country, collis!"

But she didn't quite fit the part to Brian Hooper's thinking. Sure her eyes were that typical Irish blue-green, her nose and cheeks were covered in freckles and the thick wavy hair that cascaded down her shoulders was a rich strawberry blonde-colour you so often saw on the "Come to Eire" posters. But she didn't have that north European height or build. In fact if she weighed more than ninety pounds soaking wet, or stood taller than the middle of his chest, he would have been surprised. Her face was a little too broad, her cheekbones too high, her features too big. And her skin. To one as sensitive to physical characteristics as he had trained himself to be, it was plain to see that her skin was too dark to be of Irish descent. She had an eerie look about her, he mused, piercing, intimidating, like a disabled eagle on a keeper's arm.

Weird chick, he thought as he passed his hand across his face. All the time he had been speaking to her he had wanted to get up and run away and his nose had been filled with the smell of blood. Weird chick.

"That's your problem, Lucien, you only see things in terms of race." Hooper ran a hand through a stubby thatch of jet-black hair and fanned Bedard's smoke away from his face. "You miss a lot that way."

"Oh. I was wondering why they gave this case to you, mon noir. You can see into the soul. So tell me, medicine man, what do you see in that bitch's soul, or does she 'ave one at all?"

Hooper felt the heat rise in his cheeks knew that his anger was escaping from his eyes. Was it just another one of Lucien's stupid remarks or was he echoing the current water cooler talk? In any event he decided then and there that he had had enough of this arrogant Pepsi. The Commander could go to hell with his "Bilingual/Bicultural Balance in the Unit". He would have him sent back to Vice as soon as possible.

White Earth Ojibway Reservation, Minnesota, February, 1973

"My father will want her buried in Ottawa." Cathleen found it difficult to meet the elder woman's eyes.

"Four days." The old woman took her hand and stroked it gently. It gave Cathleen the courage to look into her face, look into her dark cow-eyes framed by deep-set smile lines and grizzled eyebrows.

"Four days 'til what, Nookomis Mina?"

"We will make our own ceremony for your Nana. You will see. It will be the time for her spirit to join her ancestors. Then you can take her body back to her white family."

They sat quietly in her grandmother's cabin. It was typical of the shacks on the Rez, no electricity, no plumbing, save the hand pump at the pitted-gray porcelain sink. In the summer, water drained quickly into the back yard where Nana had grown corn, pumpkin and squash. But by February, it could take half a day for sink water to seep below the frost line. In a corner an old black woodstove held court on a slate platform, demanding that anyone who dared live there see to its insatiable appetite. Its black pipes snaked across the wooden beams to the closed-in bedroom at the opposite end. The rest of the space was split between a parlour and a kitchen. In the parlour was a threadbare armchair flanked by a mismatched ottoman, some odd lamp tables and a rag rug. In the kitchen with its ill-fitting cupboards, a solid table sheltered press-back chairs. Decorating the rough-hewn stucco walls were an odd assortment of pictures, of Jesus and Mary displaying pierced hearts and stigmata and dogs dressed like people playing cards.

Cathleen and Nookomis Mina sat at the table, an old pine thing painted glossy green, chipped here and there where it was most vulnerable. Nana's round brown teapot rose from its surface, like some sacred vessel. The tea was piping hot and plentiful.

Nookomis Mina leaned over to pour them both another cup. "You been comin' here every summer for ten years now, ever since your grandmother come back to us, to her people. We're your people too, Cathleen, whether you like it or not."

"I know, Nookomis." But her tone seemed false to her own ears. At best she could only claim a connection of familiarity, she mused, certainly not a blood relationship. Even Nana couldn't have claimed that. And yet Nana had chosen to return to this place, a place where she had always been an outsider even though it had meant leaving the farm, Aunt Lilith and Auntie Bridget and her only grandchild behind.

No, it had been much more than that. She had left her, abandoned her, like her mother had abandoned her for death, and her father had abandoned her for his business. Empty words, Nookomis Mina, she thought. When Nana's memory fades from this place, you'll abandon me, too.

She sighed deeply and smiled at the old woman as she took another sip of tea. Less than a week ago she had been cooling her heels in Waller Street Police Station, listening to threats from some two-bit Mounties. The memory of her vision trickled through her mind. It had been a warning, she mused, Nana's way of telling her something was wrong. If she had only listened to it, maybe she could have done something. Instead, here she was, sitting in Nana's wood-frame cabin in the middle of White Earth, Minnesota. Annie McCaffrey, her Nana, the only person who had taken the time and interest to know who she really was lay dead in a morgue back in Duluth.

The last couple of days felt like a nightmare of flickering shapes created by a smoky coal-oil lamp on dark walls. The cabin with its sweet smell of burning wood mixed with mothballs and Yardley's Lavender was no longer a refuge from her guilt, from her sense of shame. Now it was as lonely a shell as the inside of her head, cold, despite the proximity of the woodstove, empty despite Nookomis Mina's warm hand on hers.

When Elijah Landreville, Chief of the White Earth Ojibway had called Ottawa three days ago, his message had been short and to the point. "Your grandmother is sick. She wants you to come."

"My father will want to come, too." She had responded.

"No, only you."

She knew her father would be concerned, maybe even hurt when she told him what was going on. Deep down, she knew also that he would be relieved not having to leave the safety of his latest real estate scam for a bloody Indian reservation.

His Lincoln had been oppressively warm during the ride to the airport. She had glanced longingly at the controls, unbuttoned her down-filled parka but did not dare to reach over to switch the heat off or roll the window down. Daddy didn't like people telling him what to do in any space he called his own.

"Who's meeting you in Duluth?" he asked without taking his eyes off the road.

"I don't know. Elijah said he would send someone."

"Well whoever it is make sure you gas up before heading out. Damn people never think of those things. And make sure the heap they're driving has a chance in hell of making it back to White Earth. This time of year you'll freeze to death waiting for someone to stop and help."

"Yes, daddy." she sighed trying to block out his "damn Indian" speech.

"You got that credit card I gave you?"

"Yes, I have it."

"Well use it. If you have any doubts, just use it."

"I'll be back in a couple of days." She assured him, as she kissed him good-bye at the airport. "You know Nana; it's just her way."

"It's always been her way, Cathleen." His hug had been tight, tense; his kiss preoccupied.

As the plane reached cruising altitude, she looked out at the perfect turquoise sky and then down at the billowy clouds that seemed to be propping her up. The brilliance of it all made her eyes heavy, her body relax. She leaned back into memories of run-down shacks made beautiful by the people who lived in them, children, barefoot and dirty, rag-covered and laughing as they invented fantastic stories and games around bent wire and wheel rims rescued from the nearby garbage dump. Memories of her time there, welcomed, accepted even, but set apart in their ramshackle world by clean clothes, light hair and eyes, stung her as they always did whenever she journeyed back to White Earth.

She tried easing the pain with the Time magazine she had picked up. On the cover there was a picture of armed men with long hair and painted faces standing defiantly in front of a white clapboard church. The caption read, "Siege at Wounded Knee". She found the cover story and read the articles surrounding the subject. An interview with Dennis Banks, a radical Ojibway from Leech Lake Reserve, caught her attention.

"You think the genocide has stopped? Well think again. The weapons you use today are far more effective than guns. Alcohol, poverty, residential schools, all these things are killing Indian people in larger numbers than the Gatling guns you used to wipe us out here eighty three years ago. You are killing us from the inside out."

"Killing us from the inside out." She stored his words in a place deep within her, close to where the pain lived.

Elijah met her in Duluth, his black Stetson with the lone eagle feather towering above the crowd as she stepped through Immigration. The airport was busy with travelers. He seemed so serene, so muted against the backdrop of frosted mink coats. Musak drowned out his quiet greeting, but not his radiant smile. They made their way out against the oncoming crowd, Elijah leading the way.

He hoisted her heavy valise into the bed of the battered old pickup before scrambling up into the ratty seat of the cab. When he started the tired engine she glanced instinctively to the gas gauge only to realize that it was broken. He caught her intent and smiled warmly. "I filled up on the way here." After some coaxing with the gears, the pickup jerked grudgingly toward the exit.

"Your grandmother is dying." He waited until they had cleared the airport parking lot and were on the expressway to speak. "Last week she took a bad turn, so we brought her into town. The doctor said there was nothing he could do; she is too old and her heart is bad. She wanted to go home, but I took her to Matthew Cardinale's place instead, because I knew she wouldn't make it back."

"Why didn't you tell me this on the phone? Nana should be with her family, not at Matthew Cardinale's house." He had deliberately limited her options, her father's options, even Nana's options she thought. Anger rose in her chest.

Elijah Landreville's face grew hard, his tone cold. "She wants to see you. No one else." They made their way down the road in the silence of the labouring engine and the metallic vibration of loose parts.

Matthew Cardinale's house was crowded with White Earth people. She tried not to glare at the familiar faces as she stepped through the front door. Instead she followed Elijah to a room in the back of the house where her grandmother lay. Elijah went to Nana's head and whispered something. The only word Cathleen could make out was "ninga".

Eyes closed, the old woman extended a shaky hand in her direction. Cathleen knelt at the bedside and clutched the hand to her heart. "I'm here, Nana." Her tears overflowed onto the old woman's translucent skin. Nana was too weak to speak, but she managed a familiar smile, one that had always felt like the sun coming out from behind a cloud. Only then did Cathleen notice the fragrance of burning sweet grass, and the soft voice of Mina Wolf-Healer chanting tunelessly somewhere behind her. She glanced over to Elijah on the other side of the bed, his face stone somber, his long braids askew from removing his hat. He was holding Nana's other hand. Her own son should be here, Cathleen thought. But her anger was banished by a wash of serenity and resignation. Peace and contentment passed into her heart through the fluttering pulse of the old woman's fingers. It was as if she was telling her that things were exactly as they should be.

Cathleen looked over to Elijah Landreville as he sat, his eyes fixed on Nana's face. A sense of loss, overwhelming, misplaced, to her way of thinking seemed to be reflected in the way he held his jaw and knit his brow. How important could one old white woman be to be to the chief of an Indian reservation?

Within a couple of hours, the old woman's breathing became laboured, and her muscles tightened to an unspoken pain. All in the tiny room waited in silence until the old woman's head sank back into the rose-patterned pillowcase and her last breath eased out of her lifeless body. Cathleen sat motionless, still holding on, waiting for Nana to inhale again, one second, then one minute, then two. She turned from her grandmother's peaceful face, distracted by the glint of a knife and watched Elijah hack off his braids. He placed them in the old woman's hand, the one he had held as she slipped away.

Now she shivered in the frosty air of Nana's cabin as she opened her eyes to the next morning, the first sunrise without her grandmother. A sense of hideous loss seared through her body. She curled up to

staunch it, dragged her cheek through the tears on her pillow. "How am I supposed to go on without you?" she whispered.

After awhile she realized Mina Wolf-Healer was sitting in the wicker rocking chair in the corner of the bedroom. Her wizened face echoed her own sorrow, her eyes silently shared her pain.

"What time is it?" Cathleen stretched her arms above her as she spoke.

Nookomis Mina looked out the window and squinted toward the winter sun. "Mid-morning." It was another one of those damn Indian things that daddy found so irritating. But mid-morning was about as close to accurate as they ever got.

"I need to go into town to phone home. My father will want her buried in Ottawa." She struggled out of the warm bed and shrunk back when her feet touched the ice-cold linoleum floor.

The old woman smiled and brought her Nana's knit slippers. "Four days," she smiled.

After breakfast Mina led her out to the shed that leaned crookedly against the kitchen door and tapped her cane on the arched cover of an old steamer trunk in the corner. "Bring it into the house." The trunk was too heavy and cumbersome to carry, so Cathleen dragged it across the threshold by its mottled leather handle. The lock was brittle as the old woman turned the key. The smell of mothballs and sage filled her nostrils as the lid squeaked open.

"Last winter, your grandmother showed me what was in this box. She asked me to open it for you after she died." The tissue crackled and scattered like desiccated leaves as Nookomis Mina uncovered the first layer. "This box is full of relics and remembrances of your ancestors. It was the box of your grandmother, who we knew by her real name, Meya'wigobiwik, a Mide, a healer woman of the Bear Clan. Now it is the box of Cathleen McCaffrey who must find her own name among the people."

"What people, Nookomis? You're not making any sense."

Mina ignored her question, turned her attention back to the box. She reached for a packet covered in tattered paper and placed it in Cathleen's hands. "This is a Bear Clan medicine bundle. The contents of this pouch are sacred to your family. Meya' opened it only rarely in her lifetime and she never felt worthy of the honour. I trust you not to open it until you have been purified, until you take your place among the people." She gently wrested it from her and restored it to the box. "You can look at the rest of the things on your own. Each one of them has great meaning to your past. Each one of them represents a stone in your circle."

"What do you mean, my circle? Why would Nana have a sacred bundle, she was Catholic to the core? God, she forced me to say the rosary every night I spent with her."

Mina only smiled and again rummaged about in the steamer trunk. Her eyes mirrored success and she drew out a thick black notebook. "When your grandmother returned to White Earth, she knew the day would come when either her line would continue through you, or it would be lost forever to what she called the hollow. She said, just like her, you would someday have to choose between the path of the Wayaabishkiiwed and the path of the Anishinaa'beg. I think she knew all along that your time of choosing would come only after her spirit crossed over."

Cathleen felt her heart pounding as she listened to Mina's words, half-wished she could believe what she was hearing. But logic was against it. This was 1973, for heaven sake. Religion was dead, God was dead. How could she choose something that didn't exist anymore except in the minds of eccentric old Indians?

"Look at me, Nookomis Mina. I am a white woman, not an Indian. Nana was white, too. Her own family still doesn't know why she left Breckenridge to come here. How can I possibly choose to be an Indian when I'm white?"

"Your grandmother was the daughter of two Anishinaa'bee people, Mitig'wakik, known to you as Delia Landreville, and Ickwe'saigun, my uncle."

"No, Mina, Nana's father's name was Anthony Graham."

"Your Grandmother was born before the Wayaabishkiiwed pony soldier named Anthony Graham took Delia Landreville as his wife."

She fell silent, stunned by what the old woman said. Why hadn't Nana ever said anything about this? Why had she left the telling of this to a stranger? Why?

"She told you in other ways, Cathleen. You must have suspected it." Nookomis Mina spoke as if she had read her mind.

"No, I accepted all of it as Nana's way. From the time I was little she never explained herself. She just ...did."

"Meya' feared your father, what he would do if you ever went home with tales of your true self. She told me that it was more important that you be able to come here and live among your people than know the truth and be kept from them."

"Then why didn't she tell me when I grew older? Surely I could have kept the secret then? God knows, I carry my share of family secrets."

"It was for that very reason, Cathleen. She knew how heavy your spirit was already and questioned the wisdom of burdening it even more."

But knowing didn't change anything, did it? She was still the daughter of two Irish Catholics, even if as it turned out, one of them was a half-breed Indian. What did genetics matter anyway? Hadn't she been raised in a white world by seemingly white people?

Mina smiled and offered her the notebook. "Let Meya' tell you the story. She wrote it for you, so that you would have the wisdom to choose your path."

Cathleen took the notebook, tentatively at first, but then clutched it to her chest, It's all I have left of her, she thought. Tears spilled onto her cheeks. Nookomis Mina hugged her gently, stroked her soft blonde hair with gnarled leathery fingers.

"Now I have to go. Welfare workers took away Donna Stone's kids last night. They will be scattered across the country by tomorrow if we don't go and get them back. I'll be here when you need me." She whispered in her ear, and left silently, as if dissolving into the air.

Chapter Two

Ina'bandumo'win (medicine dream)

Breckenridge Quebec, September, 1962 (first journal entry)

My beloved Cathleen. How I wish I were here to help you through the loss I know you are feeling. If the Great Mystery, whom we call the Gitchi-Manitou granted my wish, then you and my son

Elijah were with me at the end, and all has happened as the ancestors wanted it.

"Her son." Cathleen closed the notebook and conjured up Elijah Landreville in her mind, an imposing man, standing proud and muscular even in middle age, giant hands, equally dexterous on the land as in his law office. She searched the grizzled features of his aging face for similarities with Nana's, with her own and smiled when she found them. But who was his father? When was he born? Where?

She turned her attention to the trunk. Inside was another box, with SEARS ROEBUCK embossed on the lid. She laid out the contents, a moth-worn blue serge military jacket with pitted brass buttons, one missing, a yellowed newspaper clipping and a short note addressed to Meya'. "It is time you made your choice. The people need you more than ever." it said.

The newspaper clipping was an obituary of someone named Vincent Landreville, born August 16, 1885, deceased June 7, 1962. She nodded to herself as she read on; "...father of Elijah." He too had been a lawyer, a land-claims expert and General Council to the Sandy Lake Ojibway. The last phrase was written in a phonetic transcription of the Ojibway language. K'neekaunissinaun, waukwennng k'd'izhau.

The jacket was very old, frayed badly at the cuffs and hem, gold cord patchy where it lay hidden from time and use. Where it had worn away at the elbows there were buckskin patches, brightly embroidered circles with animals and the sun. She stroked one of the buttons and squinted to read the worn inscription; "US 7th Cavalry".

Back to the trunk, she lifted out something wrapped in blue tissue paper. It was a doeskin shift, bleached white, embroidered with bear symbols in brightly coloured cloth, dyed quill and beads. There were moccasins of equally intricate design that tied just below the knee. Another tissue-wrapped bundle contained a plain blouse, yellowed with time and a gray wool skirt, badly moth-eaten. Both were heavily stained copper-brown in the front.

Scattered at the bottom of the trunk were sepia-toned photographs of Nana as a young woman, of Grandpa McCaffrey in uniform, an album of photos taken at Breckenridge around the time of the First World War, judging by the dress of the people. The same farmhouse she had known as a child peeked unchanged through the same trees. She stopped at the picture of a tall woman stuffed into a high-collared Victorian dress with leg-o-mutton sleeves. Someone had written "Delia" on the back. This is my great-grandmother.

A striking Indian woman stared seriously back at her across time. She wondered if her father had ever seen this photo for indeed this was the first time she had ever laid eyes on it herself. In the same envelope was a picture of a slight man, boyish almost, in a stiff gray suit, sporting a mustache that seemed too big for his face. She recognized him from an old family photograph in the farmhouse back in Breckenridge. This was Anthony Graham.

Another envelope was marked "Vincent 1916", in Nana's handwriting. In it was a framed picture of a young Indian warrior, intense in expression, staring at an unknown point. He wore a simple headdress of four eagle feathers. Long black hair mixed with beaded tendrils cascaded freely over his shoulders. His right hand held a crooked stick, wound with rawhide and ornamented with feathers and bones. His left hand, was hidden behind a hooped shield with the mark of a bear paw in the centre. Half covering a buckskin shirt, and the many beaded necklaces around his neck was the blue serge military jacket with the missing button.

At the very bottom of the trunk was a stiff birch bark cylinder a little over a foot long. Tendrils of beaded rawhide decorated one side of the cylinder and the birch caps at either end were embroidered in dyed

quillwork. She gently pried one of the caps off and slipped the buckskin-wrapped object out. It was a pipe, like the ones she had seen in old westerns. Its bowl was made out of finely sculpted red clay, imprinted with a tiny wolf's head. An eagle feather set in rawhide hung down from where the bowl joined the burnished brown wood of its bore. She set it down in front of her to admire its simple beauty.

In what seemed to be an order that made sense, she lined the pictures up on the rug in front of the ceremonial pipe, the military jacket, the doeskin shift and the blouse and skirt. She scanned her work, and made adjustments. The pipe and the blue-serge jacket belonged together, the woman in Victorian clothes needed to be placed with the doeskin shift and the picture of Anthony Graham belonged on top of the stained gray skirt. To her the arrangement seemed a shorthand of a story eighty-three years long, the black notebook, a key to these things. But how could things tell a story better than words?

She sat on the floor, arms clutched around her knees, half-expecting the relics to start telling their own story. The objects created an uneasy silence in her mind, drew her back to the sad time in her life, a time without Nana, when she had chosen to turn her back on magic, replace it with Glen Avenue and drugs. At first she thought living on the edge would be just as satisfying, just as effective at soothing her soul as going to White Earth. But sex and drugs, even Black Leb, could only take her so far before reality came crashing back around her. Nana's crazy ways, her stories, her old rundown cabin, and all the weird people in this place could make her forget everything, if only for the summer months.

She picked up the notebook and opened it. With her fingers she sought Nana's mystical touch across the indented trails of blue ink. But it was like reaching for a shadow.

The Past: Concerning the events of July 1962

"I started this journal in The Hollow, when I received a box in the mail. It was postmarked White Earth, Minnesota, and I think I knew before I opened it what would be inside. It was of course my father's jacket, the one Vincent Gidagaakoons and No'dinens found in his cabin after he was killed. Mina had sent it to me along with the write-up in the Tomahawk of Vincent's death. What I didn't expect was Mina's request to return. After so many years of being away, why was it important for me to go home; why now?"

"Do you remember how to go on a vision quest? Mina telephoned the next day to ask me this. "The question you must ask the Gitchi-Manitou is Who am I? Where do I belong?"

She was right. For many long years I had tried to be both Indian and White and knew I had failed to be either. I thought I had struck a compromise by building a third person out of the ashes of the first two, but even this fell short of my spirit. With Vincent's passing, I had lost a way back to my first identity. The time had come to find another way, or stay put.

A vision quest is a sacred journey not to be made lightly or without preparation. I couldn't build a proper sweatlodge, but Bridget, Lilith and I improvised one out of tarpaulin drop sheets and rope. The kitchen stove and a cauldron of water served as our source of heat and steam.

We took the telephone off the hook, stripped off our clothing and climbed inside our makeshift sweatlodge. If anyone had wandered by, they would have thought that those three old bats had finally gone crazy after living together for so long. Bridget and Lilith were adamant that they share this stage of my quest for fear I would topple over or maybe for fear that I was really losing my mind. We started with prayers to Jesus and all the saints, to our ancestors and to the Gitchi-Manitou. I fasted and prayed and sweat to prepare for my vision.

By the morning of the fourth day, I slipped into the place where visions lived. Bridget brought me to my favourite spot overlooking the beaver dam at the mouth of Blue Sea Lake. She laid a blanket down for me to sit on and guided me to it. Then she retreated down the hillside to leave me to the forces of my vision.

As I sat there, the sounds of birds and running water drifted away and were replaced by thick heavy sheets of snow blowing in a heartbeat rhythm, blinding my path stealing my breath. I had no idea where I was, only that I was walking against the wind. I looked around for a point of reference and found it in the dull snowy glow of the winter sun. I could hear a baby crying in the distance.

"Annie, come over here. The baby is over here." Through the wall of snow, I heard a familiar voice.

"Lilith, is that you?" I called out as I made my way toward it. The snow squall lifted, and there she stood, my precious stepsister, wings spread against the blinding snow, her gray dove body as large as a human body.

"Do you remember this place, Annie?"

"No, but I feel cold and hungry." The baby was still crying, only louder now. Lilith motioned me over to a pile of something, half-covered in snow. As I made my way over to it, I noticed someone else in a soldier-blue greatcoat walking toward the same pile. The pile heaved a little and then lay still. I reached it before he did. The stench of blood, of filthy clothes and stale gunpowder was overpowering.

"This is Wounded Knee. My mother is here."

"That's right, Annie." Lilith beamed at me from the other side of the pile as if she were proud of me for solving the riddle.

"And the baby is me."

The soldier pulled the stiff corpses from the top of the pile until he got to the bottom and the source of the crying. Mama looked up at him in resignation, young and beautiful and covered in rags.

"Stand up." The soldier motioned to her with the bayonet attached to the muzzle of his rifle. Mama stood up slowly, silently clutching her crying bundle close to her breast. They stood facing each other until another soldier rode up.

"What's this, Corporal Graham?"

"A squaw Sir, and a baby. I found her under some bodies." The soldier on horseback paced around the disheveled scene. "Is she the only one?"

"Yes Sir."

"Finish her off and continue with your detail." The soldier rode away before the Corporal could acknowledge his order.

He lowered his rifle and went over to get a closer look. Mama pulled away her tattered blanket and smiled faintly at him. "It's a girl," she said quietly in English. He bit his lip hard and then looked around at the dozen or so groups of men scattered across the flat firing their guns

intermittently, loading corpses onto buckboards.

"Can you walk?" he asked her.

Mama nodded as she covered me back up. The Corporal took off his greatcoat and threw it around Mama's shoulders. He guided her to the nearest wagon.

Lilith took my hand and led me away from the buckboard that the soldier had found for Mama and the baby. She guided me to her back and we flew over the snowy badlands into summer. We entered a clearing filled with Indian People, laughing and chatting with each other. At the far end of the clearing was a long dome-shaped lodge made of ironwood poles and canvas tarpaulin shellacked green and stiff.

"Look Lilith, A waginogon." I turned to my stepsister in delight and then realized that I hadn't uttered an Anishinaa'bee word in thirty years. The realization filled me with remorse. "What ceremony?"

"Sundance." She smiled at me and pointed to a doeskin shift set with shimmering bead and quillwork. "Remember? It was your first time in the Sacred Circle. The Elders chose you to be White Buffalo Calf Pipe Woman."

"And Vincent Gidagaakoons was the Sundancer." I added. I wanted to kiss her for bringing me back to this place, but when I reached for her, she dissolved into a breeze on my cheek.

"Do you remember White Buffalo Calf-Pipe Woman's lesson?" She whispered in my ear as she swept around my head.

"All creation is one, and we are joined to everything in the Sacred Circle of life." more words I hadn't spoken in a long time.

The drum began to beat slowly and the people began gathering inside the waginogon. I joined my mother and the other women in the inner circle. I was nine years old again, and the doeskin shift was too big for me. Mama led me around the inner circle in a slow sidestepping dance.

The Elders led Vincent into the centre circle, fresh and glistening from a ceremonial sweat. He was naked except for a loincloth, and painted all over with the symbols of our Clan: Bear Clan. His face and arms were covered in black ash. It was like he was in a trance. Nookomis Dinah, the healer woman and Jacob Two Fingers, Vincent's uncle-stepfather brought him the Clan pipe to smoke. Vincent offered the pipe to the ancestors in thanks for letting him join them in the Sundance.

Jacob took his knife and pierced Vincent just above his nipples so that the bone awls could be inserted. Blood flowed over his chest, but Vincent stood proud, trying hard not to wince at the pain. The Elders blew eagle-bone whistles and the drums beat to the rhythm of our hearts. Once the awls were in place, Jacob fastened a rawhide rope to them and then to a sturdy branch of a poplar tree stretched taut and buried in the earth for the ceremony. He tied buffalo skulls, ancient war prizes from the Lakota, to Vincent's ankles. He gave Vincent his own bone whistle to blow and placed an eagle feather in each of his hands.

Vincent started his dance at the eastern point of the tree and moved on the same path as the sun, toward the south, and then the west, and then the north. At the four key points of the circle, he leaned against the rope and blew the bone whistle. I continued dancing, outside his circle but with him in spirit, feeling his pain, smelling his blood.

He danced until his skin tore away from the bone awls and he fell backwards to the hard dirt floor. The drums went silent and I stopped. The Elders helped him to his feet, took the eagle feathers from his hands and gave him a bowl of cooked corn and wild rice. The circle of people parted as he stumbled and swayed over to where I stood. I smiled shyly to him, took a handful of the mixture and broke my fast. He smiled back then fell to his knees, exhausted.

Summer bled into the red leaves of fall and the soft arch of the wagon sharpened into the angles of a little brick house set into the folds of the Gatineau Hills. Lilith resumed her human shape and we sat on the front stoop watching the sun set over the fields.

"Do you remember what Father Brennan used to say, Annie?"

"He said, it didn't matter what name you gave to God or to Jesus or what stories you told to celebrate His power. It was the idea that counted, nothing else. The only thing that mattered was that you celebrated the idea," I replied looking off to the red horizon.

"Annie, you've stopped celebrating, haven't you?"

I looked up at her, surprised "I go to Mass as often as I can, say the Beads five times a day. You and Bridget say them with me." But my words only made her shake her head.

"You go through the motions well enough, but you don't believe in it. When you were a child dancing in the ceremonies, when you told me White Earth stories in secret and scattered sweet grass in the wind, the idea was alive." She sighed and looked across the field toward the setting sun. I reached into her mind for the idea in her eyes. Her thoughts formed on my lips, "Time is running out."

"The day you decided to abandon the idea and live only in its form, you started dying, your people started dying. Look at the sun; it's going down, Annie. And it's a pity too. You already know that the little girl born of your white son is a shaman child, born with visions and the ability to reach into the mind and heal. Without your guidance how will she find her Sacred Path? How will you find your own?"

As she spoke, I felt tears well up in my eyes. For the first time in a long time I started crying, sobbing with grief over the waste I was bringing down upon my ancestors and my descendants. I tasted the tears of regret over paths not followed, children not raised, love not consummated. In the distance I heard someone calling me "Annie, wake up." I felt a hand on my shoulder shaking me. I opened my eyes to searing sunlight and a shaded face leaning into my own. "Are you all right? Do you know who you are?" the dark figure asked.

I answered in the voice of a made decision. "I am Meya'wigibiwik, The One Who Stands Strong."

Chapter Three

Gidagakoons (Spotted Deer)

"Do you believe I'm a shaman child, Nookomis Mina?" Cathleen picked at the wild rice soup the old woman had brought her for lunch. It was warm and plain with chunks of musty-tasting meat. The little bit that found her stomach made a big difference to the chill she felt inside.

"You could be, like your grandmother. It is something that lies waiting inside until it is called up." Nookomis Mina looked over to where she had arranged the items on the rug and smiled. "You did a pretty good job putting those things in order. Where do you think that came from?" She tapped the

middle of her chest to indicate the answer.

"Tell me about vision quests, Nookomis." She laid the spoon to the side of her bowl. What harm was there escaping in myth and magic, for the moment at least?

"A vision in our language is called ina'bandumo'win. Women have them more easily than men because they come with pain. And we alone suffer the pain of childbirth. That is why Anishinaa'bee men honour women and take their council seriously. Not like Lakota men who make their women walk behind them and exclude them from the sweatlodge."

Nookomis Mina laughed heartily and slapped her knee "My grandmother used to tell me the only reason she would ever walk behind a man was to kick his behind."

"You must prepare for ina'bandumo'win." she continued, "Go without food, purify yourself with sweats, pray to the Gitche-Manitou. Men and sometimes even women Sundance so the ina'bandumo'win will come. And when the vision time does come, the Gitche-Manitou may reveal your secret name, give you power against your enemy, tell you what path to take. Anything can happen."

The old woman stopped the lesson abruptly and began clearing the dishes from the table. "Leave them in the sink. I'll do them in the morning. You need to get back to your reading."

Cathleen wrapped herself in a blanket and settled into Nana's old armchair. She thought about Dennis Banks' words again, about dying from the inside out. Ever since daddy had involved her in his business deals, a black cloud had descended. Listless, without purpose or connection, she knew she had been drifting, cutting herself off from everyone around her, from everything that was happening. And now she too was dead from the inside out, happily dead, she thought, until Nana reminded her with real death that there were still living parts left.

Daddy had been too busy to listen to her when she was little, uncomfortable when she had asked him the questions that had mattered so much. "Why did Mommy die? Where is she now?" Instead she found herself shipped off to The Hollow as often as possible where answers came in stories told while milking cows and feeding chickens.

Then Nana left, just like that; no explanation, no good-byes. Oh sure she made daddy promise to let her spend summer with her, after all it was damn convenient for him. But where did that leave her for the other nine months?

She had never been a child, she mused. No, she was a resource, someone to lean on, even when she was too young to understand what he was doing.

"Do you love daddy more than anyone else in the world, Katie?"

She winced at the memory of these words. "Oh yes, daddy." And she felt sick when she thought about her reply.

Then there was the ledger. From the time she was thirteen and daddy figured she was old enough to understand what she was doing, he had called upon her loyalty, on the same blood that flowed through their veins to keep secret account of his evil. She became his witness, his notary.

Was it any wonder that White Earth had become a refuge, that she had gladly exchanged marble floors and a whirlpool bath for no floors at all and an outdoor privy? Nana's only demand was that she nurture herself and repair her spirit. Nana had been the reflecting pond, where she had found the courage to look at herself for who she was.

Daddy demanded everything from her, gave her nothing in return except money and a gilded roof over her head. Nana asked for nothing, gave her everything in return. Or had she?

Now the RCMP were vying for her services as well. It wasn't enough that she had to chronicle the horror of her father's deeds, reduce blackmail, extortion and bribery to debits and credits and a bottom line. Now she was expected to go against the blood in her veins, call the dogs down on her own flesh.

Me, Shaman woman to the Bear Clan People. I don't think so, Nana. Try Judas Goat or 'Glen Avenue loser' or better still, 'daddy's little whore'.

It's too late now. she sighed, too late for me; never time for me. She picked up the black notebook and flipped to the section where she had left off. Shall I pierce my chest and dance for my vision, Nana? She laughed silently. I don't think I would even feel pain if you drove a stake through my heart right now.

The Past: When I returned to White Earth in the fall of 1962, memories flooded back in abundance -- gifts from the ancestors. The odjicag, the spirit of my father spoke to me every night, telling me to write this down and then that. Where do I begin? I prayed. And he answered in the wind at my window, "Begin where your vision left off." Of course.

White Earth Reservation, the latter half of 1901

When I was young, Indian religion and Indian ceremonies were against the law. Many of them still are. We had to conduct them in secret, in places where the white man would not find us. Our word for white man was "Wayaabishkiiwed".

The Sundance ceremony was one that the Wayaabishkiiwed were particularly afraid of because it made warriors out of young men. So when Herbert Wold, the Indian Agent for our reservation got wind that there had been one in June 1901, he ordered all the men of the village to appear before him. Because my Papa, Anthony Graham, had been a pony soldier and had fought the Indians when he was young, Mr. Wold asked him to act as his deputy.

Papa was glad whenever the white people involved him in their affairs. His marriage to my mother, the squaw who should have died at Wounded Knee, had exiled him from his own kind. He disliked Indian people in general, and the Sandy Lake Ojibway in particular. So it must have gotten mighty lonely for him at times.

Mama understood this as only she could, and tried to ease his pain by creating a circle of white life around him. When he was at home, she cooked beef and spoke English to everyone who entered our house. She learned to read and write so she could understand what was important to him and speak with knowledge about it. She even became a Catholic and had me baptized too so he would rest easy about where we would spend eternity.

But then again, as only she could, she also remained true to her own people. As soon as Papa was out of range, she reverted to the traditional ways and assumed her role as Elder and Healer to the Bear Clan people.

The Elders asked Mr. Wold if they could be present when the inspections were done, hoping that when they got to Vincent, they would be able to intercede on his behalf and keep him out of jail. Since Mama was an Elder she was allowed to go in with the rest of them, and I slipped in behind her. They had to use the assembly hall attached to the Bureau Office to hold all of us, the Council of Elders, Papa, Mr. Wold and the rest of the Indian men. It was already hot when we packed in

there and I remember the room smelling of fresh sweat mixed with the pine of the creaky floorboards. We opened the windows full and wedged both doors to let whatever little breeze there was come wafting in. Papa ordered all gathered to stand by a far wall, gave Mama a sharp look when he noticed she was there. But when he saw me peeking out from behind her skirt, he pulled her aside and told her to take me home. She smiled at him, the way she always did when she knew she wasn't going to obey and said, "It will hold everything up." Papa stormed off to the other side of the room.

The inspections began, the Elder men going first. They proudly pointed at old scars and challenged Mr. Wold to arrest them. He just checked their names off the list and moved on. Many of the men had Sundance marks, and I believe it frightened Papa and Mr. Wold to see them. No one else could tell though, from their official manner.

Finally they came to Vincent. He unbuttoned his shirt, let it drop to the floor and then stood as proudly as he could. His whole chest was covered in so many cuts and scrapes that you couldn't make out the Sundance marks from the rest. Except for the sound of hands fanning the hot air, everyone in the room went silent, waiting to see how Mr. Wold would react.

"What happened to you, boy?" He asked him, but Vincent wouldn't answer.

Jacob Two-Fingers stepped forward. "Excuse me, sir, but he don't speak English. I can ask him for you, if you want."

"Go ahead."

Jacob turned to Vincent and spoke to him in our language. I remember thinking about how funny it was that we could understand both sides of what was said and the Wayaabishkiiwed couldn't.

"What did you do to your chest Gidagaakoons Sundancer?"

"Tell them I fell on a barbed-wire fence." Vincent remained stone-faced as he spoke.

"He says he was out late last night and tripped over a pile of barbed-wire in the dark."

Mr. Wold looked unconvinced. "Ask him what he was doing out so late."

"The barbed-wire was a good idea. Do not worry, son. I think I can take care of it from here. Just say something to me so they think you are answering their question."

"If this does not work, it is a good day to die, Nindede."

Jacob turned back to the Indian Agent. "He says he was hot and he needed to pee. When he got outside, he decided not to use the outhouse and went for the bushes instead. That's where he fell on the barbed wire."

Papa and Mr. Wold approached Vincent for a closer look. The Elders watched without expression as the two inspected the area of his chest where you would expect to find Sundance wounds.

"How old is this boy, Jacob?" Mr. Wold spoke as he returned to his desk.

"Fourteen."

"He's a little old not to be knowing English." The agent challenged him.

"His folks were trappers, lived in the bush all their lives. No need for English. He only came to

live with me last year, after his people died."

"Messed himself up real good, Jacob. Good enough that we can't be sure what we're lookin' at here." Mr. Wold spoke loud enough that we could all hear him. "You tell him this for me. I got my eye on him. Better drop that cocky young buck attitude real quick, or he'll be cooling it off in a cell upstate."

Jacob nodded and turned to Vincent. "You fooled them good, Gidagaakoons." Jacob bent down and picked his shirt up for him. "But be careful from now on, watch your back, these Wayaabishkiiwed are afraid of you."

"They should be afraid." Vincent took his shirt from his stepfather and strode out of the hall.

The Present: Cathleen retrieved the picture of Vincent Landreville from the rug and ran her fingers across the dusty glass. She felt drawn to him, to his fighting spirit and his contempt for those who were trying to kill him from the inside out.

Why was it she had seen only their passive acceptance of the system, and their quiet desolation numbed in alcohol and methyl's? It was as if Vincent's defiance had come and gone without notice. But then Nana must have noticed, she thought. It must have drawn her to him.

Where did Nana fit into all this? she wondered. Did she return to White Earth to take up Vincent's fight after he died? In all the years she had been coming to the rez, she had never seen her take on any white who came calling, or challenge any system that governed her people. There had been no clandestine meetings that she could remember, no confrontations with the police, not even polite conversations with white officials.

No fights, only children. Lots of dirty little faces screaming around the place. In fact whenever she came there was always some kid living in the cabin with her, sometimes two. Nana would never explain what they were doing there. Instead she would say "This is Myron, this is Doris. You children decide who gets the couch and who gets the floor." She drifted back over the memory of summertime filled with adventure and exploration. After playing all day in the neighbouring woods, the gang of them would pile back to the cabin for meals of roasted corn and squash, and something called manomin, wild rice boiled with maple sugar. And then there were the stories, told by moonlight, of magical creatures called manitou and tricksters, tales of the beginning of the earth and of how the animals got their names. Nana could spin a tale that would make your eyes as round as saucers, and the hair stand up on the back of your neck.

But of all the images she had of her grandmother, there were none that came close to that of revolutionary.

The Past: The Sundance incident was the last straw for the white community. Their laws weren't enough to stop the spread of evil and savage ways on the reservation. What they needed to do was build a school so they could at least save the Indian children and make them good Christian Americans. So in September 1901, they told the Anishinaa'bee Council of Elders that the Jesuits would set up a school. They would have to send all the children to it or lose their winter rations.

The Council met in secret to discuss what this would mean. Mama went along and she took me with her. They met around the stove in Nookomis Dinah's kitchen, over bowls of corn soup and steaming raspberry-leaf tea.

"I have heard of these places." I remember Nookomis Dinah, saying to those who were there. "Some of them make the children live away from their families, make them feel ashamed of being Indian. I have even heard they beat the old ways out of them. Residential schools, they call them."

"What can we do? They will starve us out." Jacob Two-Fingers spoke as he inhaled the pungent steam of his tea.

"When the children get home from the Wayaabishkiwed School, then we can take over." This was the shaman woman's advice, and they all knew that she spoke with true wisdom and spirit. The Council of Elders agreed.

The Indian Bureau called the village to a meeting shortly after that to introduce the community to the new schoolteachers and officials. A school board had been elected from the white members of the church up Spengler way.

The meeting started with a prayer. "Oh God, who has entrusted us with the upbringing and succor of the ignorant savages on this reservation, grant us the strength and wisdom to guide them into your everlasting kingdom. Through Christ our Lord, Amen."

Herbert Wold, the Indian Agent was first to speak. "All children between the ages of five and sixteen must attend school. Until the new schoolhouse is completed next spring, you will bring your children to the Indian Bureau Office starting next Monday at 9:00 in the morning. Now I'll pass you over to our new Principal, Father Larose."

Father Larose was a little man, Muk-a-day'i-konayayg, Blackrobe like the rest of the priests on the reservation. He wore thick little glasses that made his round eyes seem even smaller. And when he spoke, he tucked his hands into the sleeves of his cassock making his upper body like a hoop with a big silver cross in the centre.

"The children will wear uniforms, the girls, a black dress with white collar and cuffs, the boys, black pants, white shirt, and a black tie. Shoes for both girls and boys will be black Oxfords. Girls will tie their hair back in a modest fashion: no braids, no feathers, no ornaments. Boys will wear their hair cut short: no feathers, no ornaments. Your children will be educated in English and taught the same things as all Catholic American children. And when the time comes, they will receive the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Communion. Any use of the Ojibway language is forbidden. Any practice of the Ojibway religion is forbidden. Any child or adult caught violating these rules will be severely punished. Any questions?"

"So much black." I remember thinking, "Why do the Wayaabishkiwed want to turn everything black?"

The room was silent. We had learned long ago not to react to anything they said to us. But Jacob Two-Fingers raised his hand anyway. "I have a question for Father Larose. Where we goin' to get the money to buy all these fancy clothes for our children?"

"The clothes will be provided to you." Mr. Wold answered him. "Their cost will be deducted from tribal payments for the next three months. It will be up to you to keep them neat and clean. Any other questions?"

"Three months-- so we starve anyway." Jacob Two Fingers, countered under his breath. Mama hushed him with an elbow deftly planted in his ribs.

The following Monday we went down to the Indian Office to go to school. It would be a long time

before our uniforms arrived, but the parents tried to put on a good face by dressing us in our Sunday best.

I walked to the Indian Bureau with Vincent Gidagaakoons. He looked worried and upset. "Jacob says you can already read. And you speak their language well enough," Vincent said.

"Yeah, my papa taught me." We kicked a stone back and forth as we ambled down the lane.

"So far, I have avoided the Wayaabishkiwed and their strange ways, Annie. I do not think I will ever get used to them."

"Are you afraid, Gidagaakoons Sundancer?" I taunted him, as any child would taunt another.

"Me? Afraid?" He bunted me into a pile of raked leaves and dirty snow but not before I grabbed him and took him down with me. I wondered as we walked jostling each other and laughing how Vincent would get along in school without English.

On the first day, the Sister asked each one of us to stand and tell her our name and age and whether we could read or write. When my turn came, I stood tall and smiled, like Mama had told me.

"Annie Graham. I can read and I can write some."

"Your father is white, isn't he, Annie Graham?"

"Yes, Sister."

She moved on to Vincent. He swallowed hard and stood up, but he didn't say a word.

"Well?" The Sister was getting angry.

So I stood up. "His name is Vincent Landreville, Sister. He's my cousin." I didn't tell her his Indian name because it would have given her power over him. "He can only speak Indian, and he knows he'll get punished if he does that."

"So I don't suppose he can read?"

"I don't think so, Sister."

She sighed and moved on. I smiled at Vincent and motioned him to sit down. From that point I knew for sure that I would have to be his lookout. It was only right, he was after all, a warrior and a Sundancer, and I had been his White Buffalo Calf Pipe Woman.

Although he was five years older than I was, they put him in my class because they thought he was simple-minded. I decided to sit close to him, so I could whisper the teacher's instructions to him when she wasn't looking

The morning our uniforms came, Vincent and I had a good laugh at each other. Jacob had cut Vincent's coarse hair short, and it stuck up all over the place making him look even less like a respectable schoolboy than his long plaits had. It had been a hard thing for him to lose his hair. Among the people, long hair was an indication of strength and good medicine. Jacob told him that the Sundance protected him now, and his long hair would only cause him trouble in White Earth. Vincent looked silly in the white shirt and tie, like some dressed-up wild animal. All his life he had worn only hand-sewn deerskin moccasins lined in rabbit fur. The stiff oxfords rubbed his heels and

toes into angry red blisters.

"Hey Annie, you look like one of those Sisters in that black dress." He poked at my collar and pulled on the hem.

"You look pretty funny, too. I have never seen a Gidagaakoons wearing shoes?" The thought of a deer dressed up as a schoolboy made us laugh even harder. Vincent fanned his hands out alongside his ears to imitate antlers, pawed the earth like a buck and then knocked me over into a snowbank. We played warring bucks all the way to the Indian Bureau Office. But as we reached the steps, Vincent's body straightened into defiance, his face darkened to dead serious and we entered the building.

Sister St. Michael came up behind us and asked us to approach her desk. "I want you to tell Vincent that he must try to learn English if I am going to teach him anything."

"Sister, I'll have to say it in Indian."

"That's ok, Annie. I'm asking you to speak to him for me."

I turned to Vincent. "She says you have to learn English so she can teach you."

"What could she possibly teach me? I already know what I need to know."

I turned to the Sister wondering what to say and then remembered how Jacob had taken liberties translating for him at the assembly hall. "He says he'll try."

"Good, you tell him I expect him to be speaking to me directly very soon."

I turned to Vincent trying to look as serious as possible. "If you will not learn from them, then you will have to learn from me, Vincent. They will not let you get away with it."

My words brought an arrogant smile to his face. "You tell her that I am Bear Clan, and my ancestors made the river red with the blood of her people. That is all I have to learn in my life."

"He says Thank You, Sister."

She waved us back to our seats.

All that morning I worried about him. He looked like he was going to walk right out of there at any minute. At lunch we sat down together in the assembly hall, as far away from the teachers as we could. He took his shoes off to relieve his aching feet. We both watched as Father Larose loped over.

"Put your shoes back on, boy." the priest ordered.

"Please, Father, his feet are hurting real bad. He'll put them on when we go back to class." I tried to defend him.

"Return to your class now, Miss Graham."

Vincent stood up slowly, staring coldly into the priest's eyes, clenching his fists in preparation for a fight. I had to say something to stop him.

"Debwe, Vincent, put your shoes on, or he will send you to jail."

They both looked at me in horror. Father Larose turned to face me as I put my hands over my mouth. Wisdom replaced anger in Vincent's face and he sat down to put his shoes on.

"I'm sorry, Father." I tried to rescue myself.

Forgetting about Vincent, the priest grabbed me by the arm and hauled me back to Sister St Michael. They discussed what to do with me as if I wasn't there. It was my first offense, Sister argued, and I was the child of a white man. What good would it do to strap me?

"Send a note home to her father," she said. "Let him deal with her in his own way. The best punishment for that defiant Indian boy as well as Annie is humiliation."

So they forced me to kneel at my desk with my arms outstretched for the rest of the afternoon and pray Hail Mary's for forgiveness. I didn't think about myself or how much my shoulders hurt after awhile, and I didn't pray to Mary to forgive my sin. All I could think about was Vincent behind me and how ashamed and how angry he felt. Instead I prayed to the ancestors that they would grant him the wisdom to hold his temper. When Sister finally rang the afternoon bell, I sat back on my knees thankful that my prayers had been answered.

On the way home he was sullen. I knew his pride was hurt, and I wished there was some way to fix it. "Do not feel bad, Vincent. I was honoured to protect a Sundancer."

"I will make them pay." He kicked snow into the air and hammered his fist into his hand.

As I watched him bluster and fume, it struck me that he had missed the point the Elders had so often tried to teach us. Someone had to set him straight, and I guess I would have to be that someone. "Have you not heard a word Nookomis Dinah or your Nindedede has spoken, Vincent Gidagaakoons? Have all those years in the bush made your head soft? The Elders tell us over and over again this is Sixth Fire time; you cannot fight them. There are as many of them as black flies in the summer. The Elders say you must find your way inside, where they cannot go, remember? So what if you have to learn to read and speak English? They cannot take away your pride, unless you give it to them. Learn their language and their ways. It will only make you stronger in your own ways. Use your head to defeat them, because you will not be able to use anything else."

He stopped and smiled at me, touched my face. "Jacob told me you were born at a great massacre of the Lakota by the Wayaabiishkiwed pony soldiers."

"It is the story my mother tells." I felt embarrassed and turned away from him.

"Maybe that is what makes you strong." He looked into the sky and down the street as he thought things out. After a bit, he turned to me and smiled. "I used to think you were weak and corrupt with Wayaabiishkiwed blood. But maybe I was wrong. Maybe I will learn to read and write, and learn to speak their evil language. But I will learn from the people, from you, not them."

Somehow the trouble waiting for me at home didn't seem all that bad knowing that I had gotten through to Vincent. From that day on, Gidagaakoons Sundancer came over after supper whenever he could to make good on his plan. He learned quickly, first from me until I could no longer teach him, then from Mama.

At school he was still cold and arrogant to the teachers and the priests. But at least he answered when spoken to, and he did what was expected of him. Before the new schoolhouse was finished, he no longer needed me to translate for him, and they had to move him into the senior grade to satisfy his growing reading and writing skills. I missed not having him beside me in class, not

looking out for him. But then we still walked together in the morning and the evening, and we did our homework together at my dining room table."

Chapter Four

Mitigwa'kik (Spirit Drum)

Cathleen stretched the knots out of her arms and legs. She walked over to the weathered green table and ran her hand across its glossy surface. She tried to imagine Nana as a tall gawky girl sitting next to the wild-eyed young man of the picture. In the shimmering light of the coal oil lamp, she thought she could see them bent intently over their work, carried away by a discussion, or by an exotic world laid open before them in a book.

She went over to the woodstove, opened the fire door and poked around to feed the lazy blaze some oxygen. A cup of steaming tea revived her. She made it weak, half-milk, two spoonfuls of sugar, like Nana used to. Pearl Tea, she called it because of its colour, better for children than regular.

Back in the Hollow, Nana used to surprise her with the little china figurines that came in the box of tea. The first summer she came to White Earth, she had brought them with her and had set them up in Nana's kitchen windowsill. She walked over to the window and pushed aside the printed cotton curtain. They were still there, but alongside them were two red clay pipes with faces carved into the bowls. She picked one up. The little face stared intently back at her. Yes, they had been there, alongside the figurines for as long as she had been coming to White Earth. But it had been the little figurines that had captured her attention, not the pipes.

The words from Nana's notebook seemed to change the little cabin, make it a different place from the one she had known for the last ten years. She walked quietly through the familiar space, as if for the first time. Above the bed, tied to the corner of the picture of The Immaculate Conception, was a sprig of sage and a little hoop with a bear claw dangling from the middle. Looped over the back of the rocker was an old skin bag, decorated with blue and white beads. Two feathers, brown with white tips, their shafts wrapped in rawhide, dangled from the inside corners of the faded gingham curtains. Wedged into one corner of the mirror on her dresser were the same old prayer cards, pictures of St Francis of Assisi, Our Lady of Lourdes and the crucified Christ. But why hadn't she noticed the faded photograph of an old Indian woman wedged into the opposite corner? She stepped out of the bedroom and looked to the place above the doorframe where Nana had hung the brass crucifix from Grandpa McCaffrey's coffin. Intertwined in the horizontal beam was a beaded chain bearing the missing button from the blue- serge jacket.

"You must find your way inside, where they cannot go." Cathleen spoke the words to the tired wall, to herself, to the relics on the rug. In her heart she felt the stirrings of another dimension, one that had been there all along, but had been obscured from her focus, like the pipes.

She smoothed her hand over the black cover of the notebook and, for the first time, felt where Nana had engraved the bear claw drawing with a pencil tip. She brought the lamp closer and angled the notebook so she could feel the drawing with her eyes. Another universe was opening up she thought as she opened the notebook to where she had left off.

The Past: White Earth, October 1903

All Indian people honour the earth and their ancestors by dancing and feasting. The Anishinaa'beg

were no exception. Besides, long before this, they had heard through an Oglala Yuwipi man named Wovoka that if they danced hard enough, the Gitche-Manitou would wipe out the Wayaabishkiiwed on Turtle Island and bring back the animals that they needed for survival. So all the Anishinaa'bee people from the land of the Three Fires would gather as often as possible. And so the Ottawa, Potawatomi, and Ojibway members of Crane, Catfish, Loon, Bear, Marten and Wolf Clans came to participate in the Ghost Dance ceremony.

In the Fall of 1903, I took part in one of these Ghost Dances along with my mother, and our neighbours, Jacob Two-Fingers, Vincent Gidagakoons and Nookomis Dinah. As always, we could only go if my Papa and the rest of the whites who lived on the reservation were away. This time they were all off making Christmas money bringing in the last hay before winter for the farmers up Duluth way.

We stole off to a secret place deep in the bush, bringing with us quantities of wild rice, squash, corn, dried fish, and tobacco braids, makings of a good feast. As new bands of people entered the clearing, others rushed up to greet them whooping with joy. Old friends and new ones gathered in the sweatlodge to share a smudge, exchange news and trade stories. Many burned tobacco to thank the Gitche-Manitou for giving them the chance to meet and to dance again.

I remember my eyes stinging with the smoke of sweatlodge fires and of burning tobacco as I played tag with my friends and with the children of the gathering relatives. I caught sight of Vincent hanging around with the older boys and girls, puffing his chest out and showing off his hunting knife. So I barreled into him as hard as I could and stole the bandana he was wearing to hide his stubby hair.

When we were all assembled, an Elder from Lac Courte Oreille started the ceremony with these words: "The odjicag, spirits of the dead, are pleased with the people. They can see their children gathering round the fire. So we thank the spirit of the fire, and the Potawatomi firekeepers for making sure the many fires around this camp stay lit 'til this Ghost Dance is over."

Everyone packed into the Midewagon they had built carrying the food that they had brought along and laid it before the fire. One-by-one, we stood and called out the name of a friend or relative who had passed on. We took a moment to pray silently over each name.

The People believe it isn't good to cry over the dead because they might cry also and attach themselves to the living. If they are remembered only in love and in happiness, they can continue their journey in the spirit world. I remember hearing an old man choking with tears after he had said the name of his wife killed many years previous by a small pox-infected blanket. An Elder rushed over and fanned tobacco smoke in his face to release the spirit of the dead one.

When this was finished, the Elders told us that a messenger from the Creator was about to come in. Someone blew a bone whistle four times, and the eastern door of the lodge, the door of birth and life, was thrown open to reveal Jacob Two-Fingers carrying a hooded eagle. The Elders lit a pipe and smoked it before the bird. They took its hood off and fanned the smoke over it all the time chanting under their breath.

"Now everyone must stay still and quiet." an Elder said.

I held my breath and told my heart to stop beating so loud. Jacob carried that bald eagle all around the lodge, letting it cast its blazing eyes on us. When he was sure that the eagle had blessed us all, he left by the same door he had used to come in. I heard the rush of wings and its piercing call as he let it go back into the wild. Now the western entrance was opened up to invite

the spirits of the dead in, and the drums started beating. We danced slowly around the fire, arm in arm, chanting power words, calling upon the dead to rise up and join us. We danced until we could dance no more. Then one-by-one we broke away from the human chain and turned backwards as the living must, to go out the western door.

The next morning a healing rite was held. Mama was looking forward to this because there was something inside her that needed to come out. It was making her cough. "It started back last winter, around the time of the false melt." she told us. "I guess I was worried about the shortage of food and running out of wood to heat the house. Funny, these things have happened many times, and they have never bothered me before."

"When you get older, your bones become more sensitive to the cold. It is just the way it is." Nookomis Dinah offered.

"I wish it were only my old bones, but I think it is the Red Coughing Sickness." She showed us a cloth that she had been using. It was patchy with blood. "It is a Wayaabishkiiwed thing, so I have been praying hard to Jesus and his Mother Mary to cure me, and I have been mixing herbs but nothing has worked. Maybe the ancestors will know what to do."

With Nookomis Dinah as her guide, Mama danced in the healing ceremony, backwards and with her eyes covered so that if the disease left her, she would not know where it had gone and it would not be able to find her again.

"This is what my parents died of." Vincent whispered as we watched the dancers wind their way around the circle.

"Mama will not die. Her medicine is strong. It saved her at Wounded Knee. It will save her again." He looked at me with his piercing dark eyes like the eagle had done the night before and then put his blanket around me.

The Present: Red coughing sickness. It sounded a lot like tuberculosis. And though it was a thing of the past in Ottawa, she had heard Nana and Mina tell of how it still ravaged White Earth. Daddy had TB, caught it when he was in the Air Force, airlifting sick Inuit and Cree to Winnipeg. She remembered him telling her how those he had transported died anyway, more of loneliness than of what had brought them there in the first place.

After he contracted it, she was taken out of school and stuck in the Ottawa Sanitarium until she could be properly tested. She remembered how boring it had been, without friends or TV. At least when she was there she saw her father everyday. Without access to even a phone he was forced to pay attention to her, taught her how to play Cribbage. After she was cleared and sent home, she could only visit him on Sunday.

Nana was living in The Hollow at the time. No wonder she worried herself sick over daddy's health, she thought. The three of them, Lilith, Bridget and Nana, went on a marathon prayer session until he returned home, cured by antibiotics and bedrest.

Around that time, her father asked Nana if anyone else in the family had ever had TB. She remembered Nana telling him that her father had died of it. But she didn't remember Nana ever mentioning her mother. No, there had never been any mention of Delia Landreville that she could remember.

The Past: Consumption, that's what the doctor from Duluth called it after he examined Mama. He said unless she left White Earth, to go to a sanitarium, she would only get worse and eventually die. He examined Papa and then me. I was clear, but Papa had early signs of the same disease. Mama would never leave her people, but then there would be no argument. Money, or the lack of it spoke louder than anything Papa could say.

Mama continued doing what she always did, as if there was nothing wrong with her. She cleaned up the garden for next spring's planting carefully stowing away seed from this year's corn and squash to sprout seedlings in the spring. As the snow began to fall, she took the woolen sweaters I had grown out of that year and unraveled them into big balls of yarn.

"You choose what colours you want for your new sweater, and I will have it made for you by Christmas Eve Mass." she said.

Vincent still came over almost every night. But now, before he came in, I could hear him chopping wood outside or fixing a loose board or doing something else to help. He knew all too well about the Red Coughing Sickness. "It will rob them of their strength, then it will make them bleed from the mouth," he told me. "My mother died first, just as winter was setting in. I stood vigil because my father was too weak. Then I wrapped her in birch bark and dug a grave. All my father could do was cry and talk about joining her."

"What about your father?" I asked him.

"He died mid-winter. I had to melt the ground with fire so I could dig his grave. It took me a long time and there was little food left. But I buried him like a warrior, sitting up and facing west."

From the look in his eyes I knew the story was not finished. I let my silence tell him to go on.

"So then I was alone. What do I do? I asked the Gitchi-Manitou."

"You must go on an ina'bandumo'win," he said "you will find the answer to your question there."

"I fasted for four days and entered into the dream world. A spotted buck came to me and told me to make my way to the Gitchi-Ojibway-Gameeng and cross over. He said, "Keep the rising sun on your left shoulder, and the setting sun on your right. Keep Ningobi-Anung, the Evening Star at your back. Do not fear for we, your brothers will find food for you as you travel, and we will lead you to your southern relatives. There you must dedicate your life to The People. And from now on you will bear my name."

An eerie silence had descended over the cabin as Vincent spoke. Mama had set her knitting down to listen and though he could not understand Vincent's words, Papa had stopped turning the pages to his newspaper.

"Let Annie help me tonight, Aunt Delia; you look tired." Vincent said to break the silence and he poured himself a cup of tea from the old enamel pot on the stove.

"You two fool around too much when you study. So come over here Vincent Gidagaakoons, and leave Annie alone," I remember her answering.

Even as Vincent read aloud to Mama and I worked at the kitchen table on my slate, I could still feel the magic of Vincent's story crackling around us.

At the beginning of the next moon, Nookomis Dinah brought over an amber bottle full of tea made from sheep sorrel leaves, slippery elm bark, burdock root and turkey rhubarb stems. She

told me to warm a little bit of it up and give it to Mama every night just before she went to bed. Then she taught me how to make it myself, taught me the prayers to say over it and the prayers to say over Mama when she drank it.

"This tea will purify the blood. It will keep your mother strong 'til the end. Sometimes it is powerful enough to kill the disease. But it cannot save a person from their time. That will come no matter what. So you have to pray for wisdom, Annie. And pray for your Mama to know when to let go."

One night late in January 1904, when my Papa was out playing cards with Herbert Wold, Mama brought me into her bedroom and pried open a floorboard with her skinning knife. She reached down and gently pulled out a package wrapped in crisp blue paper. Inside the paper was a deerskin bundle, painted with red ochre and beaded around the edges. She placed it into my hands and smiled at me the way mother's do.

"In the ancient times, it was the bear who taught The People about healing plants. Your ancestors followed the bear to learn his secrets. That is how we got our name. This is the medicine bundle of our clan, Bear clan, members of the Midewiwin Society. The sacred objects inside must never be shown to anyone except your own people, and then only to those who keep the ancient ways. When I die, cut off a piece of my hair from the back and wrap it in a rawhide tether. Then put it into the bundle with the rest of our ancestors' things."

Her face softened, as we sat there and she sighed deeply. Nookomis Dinah once said to me that people moved closer to the spirit world with each completed circle. I never understood what she meant until that moment as Mama and I sat cuddling each other in the brilliant light of the winter moon.

Winter wore on. Mama grew weaker and the coughing got worse. The morning of her death came clear and crisp and blue like the sky. I trudged out through squeaky snow to break the ice that had formed overnight on the water barrel. Back in the kitchen with the iron kettle heavy with water, she called me in a voice as cold as the water, as blue as the snow.

"Help me up. I need to go."

Her arm felt as thin as the leg of a bird through the heavy flannel nightgown. She leaned against me as we struggled to the commode chair that Papa had made for her when the snow came. I covered the enamel pot and took it to the outhouse right away. The contents were bloody and black.

"Today is a good day to die, Annie." She smiled sweetly at me and took my hand in both of hers. "There is a sweetgrass braid in my top drawer. I have been saving it since summer. Bring it here and burn it so I can clean myself with the smoke."

I fetched her the braid and lit it in a bowl. I watched her, my panic rising, as she cupped her hands over it and drew it over her head. People say that all the time. She didn't really mean she was going to die, I thought. But then I could feel the light in her spirit fading, and she had a deathly smell about her.

"Do you want me to go get Nookomis Dinah?" Maybe she could save her, I thought, keep her here another day. Maybe the tea could save her or some other herb Nookomis Dinah had in her Mide bag.

"Not until I am gone, child. Brush my hair now and put in two braids. Keep some out at the back

so you can take it for the medicine bundle"

As I passed the brush through her hair tears welled up in my eyes. I tried to will them back, but they spilled silently down my cheek. She smiled in the mirror at me and laughed quietly to give me strength. "See, my hair is still black. Not much gray."

"Yes Mama, it is beautiful." My voice shook, and I swallowed hard to prevent myself from sobbing.

"When I was young, my long black hair brought the young men of the village to my father, with horses and blankets. But he would have none of them until your father came along, Annie. I mean your real father. I want to tell you about him before I pass over, so you listen carefully and remember."

Although I had known from a young age that Anthony Graham was not my real father, they never raised the subject in my presence. My acceptance of their will in the matter had been the blind acceptance of a child, an act of trust.

I nodded slowly, wiped my nose dry as I started the first braid just behind her ear. My heart pounded in my chest and my fingers stiffened around her hair as I prepared to listen. She seemed to sense my excitement. She reached up and put her cold hand over mine for a moment before continuing.

"His name was Ickwe'saigun. It means Spinning Stone. He was Anishinaa'beg of the Myeengun, Wolf Clan, but because he wanted to be a warrior, he lived among his father's people, the Miniconjou Lakota. I met him once when he came to visit relatives here in White Earth. Nookomis Dinah was his mother."

"Nookomis Dinah is my grandmother?"

"I was afraid telling you this would drive a wedge between you and your Papa. But mostly, I was afraid the Wayaabishkiwed would use this knowledge to catch Ickwe'saigun. You see he wiped out lots of white soldiers in his time. After the Battle of Greasy Grass, he went to Manitoba with Sitting Bull. Later, he returned to Cheyenne River Reservation in secret. There, I met up with him and we stayed together until the Wayaabishkiwed started looking for him again. He headed back here to White Earth and I stayed with Big Foot's Miniconjou to throw them off his trail. That is how I ended up at Wounded Knee, where you were born."

"You mean he is here now, in White Earth? Has he seen me? Does he know who I am?"

"He knows you, little one, and he is proud of you. But you cannot know him, until he decides it is safe."

She struggled to turn around. "Now listen to me. I need to tell you something more important even than this. You are Bear Clan because I am Bear Clan. You must make a marriage outside our clan if you and your husband want to remain Anishinaa'beg."

She leaned back against the pillow, weak from talking. But I needed to know more, and there wasn't much time left. "What about Papa, then? What about Anthony Graham?"

"He has been good to you, even though you are not his real child. Do not forget this. He is going to need you to guide him to death as well. So promise me you will stay with him."

"I promise."

She closed her eyes and sighed deeply. "I need to rest now."

At sunset she called me again to her bedside. "Go get Papa."

We knelt by her bed and held her bone-thin hands.

"You've been a good man to me, Anthony." She spoke lovingly to him. Then she looked at me one last time, my mother who had done all she could, given all there was to give. I sensed her spirit rise from her eyes and it filled the room with the last rays of the blue winter sun.

We stayed there, holding her hands for a long time. Papa cried and coughed quietly into the covers, while I tried my best to keep the tears away lest they disturb her spirit. I helped him to his feet and took him into the kitchen. "You stay put while I stoke the stove, Papa. I'll make us some tea."

I knew Nookomis Dinah would be along soon, without even being told, so I made a big pot. Papa sat like he was in a trance, his hands dangling from the arms of the wicker rocker. I put the cup into one hand and brought his other hand over to support it.

"Drink up, Papa, I think I hear Nookomis Dinah coming to help me wash Mama."

She was at the door, the metal joint of her leg brace clicking as she entered. "Sorry for your loss, Anthony. Best we get her ready right away." She spoke to him in English. I think it was the first time I had ever heard her use it.

"I'll go get the priest." He rose from the chair and went for his coat. I had forgotten about the Church. Mama was as Catholic as she was Anishinaa'beg, had gone to Mass for nine First Fridays in a row, so it would have been her wish that she receive the Last Rites.

"Get hot water from the kettle, and some rags and soap. We will clean her up before the priest gets here." Nookomis Dinah went into the bedroom. I followed with the steaming basin. We set about washing Mama's limp body quietly and with reverence. All the while, Nookomis Dinah hummed and prayed under her breath.

"Mama told me about Ickwe'saigun."

She only smiled and continued her work. "Get me the clothes she laid out."

We dressed her as if she were going somewhere special, in her blue satin dress with the high lace collar and puffed up sleeves, her best stockings and her fine leather boots. But we left her hair in the thick braids she had asked me to make. And I cut the piece from the back for the medicine bundle.

"I brought this to put under her arm. Your mother was Mide, a healer woman, so she will need her herbs and magic on the other side." She stuffed the bear claw pouch into her dress so no one would see it. "We cannot paint her face." She said as she drew her index and middle finger across Mama's cheekbones. "But we can go through the motions with water. The Spirit World People told our ancestors to draw two black lines along the cheekbones, and then put a red circle through the middle of them, under each eye. Now she will be ready for the Ghost Dance. Go get her wooden ladle she always liked to use for maple sugar."

She put these things by Mama's feet then stripped the bed around her and wrapped her, like a baby, in the bottom sheet. "I will say the Mide prayers before the priest gets here. Then he can do what he wants."

She lit another braid of sweet grass and fanned it over Mama's body with a goose feather. "Delia whom the Gitchi-Manitou called Mitig'wakik, Spirit Drum, listen to this old Myeengun Clan healer. You must make for the Northern Lights now. That is where you will find the rest of your ancestors. Go down river to the narrows and cross there. It will be frozen over by now. Then turn north. Do not worry about your daughter here, she is among her people. And Anthony, we will take care of him too even though he is a Wayaabishkiwed and not too smart. Mi'in, That is all I have to say."

She guided me out of the bedroom, her warm hand gripped my shoulder. There was so much I wanted to ask her about my Mama and her son who was my true father, my nindedede.

She spoke as if she could read my mind. "In the spring, I will tell you what you want to know. Now I need to tell you something else. Your Mama was a mind-healer woman, like me, only she looked after Makwa, the Bear Clan, and I look after Myeengun, the Wolf Clan. It is something that the ancestors pass down from mother to daughter. I only have a son, your nindedede, so my powers got passed down through him. You inherited the power of two healers, Annie. This does not happen very often, and when it does, it is important. All the people will look to you for healing, even the Wayaabishkiwed will seek you out without understanding why. And you must give them what they want, understand?"

"Yes Nookomis." Her words made little sense through the heavy veil of loss that had descended over me.

"And the girl-child who comes after you will inherit the power from you. You must teach her how to use it. You must teach her the ways of The People so that we will survive into the next generation when she will light the Seventh Fire for us. I am going to go now. I hear the priest and your Papa coming. I will come back in four days."

They met at the door, shaman woman and priest.

"Dominus vobiscum." He made the sign of the cross over her. She hardly paid him mind, and instead spoke to Papa. "Send the child over after you're finished, Anthony. I have some fresh-made manomin."

We went into her room and knelt near the door. The priest opened his black bag and took out a prayer book, some holy water and oil. He pulled the purple Stole, edged in French lace over his head, all the time whispering in Latin.

Papa got up and held the cruet as the priest sprinkled Mama's body with holy water. He took the oil and made the sign of the cross on her forehead, cheeks, and chin where Nookomis had made her own signs. When all this was done, he knelt in front of us and said prayers in English and Latin. "Eternal life grant unto her, oh Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon her. May she rest in peace. Oh Lord, you have seen fit to call Delia Graham unto yourself. Have mercy on her and cleanse her soul of sin so that she may enter the kingdom of Heaven."

"Domine non sum dignus." He spread out his arms. "Pater noster, qui tolis peccata mundi, Miserare nobis..."

While we said the Beads I could see in my mind's eye, Mama's spirit, young and strong now that it was free of her diseased body, as it made its way north along the river. She stopped before the shimmering curtain that led to the other world, and with one look back to me, she parted it and passed through. She wasn't gone, I kept saying to myself, she had just crossed over to the ancestor world. I wasn't sad anymore, just relieved that she was free of the pain that had held her to the

earth."

The Present: The night was crisp and clear. Freshly fallen snow cast a spell of billowy silence across the yard and down the sparkling street. Cathleen wiped frozen tears from her stinging cheeks as she looked into the shimmering blue-black sky northward, to the place where the Aurora Borealis often rippled into sight. She wrapped Nana's old Siwash sweater around her and stood quietly waiting.

She searched the corridors of her mind for the hazy image of her own mother. It was incomplete; an archetype more than a person, a series of incidents remembered from the context of a three-year old. The notion of mother was synonymous with a sick room, with whispered words like cancer, stifled tears and heads shaking no. If she thought real hard, the woman she remembered had blonde hair at first, thick and wavy like her own, then no hair at all, vibrant blue eyes with deep black circles underneath, bone thin, her hug fleeting, like the feel of a feather on the cheek. Her final memory was of her own blue eyes, downcast, afraid to look inside the shiny coffin lest she be trapped inside it with the waxy effigy of the bone-thin notion of mother.

"It will come; just give it a moment." Elijah startled her as he drew silently to her side in the crisp, clear evening. "Some say that the Northern Lights is a curtain that separates this place from the place of the ancestors."

"Is that what you believe, Elijah?" She looked skyward to the profusion of winking stars.

"Then again, some say the Northern Lights are created by magnetic ions cast earthward by great explosions and firestorms on the sun's surface." The two smiled at each other in what seemed a perfect joke.

"Over there." Elijah pointed toward a far-off stand of Douglas Fir. A blue-yellow panel of light rippled across the sky, traveled toward them and then dissipated into the atmosphere. It burst forth again and climbed toward the North Star. The two stood motionless, lest their presence disturb the unfolding miracle.

"The mystery of what we just saw speaks for itself, so what we believe doesn't matter." he said. The cold made him stamp his feet. "I could use something hot. How about you?." He put his hand on her shoulder and smiled through frosty breath. They trudged back together using the footfalls they had made in the other direction.

Chapter Five

Ickwesai'gun (Spinning Stone)

Elijah pulled the old armchair up to the woodstove and perched his feet on the runner. "How are you making out with Meya's notebook?"

"You know about the notebook?" Cathleen sighed. "I suppose I'm the only one in White Earth that didn't know about it, or me for that matter."

Elijah shrugged loosely. "Meya told me about it a couple of years ago. I thought it was a good idea."

"Can I ask you something personal, Elijah?"

"Go ahead," he replied.

"When did you find out about Nana being your mother?"

"My father told me everything as soon as I could understand what it meant."

"So no one kept secrets from you." She challenged him. "You were lucky."

"What difference would it have made if you had known this last year or a few years ago, or even when you were little?"

"A big difference, Elijah. It would have explained a lot of things." She caught herself, her anger. After all, it wasn't his fault that Nana had decided to keep her in the dark.

"It would have explained things, sure. But what difference would it have made? Would you have been any more loved or accepted by the people here? Would you have treated us differently? How 'bout your father? Would you have treated him any differently? And what about you, Cathleen? Would you have treated yourself differently? I don't think so."

Maybe he was right, she thought, but still it would have been nice to know.

"The way I see it, is you're damn lucky. Especially since you can do something with the information, make something of yourself. What about all those people who never find out, who somehow know they don't fit in where they are and will never know why?"

At that moment she felt Elijah's concern and love wash over her. He had come to make sure that she was okay, that she knew they had always been with her and were with her now.

"Thanks, Elijah."

"Mi' in, Cathleen. That means enough, let's move on. So, where are you?" He smiled.

"I just read about my Great Grandmother's death." she replied as she brought the steaming cup to him.

"Delia Landreville, now there was an interesting woman." He nodded thoughtfully. "People said she was equally at home in both worlds. She knew how to be white when she needed to be white, and red when she needed to be red."

"Nana used to say the same thing about you, Elijah."

"She did, eh? How about that." He laughed quietly and then raised his eyes to meet hers. His soft smile hardened into chilling seriousness. "You came to me in a vision, Cathleen. I need to speak to you about this."

His words fell like a cast knife. Just a little earlier that evening she had been musing about needing a vision, and now here it was, hers for the taking. "An ina-bandu-mo-win, right?"

She was glad to see her attempt at Ojibway bring his smile back. "Yes, I believe it was. Ninga sent it, as I knew she would. I was fasting in the sweatlodge we set up in Matthew Cardinale's yard."

"Ninga?"

"Ninga means mother. You called her Nana, I called her Ninga."

He set the cup down and looked solemnly into her eyes. "In my vision, you came to me, dressed in a bleached doeskin shift and leggings. You were carrying an infant wrapped in an old blue-serge jacket, like the one my father used to wear to ceremonies. You called me by the name given me at birth. You

said, "Weza'wange, tell me my name? I cannot name this child until I know my own name." Light was shining all around you. It was illuminating the inside of the sweatlodge. I felt its warmth on my face, like the warmth of the sun. Wase'ya , I said. Your name is Wase'ya, Light." With that, you clutched the child to your breast and said "Then I, Wase'ya, am the Wanda'wasud, the name giver, and I will call this child Mojagi'jig, Always Day." Then you faded away and I awoke from the vision."

Cathleen shivered in the silence following his words. She wanted to ask him what it meant, but something inside her stole the question. The meaning was for her to find. "Thank you for telling me your vision, Elijah. I hope I can live up to it."

"If the old stories are true, it seems you bear Clan women always get your names from other people's visions." He laughed a little and put his hand over hers. "I'm glad it was mine, kind of special, you know."

He gulped down the last dregs of the tea and brought the cup to the sink. "That was good. Time to go home."

Wase'ya. It sounded more like the concept of light than its English counterpart, she thought. Why am I Light, Nana? What does it mean?

The Past: May 1904

Spring came, even though Mama was no longer around to coax it out with her seedlings. The garden didn't grow quite right under my hand. The seedlings looked disappointed, maybe by the words I used, or maybe it was the hint of sorrow in my tone. I prayed to Mama to send me lots of sunshine and rain to make up for her absence and to lift up the seedlings' spirits.

With spring came calving and planting, there was a shortage of money for food and no shortage of the bills that came from burying Mama. Papa pulled himself together enough to hire- out to the white farmers who lived off the reservation. But we could all see him going downhill.

For awhile after Mama's death, I called him Anthony, because it just didn't seem right calling him Papa anymore, now that I knew who my real Papa was. It hurt him deeply, and it made me wonder how much he knew of my origins beyond the fact that I was born at Wounded Knee. I couldn't keep it up. After all, hadn't I promised Mama that I would look after him?

I looked at the people in my village in a whole different light, knowing that we were blood-related on both sides, knowing that I might be looking into the eyes of a brother or a sister, or even my father. Every time I visited Nookomis Dinah, I had to will myself to not ask her the only question that mattered now. Deep down, I understood that she was teaching me patience and acceptance of the Gitchi-Manitou's timing of all things.

When finally I had come to peace within myself about it, the Gitchi-Manitou spoke to me. The moment I saw Nookomis Dinah limping up the path I knew she had come to lead me to my father's lodge.

"Today Vincent and you are coming with me on a trip into the bush. We will need to carry food and water, because it will be a journey of two days. Go pack your clothes and do not forget to bring the medicine bundle your Mama gave you."

"Oh Nookomis."

"No words. Just get ready like I told you. I will go and speak to your Papa." She hauled herself up

*the rickety wooden steps of our house and opened the squeaky screen door to the kitchen.
"Anthony Graham. You in there?"*

Papa would say yes to Nookomis Dinah, yes to just about anything she asked of him, because despite how he felt about the Indians, deep down, he was afraid of her and her powers. I wondered what she would tell him about where we were going.

I bundled up wild rice and hominy as quickly as I could, tossed in a chunk of dried maple sugar and filled Papa's old army canteen from the rain barrel. I hurried to the outhouse where I had hidden the medicine bundle behind a loose board. There was just enough room to slide the painted deerskin bundle down the side of my canvas pack.

Vincent came romping up, bursting with excitement and anticipation. He had wrapped his crazy hair in a bright bandana sewn with shells. Hanging from his belt was his hunting knife sheathed in buckskin and beadwork. His plaid flannel shirt was loose around his chest, and he could no longer tuck it in. It fell short of covering his arms now by at least six inches. He brought with him a duffel bag bursting with clothes and personal things.

"Nookomis says I am staying out there to learn the warrior way."

"What about school?"

"I am past sixteen now. They cannot force me to go anymore."

"But there is still so much for you to learn."

"I know that, Annie. I will go back, someday."

He had grown tall since he had come to live with Jacob Two-Fingers. His face, scattered with wisps of hair, had grown angular and adult and his vibrant black eyes, deep-set. He stood taller than Jacob now, but not so much taller than me. And he carried himself as if he knew every grain of earth under his feet, and it knew him. Funny. It was as though I had never really seen him before that day.

Nookomis emerged from the house and pulled herself back down the steps. "Gidagaakoons, this old woman will slow you down if she carries her own pack."

Without a word, Vincent ran down the lane to her shack to get her bundle. Nookomis winked at me. "The extra pack will keep his feet on the ground, so let him carry it."

We walked all day, breaking for a quick lunch underneath some sugar maples. Nookomis chose the spot because of the wind, she said. It would bring the message of our coming to Ickwe'saigun's camp and knowing this, he would meet us at the lakeshore to take us the rest of the way. We stayed only long enough to eat and drink and to listen to the breeze rustling in the newly sprouted leaves.

Near sunset we stopped beneath a heavy stand of White Spruce. Vincent and I built a fire pit from smooth round cobbles that we found among the trees and then fed the flames with pine cones and dried spruce branches. Nookomis up-ended a deerskin bag and poured a mixture of dried fish pieces and manomin parched in deer grease onto three stiffened pieces of hide. "This is what the hunters and the warriors used to eat when they went into the bush," she murmured, "Not too many people know how to make it anymore."

After supper we lay back against the trees and watched the moon slowly rise over the twisted

branches of our pine grove.

"Over there, Annie," Vincent pointed toward the darkness. "Did you see something move?"

"No, what was it?" I asked nervously.

"Windigo, I can hear him just beyond the tree line," Vincent whispered. "He remembers the ghost dance last fall, when you stole my bandana and made Michelle Fox laugh at my hair."

"Yeah, sure, Vincent." I poked him in the ribs and turned my back to him.

"It's true, Annie. The Windigo only goes after those who cause pain and suffering to others."

"Then I have nothing to fear, Gidagaakoons, because I saved Michelle Fox a lot of pain and suffering."

"Better not go too far to pee, Annie; the Windigo likes to get you off by yourself. Then he will strike and rip you to shreds, eat your flesh and your spirit too." By now he was perched over me, his fingers formed talons in the shadows, and he made sounds like dogs fighting over a bone.

"Is that the best you can do, Gidagaakoons?" I shoved him onto his back and sat straddling his chest.

"I heard a story once," I hissed, hoping to set the hair on his neck prickling the same way he had set mine. "of a man who killed his brother and stole all his furs so he could get whiskey from the French Traders in Michilimacinac. He left camp in the dark so no one would see what he had done and no one would follow. He wore a crow's foot around his neck hoping it would protect him from the night manitou and especially from the Windigo. The next morning a party of hunters followed his tracks until they stopped. There they found only the stolen furs and the crow's foot on its rawhide tether."

I leaned forward and grabbed him by the collar. "Now, Gidagaakoons, shall I take you by the hand to those bushes over there so that you will not be alone when you pee?"

"You two hush," Nookomis Dinah waded into the fray. "Anymore stories like that and I will have to get up and take both of you by the hand to pee."

Eventually we grew too sleepy to speak or to listen anymore so we bedded down in a thatch of pungent pine, covered ourselves with our coats and slept deeply in the cradle of the forest.

The next day we walked until our shadows lengthened and the sky turned pink, until we came to the shore of a nameless finger lake tucked away in the dense bush. It seemed narrow in the failing light. The shore was flat and outlined in gray sand and ancient round stones, a darker gray than the sand.

Nookomis smiled toward the west and then at us. "He will be here soon; I can hear his paddle in the water." She unfurled the blanket from her pack and sat down. Vincent and I wandered down the beach a way, looking for the first stars and searching for bats in the night sky.

"My father-uncle said Ickwe'saigun fought the Wayaabishkiiwed when he was young, and that he chose to live in the old ways, as far away from them as possible. I can learn so much from this warrior-without-fear." He squinted across the lake and then settled on me. "I know why I am here. But what I do not understand is why Nookomis wanted you to come with us. Why would Ickwe'saigun want to see the daughter of a Wayaabishkiiwed?"

I looked back toward the old woman sitting on the beach. Should I tell him, Nookomis? I asked her silently. The wind and the sky seemed to answer for her. "My mother gave birth to me before she met Anthony Graham. Ickwe'saigun is my nindede, my real father, Vincent."

I could feel Vincent looking at me in the darkness, looking at me through different eyes just as I had looked at him differently in White Earth the morning we left. What could he possibly see, I wondered, I was so tall and gawky. His gaze made me feel uncomfortable, made me think about how I saw myself.

My mother always said I had big bones and long arms. When I looked in a mirror my nose and mouth seemed too big for the rest of my face. I was about the same colour as Vincent, maybe a shade lighter and though my hair was thick and shiny, like my mother's had been, it wasn't black like the rest of my Bear Clan relatives. It was more the colour of the deep earth or the back of a groundhog. In those times, I wore it long, held in a single plait to keep it from tangling. As for my body, it was only beginning to take the form of a woman, and the onset of moon days was still months away. Still I remember how Vincent looked at me that night, as if I were as beautiful as Winonah herself.

I could sense Nookomis Dinah's spirit from the distance, knowing what had been said between us, and knowing where our words would eventually lead. She beckoned us toward her as a canoe approached shore.

As we ran in the soft sand, a tall figure pulled the canoe up onto the beach, took his place beside her and lit a pipe. He was a commanding presence, dressed in a red-flannel shirt, blue jeans and calf-length moccasins. His hair was like mine, earth-brown and shiny. His face bore the furrows of time. He wore his hair long and free, in the manner of the Lakota, pieces on either side pulled back from his face, bound in beaded deerskin and one eagle feather.

"Aaniin children. Come and sit with my mother and me. This old man needs to rest before we start back."

He looked first at Vincent. "You are Gidagaakoons, a Sundancer, come to learn the way of the warrior." Awestruck, Vincent could only nod. "And you are the daughter of Mitig'wakik and Ickwe'saigun, called Annie by the Wayaabishkiwed Anthony Graham." I couldn't even nod. My knees shook, my hands went clammy, and I was hardly aware of standing there. He opened his arms and motioned me to find my place near his heart. I stumbled and fell as I walked toward him.

"So this is the White Buffalo Calf-Pipe Woman I saw dance so gracefully three years ago. What happened since then? Did your feet grow long?" He wrapped his arms around me and drew me into his broad chest. I nestled my cheek against the soft flannel of his shirt and closed my eyes, breathing in the aroma of fragrant tobacco mixed with cedar and the wild smell of the lake.

We laughed into the night and then into the water as we pushed the canoe out. Nookomis and I sat low in the middle. Vincent took the bow and Ickwe'saigun took his place at the stern so he could guide us home to his island outcrop. The canoe skimmed silently over the glassy water, the paddles made no sound as they broke through the surface. We kept silent so we could hear the loons call in the distance.

Soon we reached the granite shore of his island. Rockfaces arched black out of the water like a gateway to his kingdom. A woman scuttled to our side as the canoe bottom bumped against the shore. She offered Nookomis her shoulder to lean on so that she wouldn't fall on the slippery

rocks.

As I stood on shore, wondering who this woman was, Ickwe'saigun came up and put his great gnarled hand on my shoulder. "This is Gi'wita'wisek, Annie. We share this island and take care of each other. You will see she is like her name, the-one-who-walks-around, checking things out." He laughed in her direction. "This is Annie. She is the daughter I told you about. You already know my mother. And this is Gidagaakoons."

Gi'wita'wisek studied us with the curiosity my father had joked about and then offered us a broad toothless smile. "I have some squirrel stew from supper, if my boys have not eaten it all up by now." We set off up the narrow path toward the lights above.

The stew was thick and rich, brimming with chunks of meat and squash. We sopped up the gravy with cornbread fried crisp in duck lard and washed everything down with chokecherry tea. As we ate, little eyes peered from behind a worn blanket separating the main room from the sleeping room. When Gi'wita'wisek looked in their direction, they backed off giggling.

"You two, come out now. Where is the sleeping? All I hear is laughing back there." They stepped shyly into the room, the little one with his finger in his mouth the older one holding his brother's hand. "This is Papa'gine, grasshopper, always jumping about, and the big one is No'dinens, Little Wind. He is a fast runner, too fast for me now." They leaned into their mother's back to hide and play eye games with Ickwe'saigun. "These are visitors from White Earth. They come to see Uncle."

I looked around the bleak little cabin and stopped to study the medicine shield that hung on the back of the door. It included the symbols of the loon and the turtle, but most prominent, in the eastern quadrant was the silhouette of a wolf's head. Uncle. She referred to him as Uncle, I thought.

"So you are Wolf Clan." Vincent said what I had been thinking as well. Chances were good that Ickwe'saigun had fathered these boys. But since Gi'wita'wisek and he were of the same clan, they would never speak of it. I could never know or even ask if these boys were my half- brothers. Nor did it matter. According to Anishinaa'bee custom, children were sacred in their own right, a gift to the entire tribe from the Gitchi-Manitou, no matter what their origin.

Gi'wita'wisek nodded and then continued her introductions. "This is Gidagaakoons and this is Annie. And this is Nookomis Dinah. I do not want you pulling tricks on them, hear?" The two nodded insincerely in our direction and then ran back to giggle behind the blanket.

With the meal finished and the conversation waning, my father got up and thanked Gi'wita'wisek silently. "Maajaan. Time we headed over to my camp."

We hoisted our packs and set off into the pitch-black night. Though the path was rocky and dotted with low-lying shrubs, we used touch and hearing to feel our way. I stayed beside Nookomis Dinah in case she needed an arm to steady herself while the men forged ahead and talked in low tones. In time we could see the flickering light of a fire ahead. It illuminated the rest of our steps.

The Present: So that's why there's no mention of Nana. Cathleen closed the notebook to reread Vincent Landreville's obituary. Delia Landreville said that marriage could only be with someone outside the clan if they were to remain Ojibway. Vincent and Nana were both Bear Clan, so there could be no marriage between them without cutting themselves off from the tribe. Being a part of the people, being connected

to their past was everything, was even worth not being together.

Children were sacred no matter what their origin, so Elijah had been sacred in his own right, to Nana and Vincent and to The People. What of the other children then, the ones adopted out, the ones destroyed by residential schools, the ones killed from the inside out?

"It becomes a circle." Nookomis Mina explained the next morning. "For years these children have returned to us, or worse, they have gone to the Wayaabishkiiwed cities, not Indian, not white, angry, without a path. They drink, take drugs and beat their wives and kids. They steal and kill, go to jail. Their families are taken away by the same system, and the circle begins again."

"It's a circle that needs to be broken." Cathleen thought of the armed men at Wounded Knee and wondered if their way would work.

"Yesterday I convinced the welfare office to surrender Donna Stone's kids to the tribal Elders. We found them a place among the people while their parents are in detox." She shrugged. "There are many ways to break the circle and much healing needed among us. Too few healers to handle the load." The old woman's eyes twinkled as she looked at her.

"You can't heal this kind of thing with ghost dances or Indian magic, Nookomis Mina. It's a problem in need of profound solutions."

"You don't think so?" she asked. "Look inside yourself, Wase'ya-Cathleen. The answer lies there. You tell me what is the best cure for losing yourself, losing your way along the path?" The old woman's words struck deep into the questions Cathleen had been asking herself. Questions without answers, she thought, questions that multiplied like cancer cells to choke off the spirit. Answers that once voiced would betray family and self.

"It is time for me to go." Nookomis Mina kissed her cheek and rested her warm hands on her shoulders as if to draw out the pain. "Such a heavy spirit for one so young. I wish I could take your burden and bury it in the ground for you." She kissed Cathleen's cheek again and then left silently.

Cathleen sat pondering Mina's words. Lost souls, Nana. We're all a bunch of lost souls, aren't we? dying from the inside out. She thought back to the kids who lived in Nana's cabin and smiled to herself for solving the mystery. They would have been lost souls too, if you hadn't stepped in and snapped them up from emptiness, turned their hollows into a home.

And now you're trying to save me, right? From the other side of death, you're trying to guide me. Well maybe there isn't anything left to save, no one worth guiding. Maybe it's too late.

She thought back to the Mounties' threat, to the destruction her father had wrought upon the life of Maxwell Hendry. Hendry was the only one to stand up to daddy's threats, and look what happened to him. It wasn't enough that daddy could get his government cronies to question the easements, condemn his out-buildings and declare his dairy herd diseased. He had the police harass his family every time they took the car into town, had the bank call in his loans, his neighbours kill his dog and leave the carcass for his children to find. And still it wasn't enough. No, daddy wouldn't rest until Hendry was dead.

What was the point of reading the rest of the story? What could she possibly get out of this journey into the past? But then there was nothing else she could do to fill in the void until the funeral. She retrieved the notebook and sank once again into the armchair.

The Past: "Ickwe'saigun's camp was made up of one large dome-shaped structure, called waginogan in our language, and one smaller tipi, fashioned in the Lakota style. Since it was spring, there was a fire pit outside, with smooth flat rocks in a semicircle around it.

"I built the waginogan for you and Nookomis to use," my father said. "Vincent and I will sleep in the tipi. Time to turn in. We can talk in the morning." And so we parted on that magic night.

The scent of sweetgrass, and sage greeted us as we entered our dwelling. Nookomis pointed out where the sprigs and braids hung on the walls. The ground had been pounded hard and laid thick with bullrushes so that the dust would not rise when we moved around. My father had provided us thick bearskins and deer hide groundcovers for sleeping. And someone, probably Gi'wita'wisek, had put burning embers and hot stones in the little fire pit to take the remaining chill off the place. Nookomis stripped down to her skin and crawled into the warm covers. The thought of exposing myself to the cold and to the furs was too much. I removed my shoes and slid under the bearskin. She smiled at me and then rolled over and fell asleep.

My mind raced and my heart pounded hard in my chest. I lay on the warm ground, watching the shadows created on the rough walls by the glowing embers of the fire. Could they be the spirits of my ancestors celebrating the union of father and daughter? Did I hear the mitig'wakik, the sacred drums for whom my mother was named, or was it the sound of my own heart in my ears? Too restless to lie still, I got up and silently crawled outside to the big fire. Ickwe'saigun was already there, poking at the embers, smoking his worn out pipe. He acted as if he had been expecting me.

"Trouble sleeping?"

"Uh huh." I answered quietly taking my place at his side. He smiled warmly at me and chuckled under his breath. "Me too."

We sat in silence, letting the crackling fire mesmerize us and draw us close to it and each other. Eventually he stirred it to put another log on the blinking embers. He turned to me with a gaze so serious that a chill rose through my body.

"I went into the bush to prepare for your coming, to ask for guidance from the Gitchi-Manitou. I fasted and then fell into a deep sleep. In my dream I saw you in a distant place, with a child half your age. This child's legs were twisted and crippled with disease, and you lifted her up onto your back and took her into the Wayaabishkiiwed church. Then I realized it was not a child at all that you carried; it was a bird-manitou. When I woke up, I thought and prayed about this ina'bandumo'win and its meaning came to me in the same wind that told me of your coming here. It said this will be the only time together that you and I will ever have."

"No. Whenever you want me, I will come."

He shook his head and looked down to the ground. "Soon you will have to leave White Earth to take Anthony Graham back so he can die among his own people. They will claim you as theirs, and will never let you return here."

He drew me into his arms and cuddled me like a little child. "So we better make the best of this time together, eh?"

Tears welled up in my eyes. I sobbed quietly into his broad chest. This was my place. This was my family, not Anthony Graham, not his family. I felt him reading my thoughts just as Nookomis Dinah could. "Your path may lead you away from us, Annie. But it can never lead you from your roots or from your Sacred Path. That you will carry everywhere and for all time."

He stood up and stretched. "Now, I am tired. I will see you in the morning."

I crawled back into the waginogan and threw the musky bearskin over my head. Why had he said this to me? I prayed to Mama, and to all those who had sheltered me at Wounded Knee to send Ickwe'saigun another vision, one that I could live with. When they wouldn't answer me, I turned to the Virgin Mary and to Jesus and begged them to spare me from my Father's vision. Let me stay with my people and I'll go to Mass everyday, say the Beads, anything. These prayers met the silence of that island night as well.

With morning the dread lifted a little, like the mist on the lake. I ventured out to take a better look at our camp. The waginogan where Nookomis and I slept was sturdy and squat, covered in elm bark and supported by slender ironwood saplings. It had been set up in the traditional east-west orientation, with the only entrance facing east. I wandered over to the tipi and touched the bleached buffalo skin where it had been painted and dyed. Near the opening there was a medicine hoop, with pictures of the sun, the moon, a buffalo outline and, in the eastern quadrant, the same wolf's head that I had seen in Gi'wita'wisek's cabin. It was painted red, probably ochre, and then embellished with gut and feathers. They wafted in the morning breeze. There were other pictures too, more disturbing than the ceremonial symbols. They told a story of a battle in which mounted ochre stick figures were attacking others painted blue. They carried stick-guns and axes, and even curved coup sticks. The ground lay littered with figures, more blue than ochre.

Nookomis Dinah was busy hanging our deerskins and the bear robes outside so they could air out. When she caught sight of me, she smiled sympathetically. No doubt she already knew what her son had told me. "We need to get some water," she said and then shuffled off in the direction of the lake. I looked around for something to carry it in and settled on an old painted metal jug. The lakefront was closer to Ickwe'saigun's camp than I had reckoned from last night. Why had he landed the canoe so far away?

"See those waves breaking out there?" She pointed toward the left of where we stood.

"I see them."

"There are rocks that reach up, just to the surface. Tear the bottom out of your boat, if you went over them. The people call them Manitou Fingernails." She laughed at the ancient joke. "There are only a few spots around this island where they do not crop up. Keeps it real private."

So that's why my father had chosen to live here, why it was safe from the long arm of the Wayaabishkiwed. It was a fitting place for him, bleak and mysterious, forbidding to strangers, yet protective of friends. The virgin stands of Jack pine and spruce interspersed with hardy sugar maple and oak cast a blue-green aura about the place, made it cathedral-like, a holy land where visions came with the asking, and the Gitchi-Manitou bent close to whisper secrets to those who would listen.

I waded out until the ice cold water reached over my knees and filled the jug to the brim. The lake felt pure, life giving, able to banish my fears to the deep part of my being. It reminded me to live for the moment, enjoy what I was feeling right now and leave the rest to the Gitchi-Manitou. Nookomis helped me haul the jug up the path as best she could, laughing as it sloshed over our feet and hands. We poured some in the blackened coffeepot and the rest went into the iron cauldron for hominy grits cooked with maple sugar. She sat down on the flat rock to stir the pot.

I could hear my father talking in a low voice to Vincent inside the tipi, so I joined them. They smiled warmly to me as I entered, and beckoned me over to hear what they had to say.

"Anyone can fight." my father said to Vincent, "A good warrior learns when to join battle, when not to, which ones are worth fighting, which ones are not."

"How will I know this?" Vincent leaned forward on his arms.

"Learn all you can about your enemy. Walk in his shoes, think with his mind. Know his strengths, his weaknesses. All this will tell you what your next move should be."

Vincent bent closer and freed his hands from the ground to make his point. "Debwe, what Annie's father says is the same as Annie. And I already told her she speaks with great wisdom. That is why I agreed to learn the Wayaabishkiwed's language and go to his school."

"That is good. Gidagaakoons." Ickwe'saigun, patted him on the back. "When I was young, I thought, we could drive these people away with bullets and knives. But they kept coming back with paper and pen, making us put our marks when we could not read or understand. But it didn't matter anyway because they never lived up to their word whether it was on their paper or their lips."

My father sighed deeply and lit his pipe. "You want to be a good warrior? First, understand what it is the Wayaabishkiwed has taken from us. Stay here and learn that. Then go back to his school. Learn his ways and his laws. Take back what he has stolen from us using his weapons, pen and paper, not bullets and knives." He scanned our serious faces as we sat considering his words and laughed roundly. "Now that your minds are full, you need to go fill your bellies."

The day unfolded before us, cool but with the promise of warmth. Ickwe'saigun took us into the dense bush of the island to snare rabbits and gather fiddleheads for our supper. As we went about our tasks, Vincent kept up a steady stream of questions. My father patiently considered each one and provided answers that were sometimes more perplexing than what Vincent had wanted to know in the first place.

He laughed like a manitou when Vincent knit his brow. "Why is it that when we are young, we expect all things to have final answers?" father asked. "When you grow older, you discover that many times, questions lead only to more questions or to nothing at all."

As the shadows grew longer we made our way back toward the camp, checking the rabbit snares as we went. Ickwe'saigun had set them in the Anishinaa'bee fashion, so they killed immediately without suffering.

As we walked, he bent over to pick up an acorn. He hurled it at a hidden target in the bush. Where it landed, there was giggling and crackling twigs as our shadower escaped. "No'dinens is becoming a good tracker. I did not hear him 'til about a half-hour ago."

Of the six traps he had set, only two had been sprung with deadly effect. "So Gidagaakoons, tell me what the last thought of this Wabos was before the snare broke his neck?"

Vincent shrugged and shook his head. Ickwe'saigun bent his head to the wind. "You only need to sit quietly and listen with your odjicag to hear the odjicag of this animal. A warrior believes that the spirits of all who meet death at his hands have advice to give him in their dying breaths. When I killed the white soldier at Greasy Grass, I asked him in his own language how he wanted to die. He said quickly and asked me not to take his scalp. What shall I take then? I asked him this. He said, "my coat, you will need it because you will spend the rest of your life on the run." Ickwe'saigun chuckled at the memory, squinted his eyes so that the delicate patterns at their outer edge became sharp. "He was right, his blue coat keeps me warm every winter."

Vincent sat down and held the rabbit's limp body in his hands. He closed his eyes and concentrated. "Wabos told me to enjoy his meat, and to take his pelt, make it into a pouch for Annie. Told me to make it right away."

Ickwe'saigun nodded as if he already knew what the rabbit spirit had said.

I spent two wonderful weeks on that magic island, learning warrior ways and gaining strength for accepting what lay ahead for me. In his quiet way, my father gave me a sharp image of his love so that I could always carry it in my heart. He gave me all the wisdom he could find within himself so that it might guide my warrior-path and give me courage. In my heart I knew that every word, every skill he showed Vincent, was meant for me as well.

I could see that everything I did brought a smile to his face, made him proud and complete. It was as if he could gather up the memories of this small bit of time and knit them into the fabric of his being like some elaborate quillwork sewn onto a medicine shirt.

On the last night of my visit, my father brought out his asin'ipwa'gun, his Wolf-Clan ceremonial pipe. It was long, the bowl made from the red clay of Bow-e-ting or what the whites call Sault-Ste-Marie. And, like the pipe described in the legend of White Buffalo Calf-Pipe Woman, it combined all the elements of the earth and the sky. From a finely-worked beaded pouch he took pungent tobacco and stuffed it lovingly into the pipe bowl. As he lit it his face was illuminated in the purple dark. He drew the smoke into his mouth and lungs until the tobacco was well involved and then smudged the gray cloud over his head. The second puff he offered to Muzzu-Kummik-Quae, the earth mother for all the blessing she had bestowed upon us. He passed the pipe lovingly to his mother, and she repeated the ritual. Then it came to me, and finally to Vincent. When the pipe returned to him, he placed it before the fire, so that we could all feel honoured by it.

"The Gitchi-Manitou found this place of peace for me and brought family to my campfire to share this pipe, the pipe of my ancestors, the pipe of the Myeengun people. This moment completes the circle of my life. I see the past, the present and the future sitting here, sharing the pipe. For these things, miigwech."

After a silence filled with prayer and thoughts, he touched my arm. "Go get your medicine bundle, so I can pray over it."

I jumped up and retrieved it from our waginogan. Ickwe'saigun untied the sinew bindings and opened the supple deerskin to reveal its contents, all the time chanting under his breath. Although I had added Mama's hair to the bundle the day she died, I had not dared to open it all the way, or look at the other things inside. To do so out of curiosity or without the sacredness of this moment would have been wrong.

He spread the bits of bone, hair and cloth evenly over the deerskin and then began singing the Ancestor Song. With each verse, he chose a piece from the bundle and passed it to us so that we could hold it and remember its original owner. When finally he came to the lock of Mama's hair, pain gripped his face and his voice. He drew his knife from its hilt and cut a piece of his own hair close to his scalp and twisted it into hers. Only then did he pass it around for us to hold and to pray. After we had returned the pieces, he took the pipe and fanned its smoke over them and then fanned us so that we would not cry over the spirits of those whose remains we had touched. Then he carefully wrapped the bundle back up. "I give you back the bundle of your Makwa ancestors, Annie Graham, whom the spirits in my vision called Meya'wigobiwik, One Who Stands Strong. This name is yours until the Gitchi-Manitou sends you your own vision."

I took the bundle from him and kissed his smoky cheek. "When my vision comes, Nindede, I pray this is the name I will hear."

Chapter Six

The Present: Anthony Graham

The squeak of hinges on the woodstove fire door woke Cathleen from the mid-morning nap that had overtaken her as she finished Spinning Stone's story. Nookomis Mina smiled a greeting before turning toward the woodpile for a choice log to jump-start the dying fire. Dreams of tobacco smoke and medicine bundles vanished into the whispering of sacred names and rabbit spirits.

"Aanin, Nookomis Mina."

"Debwe, Wase'ya-Cathleen, so you are picking up a little Ojibway, I see. Meya' told me you had a good ear for languages."

It wasn't at all surprising that Mina now used the name Elijah had given her. After all, she seemed to have sight that went beyond skin and bone, Cathleen mused. "You said that Nana's real father, Ickwe something..."

"Ickwe'saigun, Spinning Stone. He was my uncle." The old woman set bowls and spoons onto the green table for a breakfast of oatmeal.

"Spinning Stone, was your uncle?"

"Yes, my mother was his sister."

"Did you ever meet him?"

The old woman sat down and placed the blackened pot on a charred oven mitt. "Once, in Minneapolis. We all traveled down to see him and Gidagaakoons take on the Indian Bureau. It was Gidagaakoons' first case after he graduated from law school."

Cathleen joined her and spooned some of the sticky contents of the pot into her bowl.

"So what's the story?"

Nookomis Mina passed her some dried maple sugar and a can of evaporated milk. "A millionaire named Gilby stumbled upon Ickwe'saigun's island during a hunting trip and decided he wanted it for himself. When he found out that it was in Indian territory he applied to the government to have it sold to him. The government said it was okay to let it go since there was no legal claim filed on it. Gidagaakoons argued that all land within the borders of the White Earth Reserve belonged to the Indians so they had no right to sell. But that didn't work, because the government said they had the right to sell off unclaimed territory. Gidagaakoons figured that there had been enough time pass from the Little BigHorn to reveal that an old Indian man and his family inhabited that island. So he brought Ickwe'saigun and the woman he was living with to Minneapolis to show the government that the island already had a legal owner. Gidagaakoons won the case, and the millionaire went off to think up another way to get that island."

"Did he succeed?"

Mina pursed her lips looking for the right words. "I guess the answer to that is both yes and no. Gilby sent his men to kill Ickwe'saigun and anyone else they found living there. Ickwe'saigun's woman saw them coming and hid her sons in the forest. She and my uncle held Gilby's men off for three days with only one

gun and several rounds of ammunition. But in the end, the white men killed Ickwe'saigun and the woman. No'dinens told us he and his brother watched the whites tie stones to their bodies and dump them into the lake. The boys hid in the forest until Gilby's men left, then they made their way to White Earth. The elders hid the boys among the people to avoid them being sent to the Wayaabishkiiwed orphanage. Papagine, the little one, died the next winter of rheumatic fever. The government eventually sold the island to Gilby."

"Bastards." Cathleen choked out. But no sooner had the word left her lips when the face of Maxwell Hendry uttering the same thing to her father materialized in her mind. How ironic, she thought; daddy became the very evil that killed his own grandfather. And he made me a henchman, like the ones Gilby sent to do his dirty work. When it came right down to it, this is what made her white, she thought; this is what truly separated her from these people and robbed her of any shaman power that may have been passed down to her.

She glanced over to Nookomis Mina. Had she reached into her mind and discovered her dirty little secret? Was this why she was telling the story of Ickwe'saigun's murder?

"The story does not end here." Mina smiled dangerously. "About a year later, Gilby went up to the island to find a spot for his hunting lodge. He went with two others, a surveyor and an architect. They were only supposed to be gone a couple of days. So when they had not returned after a couple of weeks, Gilby's family sent a search party to the island. Gidagaakoons and No'dinens posed as guides and took them there. What they found did not surprise us."

Cathleen sat chewing her lower lip, as she had done so many times before listening to Nana's stories with the other children. "What did they find, Nookomis?"

Mina nodded and continued. "At Gilby's campsite, they found the three maggot-infested bodies, big jagged holes where their stomachs and entrails had once been. Gilby's body was missing its head. They found it by the shoreline, leaning against Ickwe'saigun's bloodstained canoe, the same one Gilby's men had used to dump his body into the lake. No'dinens told the whites they had been attacked by wolves, since wolves eat the stomach contents of their prey before eating the rest. The whites accepted his explanation and took the bodies home with them."

She paused for another spoonful of oatmeal. "Later No'dinens told us that in all the years he had lived on that island, he had never seen a wolf, nor had Ickwe'saigun ever told him of seeing a wolf. He had just said that to the whites to make them go away. The people say it was not a wolf that got those men. It was wolf medicine. So after that the island became known as Wolf Medicine Island and the whites never tried to live on it again."

"Surely there's a logical explanation to what happened, Nookomis. You can't believe that Ickwe'saigun was able to take revenge from the bottom of the lake."

"There are many stories about these kinds of things happening among the people, Cathleen. I know your Nana told you some of them while you were growing up here. So it is easy for us to understand what happened," she countered. "Makes no difference anyway, the story speaks for itself." Mina smiled. "Like the northern lights, right?"

"Like the northern lights." Cathleen repeated under her breath.

"And what is the life of a human being, but the story of their path, the story of their journey down that path? Makes no difference what made that person, good or bad, white or red. In the end it is the story and the story speaks for itself." Nookomis Mina leaned over and poked Cathleen in the middle.

"You know about me, don't you Nookomis Mina? You know about my father, too."

"I know what is in your heart, Waseya-Cathleen. These things that hold you back from us are false faces, masks without eyes. You are not your father's story unless you choose his path. You are still a child looking for your own path. That's why Meya' left you her story."

The two women cleared away their dishes in silence. Nookomis Mina shuffled over to the relics on the floor and picked up the pipe and jacket. "This was my uncle's pipe and his coat. Gidagaakoons and my cousin-brother, No'dinens found them in the woman's cabin and brought them back to White Earth. No'dinens presented them to Gidagaakoons in a Ghost Dance ceremony once, saying that Ickwe'saigun had come to him in a vision and told him to do it. Elijah, in turn told me to send them to your Nana when his father died, because it was his father's wish that she should have them. So now they belong to you, little sister-cousin, and you know their history as far back as we know it."

She handed the relics over to Cathleen, gently and with great reverence. "When the time comes, the ancestors will tell you what to do with them. She took her coat from the hook and pulled on her heavy galoshes. "I will leave you now."

Cathleen made her way to the bedroom, nestled into the old rocker and leaned her feet up against the single cot. Maybe Nookomis Mina was right; her story would speak for itself, and she could be its author. She bent over for her purse and pulled out the business card that the RCMP Corporal had given her. Funny his name should be Hooper, she thought, with all the references to wheels and hollows and hoops she had been reading. He wanted her to tell a story too, but not her story. She chuckled quietly. They had it all wrong, the story had already told itself, she thought. Why did they need her to tell it again?

Vincent's obituary held her place in the black notebook. She opened the book to Nana's handwritten words. Maybe this wasn't a story at all. Maybe it was the entrance to a path -- or maybe it was the beginning of her own story.

The Past: August 1904

It was high summer by the time Anthony Graham had worked up the money for us to leave White Earth. And though he kept his intentions to himself, I knew, as I watched him grow weaker, as I burned the bloody rags in the garbage drum, that the time was drawing near. He refused to speak to me about it. I think it hurt him to admit that we lived in two different worlds and that he was fast losing ground in the only world he knew.

"The child should stay with her people." I heard Nookomis Dinah say to him one night outside my window as I lay fretting in the heat.

"No, she goes with me." His answer darkened the night, brought silent tears to the rifts of my eyelids.

Even Vincent approached him, one night as he sat on the porch tugging on his pipe. I watched the scene from the kitchen window. He came, cap in hand, contempt in tow, speaking in his best English. "We need Annie here. Someday she will be a good teacher. She understands us, understands how we learn. The People will be better off if she stays here."

"Ain't your place to say, boy. Besides, I got to think in her best interest, not yours." He didn't even look at Vincent when he answered him.

"We leave White Earth for Canada next week. Think on what you would like to take along." Papa spoke to me, suddenly, one night as I was clearing by the dishes from supper, in words

meant to convey the message, not to invoke discussion.

"Papa, I want to stay here. This is my home." I stopped what I was doing, lowered my head and spoke as respectfully as possible.

"Best you say your good-byes, Annie." I knew by the tone of his voice that I had disappointed him, maybe even angered him. But he no longer had the energy to fight back.

The promise I made to Mama the day she joined the ancestors, Ickwe'saigun's dream vision crossed over my heart like a cloud sent by Nana'boohzoo the trickster. And though I wanted to run away and hide in the bush until Papa left White Earth, I knew deep down, that my path lay with him. I would follow him out of the familiar pattern of my world, into the confusion of his.

Our journey took well over a month, by foot and by buckboard, and then finally by train. Along the way we talked as never before, of his childhood on the Graham farm, and the restless and romantic spirit that sent him south to join the US Cavalry.

"Wait 'til you see the Gatineau Hills Annie, they're beautiful, especially in the fall," he said, his eyes filled with tears. "Our land stretches out like a carpet from the base of the mountain. And the house, a little red brick thing, it sits back in its shadow, safe from the wind and the snow. My Papa built it for us, called it The Holl'r on account of it looking like he had holl'ed it out of the rock."

He took my hand and patted it, a surprising gesture of intimacy. "You'll be happy, and I'll get well. I promise you that."

My smile was a lie to cover up the grief of losing White Earth, of losing my family.

"Last spring, that devil woman Dinah took you to meet Spinnin' Stone, didn't she?"

"Do you know who Spinning Stone is?" I looked at him with the shock of his words in my eyes. He knew all along what Mama had never told him, carried it with him in silence like the special cross that Father Larose said we all carried through life.

"Makes no never mind whose seed made you Annie. You're my child; that makes you white. By all reckonin', Spinnin' Stone's an outlaw, renegade savage, soldier killer. There's only one way for him to end. Your Mama knew that and stayed clear away from him. Best put him out of your mind and get on with it."

It happened suddenly, without warning; but if I thought about it, there had been warning enough. He had been fine, in high spirits even, between White Earth and where we crossed into Canada at Fort Frances. As soon as we boarded the train though, his coughing got worse. By the time we reached Toronto, he was having trouble sitting up and staying awake.

Nanaa'boohzoo, the trickster manitou had followed us from White Earth. Now he struck in the middle of the night, just outside a place called Smith Falls. The coughing wouldn't stop, and the blood. I called out in the semi-darkness of the sleepy car.

"Help me, please. My Father is sick."

A woman came, Mrs. Brannigan, she called herself. "I'll go find the conductor," she said and left me cradling Papa in my arms.

Two men lifted his frail body and brought him back to the mail car where they found a mattress

and a pillow for him. But the coughing had turned to choking and gasping. With every breath, frothy blood filled his mouth and sprayed into the air. I held him, cradled his head against my chest reached for his grasping hands. He stared wide-eyed into space, and then into my face, his eyes asking me "Why?" and "Why now?" His agony seemed to go on forever, but really it must have been only a couple of minutes. He looked into my eyes one last time and smiled. "So close." he said, and then died. I held him for some time after that, rocking him back and forth, not caring about the blood that oozed from his mouth onto my lap.

The train stopped in Smith Falls and a doctor came aboard. Mrs. Brannigan eased me away from Papa's body so the he could check him over.

"You father have consumption, girl?" He spoke gruffly as he went about his task.

"Yes, sir."

"Drowned in his own blood, by the looks of it." He stood up and went to the washbasin in the corner of the car. "Where were you headed?"

I looked down at my hands, sticky and red. My white blouse was spotted and there was a large clammy stain on my gray wool skirt. "Old Chelsea. Papa said it was the second stop beyond the Quebec border."

"I know where it is. It's not much further. You'll be there by mid-morning. Is anyone meeting you?"

"My aunt and her family."

"What are their names, child?" Mrs. Brannigan asked.

"Elizabeth Graham and Frank Corcoran. They live in the country -- Breckenridge, Papa called it."

"Don't suppose we can warn them then." The doctor sighed deeply and turned to the conductor. "He'll keep 'til you get there. Someone get Matt Kelly down here with a coffin."

Mrs. Brannigan helped me change and wash my face and arms and hands in the women's room of the train station while Mr. Kelly, the undertaker washed Papa off and put him in a coffin.

"Best you throw those clothes away. The stains won't come out." Mrs. Brannigan said. Instead, I folded them neatly into my case, next to the medicine bundle wrapped in blue paper.

The Present: Cathleen closed the notebook and went over to where she had placed the white blouse and gray skirt in the parlour. She brushed the brittle surface of the moldy bloodstain on the skirt and then examined the speckled pattern on the blouse. So many years since Anthony Graham had spilled this blood, she thought, "So many years." she said out loud. She looked out the window to capture the memory of being with Nana among the tilted gravestones in St. Stephen's churchyard. It was All Saints' Day and a bitter November wind cut through her wool coat and cotton stockings. "This is where your Great Grandfather is buried," she remembered her saying.

"Why did you lie to me, Nana? Don't you think I would have understood?" she moaned. Cathleen pressed her face into the tattered gray skirt to stifle the pain. New tears mixed with old blood.

The Past: The dust coated my black dress as I sat in the August heat of Old Chelsea train station. I glanced over to the long pine box perched at the edge of the platform and then down to my fingernails, stained deeply by Papa's final moments. I reached into the deep pocket of my dress and fingered the hard round thing inside. Slowly I pulled it out and stroked it with my fingertips. Its shiny yellow surface caught the sun and it glinted cheerfully against my dress. "US 7th Cavalry". The little button brought Ickwe'saigun's loving smile back to me; that last smile as he cut the button off his blue coat and placed it in my hand.

"Are you Annie Graham, my child?" A priest sat down beside me, his black cassock coated in the same pale dust as my own black dress. My hand closed quietly over its treasure and returned it to safety. He was young and round, not like the stick-priests I had known in White Earth. His thick red hair blew in the hot breeze and his face was polished red with the sun. He bore a serious and concerned look.

"Yes, Father."

"My name is Father Brennan. I'm the curate of St. Stephen's over there, your aunt's church -- your father's church, when he lived here. Mr. Ebbs, the Stationmaster, came to get me. What happened, child?"

He expected me to cry, I could see that in his face. But there were no tears, there was nothing. "Papa died last night on the train. We stopped somewhere and a man came and put him into that box." I pointed to where the coffin rested on the platform. He took my hand and led me over to it. We knelt and prayed silently.

"It's too hot for a corpse to be sittin' out in the sun. Best we take it over to the church 'til your uncle comes for you. You must be hungry, and thirsty in this heat. I'll bet Mrs. Meaney can find us some lemonade and cookies in the icebox."

His voice was musical in a way I had never heard before. And it was friendly enough to poke a little bit at the wall that had descended around me. We followed the cart with the coffin and our luggage strapped to it up the hill to the dusty gray church. He put his arm around my shoulder and spoke soothingly as he led me to the little stone rectory.

I had never imagined such splendour as this priest's house. In White Earth, priests lived no better than we did. And though I had never seen the inside of their wooden shack, Papa had said that they had only the bare essentials of life: a cot, a table, some bookcases and a big wooden crucifix. Here the priest had a parlour. And it was filled with marvelous things. In the corner was a settee covered in red brocade, and near it, a big chair and footstool to match. There was a rounded table with curved legs made of wood the colour of a chestnut, so shiny that I could see my face in it. But most magnificent of all was the pump organ with its soft white and shiny black keys.

Father Brennan watched me from the entrance as I wandered through the room. I stretched my hand out to touch the keys of the organ, but thought better of it and withdrew casting a worried look toward him

"Go ahead, give it try."

The key gave way to my finger and a small rich tone came from behind the purple fabric.

"If you want volume, you need to pump the bellows with your feet."

I sat on the smooth bench and pushed the wide pedals tentatively then chose the same key to see what the difference would be. The tone sprang so loudly that I jumped back. He laughed from the depths of his belly. It was so infectious that I couldn't help but grin back at him.

"Sure the sun comes out when you smile."

We sat in the kitchen, in the clean bright sunlight. This room alone would have swallowed up our whole house, and the copper pots for this one man numbered more than were in the whole village of White Earth. The first taste of sweet reminded me that I hadn't eaten since last evening -- hard bread and cheese, with Papa. I wanted all of those cookies, but took one so that my dignity would remain. He offered me more, and seemed to understand when I refused.

"Your Aunt's told me about you. She says your name is Annie Graham and you're comin' from Minnesota, from an Indian reservation."

He seemed to want an answer, though his words did not form a question. Perhaps he wanted to know where, I thought. "White Earth."

"Is that so? And what tribe would that be?"

"Anishinaa'beg."

He pursed his lips and nodded. But I knew what I had said was without meaning to him.

"You call us Chippewa."

"Us is it? So you're a Chippewa too, Annie Graham?"

What could I say? On the train, Papa had said it would be best if I put that life behind and start anew as a white girl. "My mother was a Chippewa."

"And where might she be now?"

"Dead."

He studied me for a moment. It felt as if he was looking into my soul. "But she died a Catholic, from what I heard, having received the last Sacrament. And you, Annie Graham, sure you've been baptized and confirmed in Holy Mother Church."

The hair prickled on the back of my neck. Yes, and I confessed and went to Mass every Sunday, that is, if I wasn't in the bush worshipping Gitchi-Manitou with The People. Mother Mary, could he see that in my soul as well? I couldn't speak. But he sat there expecting me to answer.

"Excuse me Father, but Mr. Corcoran is at the door." The housekeeper interrupted, saving me from potential sin. I rejoiced but only for a moment. Mama used to say that even thinking a lie made us guilty in the eyes of the Church. And so eventually this priest would have to know my intent, albeit in the darkness of the confessional.

He flashed me a look of inner knowledge and then turned to the housekeeper. "Thank you, Mrs. Meaney. Could you show him to the parlour?" When he turned to me again, his warm smile reappeared. "Come Annie. It's time to meet your Uncle." He put his hands on my shoulders and guided me down the hall.

A tall man dressed in dusty overalls turned to face us as we stopped at the entrance. His large

hands squeezed a frayed straw hat and his broad shoulders braced themselves for the moment. "Father, Jake Ebbs told me to come here."

"Yes, Frank. I'm afraid there's bad news. Your brother-in-law, Anthony Graham has passed away." He paused to let it sink in. The tall man sat down on the brocade settee and stared off toward the window. The priest cleared his throat and moved into the room, guiding me along with him. "This is Annie Graham, your niece."

He glanced at me momentarily and then spoke to the priest. "Where? Of what? What happened?"

"Annie was with him. She can tell you better than I can." Father Brennan sat me down beside this man and bid me speak to him.

"He was coughing blood." I reached into my skirt pocket and offered him the document that the doctor had filled out and given me the night before

"Where is he now, Father?"

"I had him put in the crypt. It's cooler there."

"Jesus, what am I going to tell Lizzie?" Frank Corcoran drew his broad hand through his sweaty hair.

"Tell her to come to church tomorrow for a funeral Mass." The priest patted him gently on the shoulders and guided him to a standing position. "We'll need to bury him quick in this heat. Now you take Annie Graham home so she can meet her new sister and brother, and her new mother and father for that matter."

We drove the buckboard in silence, to the place Anthony Graham had called "The Holl'r". I was happy to be left to my own thoughts, to drink in the ragged beauty of this place. Towering trees and polished rock outcroppings like the ones on my father's island surrounded me with memories. Deer bounded across the road and stopped in sparse thickets to watch us pass by. One of them, a six-point buck, had several dark spots on his rump.

As the last light left a sky silhouetted in rolling hilltops, we turned off the road onto a little path that ended in a sweet-smelling shed. The horse nickered its recognition of home as my uncle slid down from his seat. "You stay here while I talk to your aunt."

He disappeared into a brightly-lit kitchen. The horse seemed impatient, so I hopped down and went to its head to soothe it. A boy with a coal-oil lantern emerged from the kitchen door and made his way down worn wooden steps. "You Annie?"

"Uh huh."

"I'm Arthur. Papa sent me out to take care of Ben here." He went round and unhitched the horse from the wagon. "Want to help?"

"Okay," I answered shyly.

He unloaded the cases from the back while I held Ben's bridle. The horse tossed his head impatiently as we waited. Arthur pushed the buckboard to one side and then hooked a lead rope to the horse. "The barn's across the yard. You can hold the lantern for me."

We walked slowly in the darkness, me leading the way with the lantern, Arthur following with the

horse. I lifted the latch to the barn door and stepped aside. Arthur guided Ben to a generous open stall where he had already broken up a flake of hay and filled the trough with cool water. The horse ate and drank greedily as the boy removed the collar and traces from its broad shining shoulders and haunches.

"Mama's in tears. Pretty bad stuff by the sounds of it. Can you hand me that brush over there, and the hoof pick?"

I brought him the tack box. "I'll brush him if you pick his hooves."

Arthur smiled, glad for the help and the company by the look of it. He was a little older than I was, I reckoned, tall and gangly and shy beyond words. His hair was wild and curly, a pale yellow-red. And his eyes were stone blue, like Papa's eyes had been. We worked in silence, painfully shy of each other, awkward in each other's company.

By the time we were finished, Uncle Frank joined us. As he approached, Arthur backed away into the shadows.

"You can come in now Annie; your aunt wants to meet you."

In the kitchen there was a large shiny black and white wood stove with pipes that poked through the ceiling in two directions. The heat it threw in the summer night was oppressive. A small woman with a weathered face, thin graying hair pulled back sharply into a neat little bun strained to put a heavy kettle onto a gray metal slab on the top of the stove. She turned without seeing me and went to a cupboard to retrieve a large round teapot and a tin that said "Red Rose".

"Sit down, child." Her voice was little and sharp, like her fine little body. She darted to another cupboard for plates and cups, set the rough wood table for four. Then she moved to the pantry as if the earth could not hold her down. I remember thinking how like my Papa she was, thin and wispy; but without his soft smile, or his jaunty walk.

Arthur joined us in the flickering light of the kitchen. She flashed him a threatening glare as she poured searing water into the pot. "Wash your filthy hands, boy, up to your elbows, mind. Then come and get your tea." I followed him to the sink and shared the cake of lye soap.

And so we sat, Aunt Lizzie and Uncle Frank across from me, Arthur further down, removed from us.

"Now tell me what happened," Aunt Lizzie sighed.

I went over the words I had prepared for her, slowly and carefully, stopping here and there in case it would be too much. She remained unmoved, like an Indian, I thought, her emotions betrayed only by her hands slipping around her untouched cup of tea.

"Consumption will do that. Create a mess at the end. And what about you, Annie, are you afflicted with this disease too?" she snapped.

"No, Ma'am."

"Good, there's no place in this house for the sick. You're a strong girl, built like your mother's side of the family by the looks of it. You certainly don't have the cut of your father. We can use an extra pair of hands around here. There's plenty enough to do between the house and the farm."

Real tea was a luxury in White Earth, and milk, almost unheard of among The People. Before the

Wayaabishkiiwed, there was no milk. Fish, venison and rice had given us what we needed to keep our bodies strong. But now that game was scarce and many of the rice swamps filled in, the Elders turned to milk as a substitute and pooled what little money they made selling trinkets to tourists to buy it for the children and the sick. For many of us though, milk brought agonizing cramps and diarrhea along with strong bodies and teeth. Diluted with water or tea, one could reap the benefits and avoid the side effects.

I mixed half-tea, half-milk into my cup as she spoke and then stirred it slowly to enjoy its fragrance before tasting it. The room went silent after she finished talking, the only sound coming from Arthur as he sipped loudly from his cup.

"You'll sleep with Lilith. The bed is at the top of the stairs. Stow your things underneath for tonight, mind, so we don't trip over them. I'll find a place for you to put them tomorrow. One more thing, Annie Graham." She stared menacingly into my face and spoke in a threatening tone. "I'm not pleased with this turn of events, not pleased at all. Anthony Graham was my kin, and I agreed to him coming home because he was sick and it would have been a sin to turn my back on him. He was nothing but an irresponsible vagabond, a runaway from his duties and his home. And now I'm stuck with his half-breed daughter, and the shame he brought on his family." She cast a hateful look in Arthur's direction. "I'll say the same to you as I said to that one. You better tow the line and work hard, or you'll end up in the orphanage in Val Tetreau mighty quick."

Chapter Seven

Douglas Fairchild

Val Tetreau was a poor French community just across the river from Ottawa and down the mountain from the homestead. Cathleen pictured the neat little clapboard houses that ran parallel to Boulevard Ste. Joseph, the corner stores that sold beer all night, and the noisy bars she often frequented after the ones in Ottawa closed. The orphanage itself, a slate-gray building, surrounded by a huge stone fence, had been shut down long ago. But she remembered Nana's wistful gaze as they drove by.

Thoughts of home reminded her that she hadn't spoken to her father since she left Ottawa. Besides, she had questions to ask him. She passed a brush through her hair, pulled on her black leather boots and went into the kitchen to retrieve the old Siwash sweater. Quarters, she reminded herself, I need quarters. Experience had taught her that operators were reluctant to reverse the charges from a pay phone especially one on a reservation. There was a Seven-Eleven in the heart of the village, next to the Tomahawk Press. Nana had called Ottawa from that phone, and when the family needed to get in touch with her, they could always rely on whoever answered to deliver the message. She threw a handful of coins from Nana's jar into her totebag and headed out into the dark.

Gene Montour smiled from behind the counter as she entered the store "Hey, Kate. Sorry to hear about your Grandmother."

"Thanks, Gene." She looked briefly at him and then quickly went to the phone.

"Please insert four quarters to complete your call," the operator droned at her request for a person-to-person connection.

"Hello daddy, it's Cathleen. You want to call me back at the pay phone in White Earth?" she hung up and waited for his call.

"Hi. Yes I'm fine. I'm going through Nana's stuff at the cabin. Yes I know you're coming tomorrow. The

elders are preparing some kind of service for her, but I'm not quite sure what it involves. I think it would be nice if you could attend. Yes, of course, I'll be there. No, she didn't suffer, she went down quickly. There was nothing anyone could have done for her. Yes, I was with her. Listen daddy, I need to ask you a question. What do you know about Nana's parents? Why? I just want to know that's all."

She listened quietly as her father told her that his Grandfather, Anthony Graham had met Delia Landreville, a white lay missionary while they were both working among the Indians. When Nana was about twelve, her mother died of TB and her father brought her back home to Breckenridge before dying himself of the same disease.

"Did Nana tell you this?" she asked, almost afraid of the answer.

"No, Aunt Lizzie told me when I was a boy," he replied

"Did Nana ever talk to you about her life here, her parents or anything?"

"No, she didn't. Cathleen what are you trying to say?" His voice sounded tired, stressed out. Why burden him with more? she thought.

"Nothing Daddy. It's just I was going through her things and it made me curious. So what's new on your end?"

Her heart sank as he told her that the RCMP had been nosing around the office again. "A big fellow, black hair, brown eyes, named Hooper," her father scoffed. "You ever see him before?"

"No," She held her breath, waiting for what he would say next.

"I didn't think so," he pronounced. "All the same, he wanted to know where you were and what you were doing."

"What did you say?"

"None of your goddamn business and threw him out." He laughed back. "Listen, baby, I really miss you. I'll be glad when all of this is over and you can come home."

Cathleen cringed at his tone, tried to shut out the pain and the anger. It was just his way of showing he loved her, she told herself. The more he cared for you, the more he leaned on you.

"Look I've got to go, there's a lineup for the phone. Do you want me to pick you up at the airport? Okay, then I'll see you here, after supper at the hall. Bye."

She struggled with tears as she hung up the phone, knowing now that it had been daddy and his white man's greed, not Ottawa or school or the stuffy relatives that she had been fleeing when she came to White Earth. For ten years she had been passing between enemy camps, she thought. From the camp of the perpetrator to the camp of the victim. And although she identified with the weak, she could never belong, having shared in their defeat and lived off their spoils. Her plight was worse than theirs.

She made her way to the counter. "Marlborough's, Gene. And give me a couple of books of matches." She dumped out the remaining quarters and let him decipher whether she had enough.

"You're short fifty cents." he smiled sympathetically "Just bring it in the next time,".

Outside she turned her face into the cold north wind hoping it would cool the anger, the emptiness she felt. She peeled off the cellophane and labels from the pack of cigarettes, contemplating how long it

would take to smoke them all. Jesus, she thought as she lit the first one and inhaled deeply, a twenty-sixer of Southern Comfort would go good now. Surely with all the people she had seen stumbling around there was somewhere to get the stuff. She leaned against the clapboard front of the Tomahawk and cast about the shops for a liquor sign.

"How 'bout a cigarette, white girl."

She hadn't heard him approach, jumped a little at the sound of his voice. Her reaction brought a smile to his lips. He looked familiar, she thought. His face had changed, become more mature since she had seen him last at Nana's cabin. In the dark and by himself he was out of context, but intriguing, attractive in his black biker jacket and tight jeans.

She handed him the pack, reluctant to part with even one of them. His face took shape in the momentary glow of the match. He eyed her suspiciously with his first drag.

"You're the one who comes to stay with Meya', the old shaman woman. You remember me, or do we all look alike to you?"

"You're name's Douglas. I don't remember your last name. You used to hang around with the kids who lived at the cabin."

"Well, I don't remember your name." He spat back.

She noted his raw contempt, his angry eyes.

"Maybe because we all look alike to you." She turned to the street to retrace her examination of shop signs. "Look Douglas, do you know where I could pick up a bottle in this damn place?"

"The rez is as dry as a bone, white girl. Alcohol is banned here. Closest liquor store is in Spengler, ten miles down the highway."

"Stop calling me that. How would you like it if I called you Tonto?"

"Been called worse. Kate, then. That's your name isn't it?" This time his smile was softer. She could feel it even in the dark street.

"I thought you said you couldn't remember." She returned his smile quickly and then turned her attention to grinding the butt into the snow.

"So I lied. Well Kate, I can take you to Spengler so you can get your bottle. But if I do, it will cost you another bottle of the same stuff. The asshole in that liquor store won't sell to Indians. What do you say?"

What the hell, she reasoned, can't feel any worse than this. "All right, let's go."

"Wait here. I'll get my truck." As he bolted into the darkness she noticed his long black hair fly out behind him and the muscular spring in his step. He wasn't all that tall, but thin, like a dancer. His lines were graceful and proud, his movements smooth and athletic, like a lot of the young men she had seen in White Earth. As she waited for his return, she tried to imagine him in the spiritual realm of Elijah and Nookomis Mina or in the defiant mode of Vincent Gidagaakoons. The old Ford pickup rounded the corner and put an end to her musings.

The road was dark and clear, like the night. Fields shrouded in deep rolling snow lit the horizon in an eerie way as they drove along in silence. She felt uncomfortable, mildly threatened.

"So what are you doing in White Earth, Kate? Bad time of the year for tourists." She figured he was trying to put her at ease about the situation.

"My grandmother, the one you referred to as 'Meya' died a few days ago."

"Yeah, I heard. That's the shits. Meya' did a lot for The People. We'll miss her."

"This may sound strange, Douglas, but I'm not quite sure what she was doing in White Earth."

"Doesn't sound strange at all. Your world and her world are two different places." He ventured a quick glance in her direction, but she wouldn't give him the satisfaction of a response.

"Do you want me to tell you?" He relented.

She smiled as he climbed down from his resentful Indian act. "Sure, if you think I'll understand what you're talking about."

"When I was in high school, she would come three times a week and teach us how to speak Ojibway. Can't say I ever picked it up too well though. I think you need to start younger. On Saturdays she would go down to the assembly hall with the rest of the elders and teach us the old stories, teach us how to drum and sing the old songs."

"Did you go to the assembly hall often?"

"Only a couple of times. I was too busy learning my trade, auto mechanics. I work off rez at a Golden Eagle."

They reached their destination, a concession town between farms. Within the half-mile of dour little buildings known as Spengler there was a post office, a dry-goods store and a liquor outlet, the essentials of rural life.

"I'll drop you off down the street and meet you in the post office parking lot. If the clerk gets a look at me, he won't even sell to you. What are you buying anyway?" he asked her as he looked furtively over his shoulder.

"Southern Comfort."

"Sounds fine. Jump out and I'll see you in a few minutes." The pickup moved off slowly as she made her way to the filthy little storefront.

The clerk was oblivious to their scheme, more intent on chatting her up than whether she was buying for herself or someone else. "Janis Joplin drank this stuff. Where's the party?"

"How much?" She intoned ignoring his attempts to start a conversation.

"Thirteen dollars. You know I get off in an hour. I could join you and your Comfort somewhere."

"No Thanks." She glared at his boldness as she passed him her credit card.

"Party time, Kate." Douglas whooped as she climbed back into the cab. He peeled out of the parking lot and headed back down the road toward the reservation. "So, how drunk do you want to get?" he asked.

"Shitfaced. How drunk do you want to get?" she responded comfortably, surprised at how easy it was to slip back into a familiar routine.

"Drunker than you, Kate."

"I don't know if that's possible." She pulled the first bottle out of the paper bag and broke the seal. "Let's get started." They stopped just short of the reservation limits and pulled off the road onto a deserted path.

"How come you stopped spending the summer with your grandmother?" Douglas slurred the question after downing a good portion of the bottle. "Finally figure out where it was you were coming to?"

"Would you fuck off with the poor-Indian act, Douglas." She lit up a cigarette and handed it to him, then lit up another for herself. "Why would you care anyway?"

"White Earth's a small place, everything gets noticed, that's all." He shrugged nervously and drew the smoke into his lungs. "So why didn't you come?"

"I got in with some people, met a guy, lots of parties, you know. It just seemed like it would be more fun than picking herbs and listening to stories." She sighed and took another slug from the bottle.

"You still seeing him?"

"Who?"

"The guy," he answered uncomfortably.

"Oh, no. It's not like that. Julian's a good lay, that's all."

"Julian?" he grinned broadly, displaying perfectly aligned white teeth. "Now that's a fag name if I ever heard one."

"And I suppose Douglas is real macho." Cathleen turned to face him so she could whack him in the chest. He caught her arms as they found her mark and drew her close.

"Want to find out?"

"Yeah." She climbed onto his lap and pulled his long hair back to expose his ears. The left one was pierced with a silver feather earring. She nibbled on the other ear and then kissed his neck. The steering wheel caught her in the back when he leaned forward for more. The cab was getting cold now, their breath was fogging the windows badly.

"I live with my aunt and her two sisters-in-law, so we can't go there," he whispered as he worked his hands around her hips and waist.

"I'm alone at my grandmother's place," Cathleen answered and slipped off his lap.

By the time they reached the cabin the atmosphere had thickened around them turning movement into a euphoric slow-dance. They held onto each other for balance, laughed at nothing, knocked a chair over as they entered the kitchen. Douglas plopped himself down into the sofa as she fumbled for the coat hook.

"Christ it's colder in here than the truck." He dangled his legs over the worn arm of the sofa and sunk back into the lumpy cushion.

"Don't get excited. I need to stoke the woodstove that's all. There's an oil lamp and some matches on the table beside you." They fumbled until the weak lamplight rose and the stove crackled its gratitude. Then they settled back together.

Cathleen ran her finger through his coarse black hair, first to get the tangles out and then to braid it into little plaits. He leaned back and closed his eyes. She looked around the room for rubber bands to hold her work and found some hooked around the spindle of the lamp table where she knew Nana had always collected them. "Hold still Douglas. I'm almost finished." She leaned back to savour the effect she had created around his broad face and high forehead, thinking about Spinning Stone as Nana had described him, and of Vincent Gidagaakoons, as the old photograph had portrayed him.

He opened his eyes and ran his hands through her hair, then drew her close to kiss her. Her body tingled at the touch of his lips. Desire struggled its way through the alcohol to the surface. They kissed deeply, breathed deeply, exhaling antiseptic afterburn. She unbuttoned his plaid flannel shirt and exposed his hairless chest, dark nipples and golden skin. She ran her hands over his pectorals, imagining the feel of Sundance scars against her palms. He responded by slipping his hands under her sweatshirt, and resting them on her breasts. He cupped his hands over them and kissed her again. She sighed out her rising arousal. They lay back into the sofa baiting their lust.

"Do you have an Ojibway name, Douglas?" She whispered into his ear.

He responded by rubbing his pelvis into hers. "Yeah, Hard Dick." He slipped his hands under her jeans and underwear and drew her closer. She fell back. Things were moving too quickly for her swimming head. Douglas returned to her breasts, lifted her sweatshirt over her head so he could see what his hands had been feeling.

"In this light, your skin looks the same colour as mine," he said quietly and kissed her nipples.

"It is the same colour as yours." she whispered back.

"No, it just looks that way in the light, see." He leaned back and laid his arm between her breasts for comparison.

"I'm probably as Indian as you are, Douglas." She turned his hand over and kissed the palm.

"You're white, Kate. Be glad of it." He lost his smile as he played with a tendril of her soft hair. "If you were Indian you wouldn't have bought the liquor for me."

His words stopped her like a bullet. "You're right." Her head cleared enough to form the thought. She reached for her sweatshirt and pulled it hastily over her head. "You need something hot before you leave." She pushed herself from him and padded over to the sink to fill the kettle.

"What?" He sat up and shook the heaviness from his head. "Before I leave? I thought we were making love here."

"I'm sorry, Douglas, I can't go through with it."

"You can't go through with what? Did white girl just figure out she was going down on an animal." He buttoned his shirt and joined her at the pump.

"Stop it, Douglas, stop abusing yourself like that. I'm just really confused right now. I'm feeling bad about what I did to you. Please, forgive me." Tears welled up in her eyes as she hoisted the kettle onto the woodstove.

"What you did to me! What more could you possibly do that hasn't already been done?" He spat the words at her and looked around until he caught sight of his jacket.

"Don't go yet, Douglas, please." She took his hand and led him to the green table. "Please, you might get

into an accident."

He sat down, sullen, still drunk and uncoordinated. He leaned his head into his hands and exhaled loudly. She went to the cupboard to find the bottle of instant coffee Nana kept for special occasions and some cornbread that Nookomis Mina had brought over last night. He reached for a piece and nibbled aimlessly on it as she sat down.

"How could you understand anything about being Indian? You think 'cause you've been coming here all these years you're one of us? Well fuck you Kate. You're just some spoiled white bitch who's been slumming around. You don't know squat."

"So tell me what I don't know, Douglas. Tell me what it's like to be an Indian in White Earth." She closed her mind to his hurtful words, concentrated on the pain that surrounded them.

"You're crazy." He pulled back staring wild-eyed at her.

"You're the big authority on the subject. So tell me." She felt her anger kindled, heard her own voice demand an answer. It jarred him into one.

He leaned forward, half-menacingly. "It means losing control, waiting for the next shot, the next betrayal. And between the blows you try like hell to survive, to forget, to feel good. When the white man comes looking for someone to stick it to, you hide, you pray to be made invisible. If you're lucky, he passes on to the next guy. If you're not, you close your eyes and wait 'til he finishes." He sat back and smiled angrily at her. "You'll never know what it's like, feel what it's like, 'cause you're not one of us; you'll never be one of us."

She shifted in her chair, wishing he was wrong, wanting to fight back. But he was right. He had seen it all, borne it all. Maybe she could give him hope.

"Control comes from the inside, Douglas. You don't lose it. You give it away, you throw it away. But you can always take control back, like those people at Wounded Knee. You have to start with yourself. Control starts in here." She put her hand over the centre of his chest. "It comes with pride in who you are and where you come from. At least you know who you are and no one can take that away from you."

He had expected an attack, she figured, was confused by her concern. His rage dissipated in the steam coming off his cup of coffee. He nodded to himself and smiled drunkenly.

"Sounds real simple when you say it, Kate. Too bad it's not. Only tonight I wish it was."

He took her hand in both of his and kissed her fingers. "Thanks for the coffee. I think you would have been a good lay, too." He threw his leather jacket on and searched his pockets for the keys to his truck. "Think I'll go make love to that bottle under my seat."

She sat alone at the old green table, listening to the crackling fire in the woodstove, desolate, unsatisfied, unable to move. Her head was throbbing now that the euphoria was gone and her stomach churned like water in a washing machine. She laid her head on the table and fell asleep in her tears.

She awoke to a sudden chill and the shrieking sound of hinges as Nookomis Mina came through the kitchen door. "Why aren't you in bed Wase'ya-Cathleen? Are you all right?" The old woman looked around the quiet cabin. "You have a good time with Douglas Fairchild?"

"No." Cathleen hauled herself to a standing position and made her way to the sink. As she reached it, she felt the bile rise in her throat. She bent over and emptied her stomach into the brown-stained basin.

"Southern Comfort." Nookomis Mina concluded as she passed her a damp rag for her face.

Cathleen took it from her and sponged herself off. "Is there anything you don't know about me?"

"I don't know what path you are going to choose." The old woman smiled at her as she dropped Alka-Seltzer into a glass of water and handed it to her. "Douglas Fairchild is a good boy, very smart but mixed up and angry. It's always been that way with Marten Clan, Woodland Pillager People. He'll settle down some day, come to his senses when he gets all that anger out."

"Why is he so angry, Nookomis?" She shivered as the alcohol released its grip on her. Nookomis draped the Siwash sweater over her shoulders.

"It probably has something to do with the years he spent at Leech Lake in residential school. He was six when Welfare took him away. When he turned ten, he ran from that place and came back here. His backside was so bad with beatings he couldn't sit down. There's probably more to the story, but he never spoke of it to anyone."

"Oh, no." Cathleen put her hand over her mouth. She realized she had sensed the truth.

"Douglas was smart enough to know that his healing was here, among his own people. He worked hard for a trade, got his dignity back. He still has a lot of anger though. Sometimes it makes him drink. Sometimes it makes him hurt himself."

"He didn't need to hurt himself with me around." She cradled her throbbing head in her hands.

"Seems to me you hurt each other. Oh well, at least he didn't get the rest of that bottle he hid in his pickup. Where did you buy it for him? Spengler?" Nookomis Mina laid her hand on Cathleen's shoulder. "C'mon, you need some sleep for tomorrow."

"You could at least chew me out for what I did, Nookomis. God knows I deserve it." She moaned into the old woman's shoulder as she let her lift the sweatshirt over her head and replace it with one of Nana's flannel nightdresses.

"Why should I? You're doing a much better job than I could. Hush now and lie down." She smoothed the quilt around her and then left silently. Cathleen did not hear the kitchen door close.

Chapter Eight

Rebirth

A throbbing headache and a queasy stomach drove her from the warmth of the old quilt. Cathleen groped for the chamber pot underneath the bed and willed herself to connect with the cold porcelain. Next, she stumbled to the woodbox for some choice faggots to interest the pulsing embers in the stove. Once these were engaged, she went for a bigger piece. The smell of pungent fire, a burst of thick gray smoke caught her eyes as she poked the piece toward the hottest spot in the firebox. It would take at least a quarter of an hour to work up enough heat to boil water, so she plopped herself down into the armchair and leaned her slippered feet against the warm metal of the stove.

The black notebook lay within reach. Cathleen flipped slowly through the pages, not concentrating on the words, but on Nana's perfectly formed letters, a legacy of her years of teaching. Time was short until the ceremony and there was still much to go through. So what she chose to read now better help her to understand these people who saw her as sister and daughter. That would mean reading about Vincent Gidagaakoons, where his path had crossed back into Nana's, how it resulted in the birth of Elijah, and

why their paths had split again.

Her thumb stopped halfway through the notebook. Nana had written "Six Nations" at the top of the page. She would have been in her mid-twenties at this point in her story judging from the date. Daddy was born in 1921. That put Elijah's birth somewhere between the beginning of the First World War and the years directly after.

The Past: September, 1914

"The day finally came to take my post as teacher to the Iroquois people of the Six Nations Reserve in southwestern Ontario. I traveled by train to a white town called Brantford, the closest stop to the reserve. As the train slowed I could see a tall, plainly dressed woman on the platform. I knew she must be the Bridget Donnelly who had written to thank me for accepting a position that offered little but hardship. She couldn't know how I looked forward to coming to this place. In her letter, she told me she was the public health nurse, sent out by the province to see to the physical needs of the Indians and to ensure that their children grew up with the essentials of life.

"Annie Graham, I presume?" Her bright blue eyes sparkled with energy and good humour. Her warmth and kindness dispelled my anxiety. I fell in love with her spirit instantly. "Welcome to the middle of nowhere. Wait here and I'll see to your things." She went off leaving me to scan my surroundings. I stood on the platform of a typical Ontario redbrick train station, its round turret at one end and a waiting room at the other. To the side of the station was a hotel built of the same red brick. It was named "The Joseph Brant", after the great Iroquois Chief and English ally responsible for establishing the reservation and its white trading post a little over a hundred years ago. On its ground floor was a tavern, already noisy with early patrons. Some of them sat on the steps drinking beer and sizing me up.

She escorted me to a buggy where a solemn Indian driver sat waiting. "May I introduce Seth Crow Catcher to you? Seth, this is Annie Graham, the new schoolteacher." She climbed up beside him and offered me a helping hand. "Seth is elected chief of the Oshweken Seneca and chair of the committee who decided on your appointment. He was most anxious to come along and greet you on behalf of the Christian Indian community."

I offered my hand and tried to give him what I thought would be a professional smile. He looked deeply into my eyes and smiled. "You are one of us. What tribe?"

"Ojibway." His directness caught me off guard enough to answer him directly.

He nodded his approval and continued. "What clan?"

"Bear." I flushed and stole a glance at Bridget. What must she think of me? I asked myself. But when I dared to glance in her direction, she winked at me.

"I knew there was something special about your application letter," Chief Crow Catcher continued, "something I could not put to words. Others on the committee felt it too. This is good, it will make a difference, maybe even to the Longhouse people. We welcome you, Annie Graham."

The three of us talked of children and books and learning all the way to the dirt road that led to Oshweken. Seth had two school-age children who would be in my care. Bridget spoke enthusiastically of the schoolhouse that had been built recently. It was attached to the public health office and a medical dispensary.

"The Band Council has provided a modest house for both of us to share. So whether we like it or not," she beamed "we're destined to be good friends."

The Present: Odd, Cathleen thought, wasn't it only last fall when Bridget had shown her a locket that Nana had given her during their time together in Six Nations? On the back was inscribed "my life" and inside there were badly faded pictures of Nana and Bridget.

"Why, "my life", Aunt Bridget?" She remembered asking her at the time.

"We were young, Katie. And life was oh so serious and passionate." She had answered. "They were the best of times, and the worst. Just like Dickens said." and then refused to say anymore.

There were more pictures in the trunk, Cathleen thought as she flipped through the notebook, she had seen them there when she first looked through it. She found them again, two sepia-toned postcards, tucked away in an envelope at the bottom. On the back Nana had marked the year 1916. They had been taken at a studio against a background of simulated opulence. In one, Nana and Bridget sat together, almost smiling, content with life, leaning happily into one another. Bridget's hand rested on Nana's shoulder. The other picture was of Nana standing against a false background of an English garden, her hand placed stiffly on a flowered pedestal. Her face was strong-featured, intense, beautiful in a rugged way. Her thick dark hair, parted severely down the centre, was pulled lightly back to a length unseen. She wore a plain white blouse with a scalloped collar and three-quarter length sleeves. The blouse was tucked tightly into a neatly draped plain dark skirt. She stood tall, imposing and proud, her head cocked slightly forward and to the left. And though she did not smile, her eyes reflected happiness, self-confidence. She placed the photographs on the lamp table so she could refer to them while she read.

The Past: "As we made our way down the road, Seth pointed out a log structure set deep in a field of scrub brush and bulrushes. "That is the Onondaga Longhouse. There are three other Longhouse societies on this reserve, down below where we are now are Seneca, Lower Cayuga and Onandaga, up above there is Sour Springs. Longhouse People follow the Code of Sganyodae:yoh, Handsome Lake, in English."

"Gaihiwi'yo." I replied using the Iroquois term for Handsome Lake's doctrine.

"So you know about the Code already?" Seth Crow Catcher smiled approvingly at me while Bridget beamed across his shoulder.

"Only what I was able to find out from my Mohawk teacher at the College. He told us that Handsome Lake preached isolation from white influences and strict adherence to traditional religion and ways."

"Then he must have told you that your job would be a tough one," Seth cautioned, "Handsome Lake warns against learning the white man's language, and using the white man's medicine, his tools and his organizations; especially the church."

"Yes, he told me this. But he also told me that the Longhouse people understood that the world was changing and above all, they needed to survive. Chief Crow Catcher, I would like to make school a place where the people can learn what it is to be Iroquois as well as white, both are equally important."

He nodded gravely as I spoke and stared thoughtfully at the horse's undulating haunches as we rolled down the corduroy road. "There has been much debate over this issue within the band council and within the four Longhouse Societies. It will not come as a surprise to you that the council agrees with this approach and the hereditary chiefs are opposed to it."

Levy Harper, my teacher, had already posed this very situation when I had told him of my appointment to Six Nations. And after much discussion and prayer, we believed we had worked out a solution to the problem. "What if we ask the faith keepers to handle the teaching of traditional ways and of languages while I take care of the rest?"

He laughed out loud and slapped his thigh. The horse startled but was quickly contained by his strong hold on the reins. "Miss Graham, if you have all our problems worked out before we reach Oshweken, what will you do for the rest of your time here?"

The remainder of our journey was light-hearted as we crossed through marshy flatlands and rolling farm country dotted here and there with clapboard houses and log cabins. Rows upon rows of emerging cornstalks waved their welcome to our little party and tree swallows coursed high above our heads chattering playfully in their aerial ballet. Over the next ridge Oshweken appeared before us, a little garden of whitewashed buildings tucked neatly in the folds of two gentle hills.

Within the month, I opened the doors of the schoolhouse to an assortment of children ranging in age from five years to sixteen. They came entirely from the Christian convert community and were happy to follow the standard curriculum established by the Province of Ontario. They were bright and eager children, a pleasure to teach and a joy to be around.

I learned from Bridget how Seth Crow Catcher had been delighted with my ideas and impressed with my direct and honest manner. "Crow Catcher is unique," she explained, "He is a Catholic and a member in good standing of the Sour Springs Longhouse Society. If anyone can talk the traditionalists into accepting your plan, he can."

"How can this be?" I asked. "Doesn't his status in the church eliminate him from the Longhouse?"

"It should. In fact anyone else in his position would have been booted out long ago. But Seth is a born politician, a diplomat. And it doesn't hurt that his wife's family holds the hereditary title of Sachem to the Seneca Turtle Clan."

In time, word got around that an Ojibway woman had come to teach at Six Nations. Curious onlookers milled about the schoolhouse steps at the end of the day and unenrolled children popped into the classroom to get a better look at the new schoolmistress.

Soon our modest little house became the scene of unexpected visits from band members and their families and especially their eligible bachelor sons. Our Sunday afternoon walks that we had so enjoyed during the first months of my appointment gave way to social gatherings in our parlour. Important issues were discussed in the warmth of a good cup of tea. Sometimes what started out as a brief visit by Seth Crow Catcher or other members of the band council would turn into an all-night discussion.

Even Bridget gained an acceptance denied her before my coming. She was after all, a white woman sent by the government to practice white medicine. For my part, I shared with her the knowledge of medicinal plants and herbal decoctions that Mama and Nookomis Dinah had taught me. This helped open doors to the traditional medicine practices of the Longhouse. As she probed

deeper into their healing ways, they grew curious about hers. Faith keepers and shaman women gathered in her dispensary to compare remedies and adapt new methods of treatment to old problems. Bridget flourished and her spirit grew rich with each secret revealed from the Code of Handsome Lake. As she drew the Longhouse people into the present with her medical skills, she in turn was drawn into the past by theirs.

One morning I arrived to find a crowd of fifty more children and several adults waiting for me to open the schoolhouse door. The new group stood apart from my regular students, and eyed them with suspicion and fear. The air snapped with tension and I feared what was about to happen would end in blood. The leader of this group approached me cautiously. "I am Maria General, speaker of Mohawk and Seneca. This is Isabelle Jamieson, speaker of Onandaga and Cayuga. We have come to teach the children their own languages. We have come to teach them their own ways."

The sense of relief and indeed elation at that moment was beyond description. "Mrs. General, Mrs. Jamieson," I sputtered, "we are going to need more desks."

It was necessary to extend the school day by an hour so we could provide adequate time for both aspects of the children's education. The two women quickly picked up the essentials of the white curriculum in order to develop their own to correspond to it.

To my relief even the little ones rose to the challenge. I watched with the greatest satisfaction as my students' performance in the standard curriculum improved because of their growing understanding of who they were and where they had come from. By the end of my second year there, the attendance rate rose by eighty percent and two students had gone on to college with full scholarships.

It was obvious to all that Six Nations was undergoing a spiritual rebirth and in its struggle; I, too, felt the rebirth of my spirit."

The Present: So Nana had found the answer to dying from the inside out at Six Nations, Cathleen speculated. The reason she had returned to White Earth in 1962 lay in her conquest of the disease that had plagued her people. She had learned the secret of healing, first from her mother, then from her grandmother and her father, and finally from the very people who had needed healing. The secret was in the hoop, in the very margins that defined the hollow. It lay in the act of closing the circle so that deed fed deed; spirit fed spirit. She shifted her body in the armchair, expecting to feel a jab of pain in her neck and in her head from the night before. But it was gone, replaced by the energy of her thoughts, soothed by a hand extended from beyond death itself.

The Past: "In the Fall of 1916, two important events occurred within a short time of each other. And although I hardly sensed it at the time, they would both conspire to define my path, to change my life completely. From the vantage point of old age, I see now that these two events, like the forked branches of a spikenard root, combined to form the most powerful medicine for myself and for my people.

The first one came with the frost-laced winds of October. I was in the schoolyard watching over my students as they spent their energy, pent up from a morning of concentration. He appeared from nowhere, at first a voice and then a familiar face.

"Why, if it isn't Annie Graham, lookin' like she's found herself a perfect spot on earth."

"Cyril Brennan. As I live and breathe what are you doing here?" I turned and grasped the hand of my old friend, my spiritual guide and confessor. He stood there, still looking like a schoolboy dressed up in the robes of a priest. Time had silvered some of the thick red hair at his temple, but his round face still shone pink and his smile still held the promise of mischief.

Seth Crow Catcher stood to the side watching with obvious satisfaction. "I guess I will not need to introduce you to the village school teacher, Father Brennan. And it also explains why your application also stood out from the rest. You too have fallen under the spell of this Ojibway Bear Clan woman's medicine."

"More than once, Chief Crow Catcher, more than once. But you needn't fear her power. I have found that whatever she does to people, it ends up bringin' 'em closer to God."

Maria General appeared at the door of the schoolhouse and rang the bell to signal the end of the lunch period and the beginning of the children's lesson in Mohawk. It also signaled the beginning of a two-hour break for me.

"I have some time now. Come over for lunch and tell me what is going on."

"Much as I would prefer it, Annie, I must attend to urgent business at the council office," Seth Crow Catcher sighed. "But I am sure our new parish priest can accept your offer."

"It's the burial ground business, isn't it Seth?" I noted the strain in his smile.

"It seems that Mr. Yorke won't take no for an answer." he sighed.

"I'm sure there is a way around it, with God's help."

"And the help of a good lawyer, by the looks of it. Enjoy your lunch."

We watched as the chief strode off down the road in the cold sunshine. The gaiety of our reunion seemed dampened only momentarily. Naturally Cyril wanted to know all about it.

"Zachary Yorke is corrupt. He has either bought or bludgeoned the city council of Brantford into issuing a claim for the six-mile reservation tract above the Grand River. The treaties are not clear about who owns what, and The Indian Affairs Bureau in Ottawa claims they are the real controllers of Indian land. You can guess whose interests they uphold."

"And this man Yorke wants to buy the land that the band has used as a burial ground, right?" Cyril asked.

"Right. He wants to buy it so he can set up a garbage dump for the city. So you see it isn't just a question of defiling the dead, it involves poisoning the living."

"Sounds like Mr. Yorke's way of pissin' upstream to defeat his enemies." He looked at me with the devil in his eyes, hoping to bring the roses to my cheeks.

"I see you haven't changed a bit Father Brennan. But then tell me the news. Parish Priest? Here?"

"Ah yes. Some time ago I met up with a special child, one who seemed as old as time itself. And her very nature came from the soil of an Indian reservation. She put the bug in me to find my own

place on sacred soil. So, after years of tryin' here I am."

This attempt did put the roses in my cheeks and I turned away from him to hide his victory. "The house is over there. Bridget will be home for lunch too."

As we entered the foyer, the smell of leftover stew wafted from the kitchen. "Bridget, could you set another place please. We have company."

"Who is it you've dragged off the street this time?" She chimed back as we made our way to where she was bent over the cooking pot.

"Bridget, this is Father Cyril Brennan, our new parish priest."

Cyril smiled impishly as he watched Bridget smooth down her stained apron and coax a wild bit of hair back in place. "How do you do, Father. Please forgive my appearance. No one warned me that you were coming." She shot me a deadly look and motioned me to the pantry.

"For God sakes Annie, I'm in no shape to be receiving priests."

"Stop fussing, Bridget. He's an old friend and a horrible tease. Come on, let's get some food out. I'm starving."

We finished setting the table and spooned the steaming mixture into bowls. Cyril offered blessings for the meal and then we dug in, hungry after our busy morning.

"What's the news from home? Have you seen Lilith? Is she well?" I hadn't received a letter from my stepsister in weeks and it had made me anxious.

"The Corcorans are well enough. But they still suffer from the loss of Arthur."

The pang of sorrow caught me unexpectedly. I turned away.

"There now, Annie. You did more for him than anyone else. Had he lived who could say? He would have ended up dyin' in some muddy trench in France, alone, his body pushed into some common grave. It's bloody carnage over there, from what I've heard. And there isn't a family in Chelsea Parish who hasn't suffered the loss of someone dear."

The war was far-removed from Oshweken and the reserve. The whites encouraged the young Iroquois to join up even though their status made them ineligible for the recently instituted draft. Several young men, eager to prove themselves, had gone off to the battlefields of France with the first wave of recruits. From what we read in the papers, the commanders usually ordered their Indian soldiers over the top of the trenches ahead of the rest of their battalions because of their reputation for ferocity in battle. They died alone and vulnerable, and were never heard of again.

Silence descended over the table as we thought about the horrible things that were happening in Europe. Cyril cleared his throat. "Your Aunt Lizzie is determined to marry you off Annie, especially now that Arthur's gone and your uncle is getting old. They need someone young to take over the farm and see to Lilith's needs. You're the only one left in the family with a future."

"What if she doesn't want to go back?" Bridget interjected.

"I don't think they're prepared to entertain that possibility." he replied.

"Well they better start entertaining it. Annie, you need to make it clear to them that this is your

home now. There's no going back."

They both looked to me for an answer, waited patiently while my heart sank into the sadness that I had pushed away for so long. "Isn't it strange that a war could prove to be a godsend?" I replied. "So far it has delayed Aunt Lizzie's plans for two years. I wonder how much longer it will last?"

The second event followed close on the heels of the first. It was heralded by a sense of excitement and hope crackling in my parlour among the band members who had ostensibly dropped in for Sunday tea.

"He will arrive on the mid-morning train." I overheard Seth Crow Catcher telling Myron Greene as I went to the kitchen to replenish the tray of poundcake. "I asked Father Brennan to go pick him up so as not to arouse suspicion in Brantford."

"We mustn't press him as soon as he gets here. Another of my guests advised. "After all, he has been traveling for two days and will be exhausted."

"I have heard he is hated and even feared in Washington, and that they would rather settle quietly than face him in court."

"Keep your spirits up, brothers. If anyone can settle this thing in our favour, he can." Seth beamed excitedly at them all.

I was in the kitchen when Cyril and the visitor came through to the parlour. My guests crowded around him and broke into applause. Cyril pushed his way to the kitchen, reached for a hearty cup from my cupboard and then turned his attention to the poundcake. Odd, I thought. Why was he dressed in a gray tweed suit and tie instead of his cassock?

"Cyril, I've just filled the pot. You'll drain it with that cup."

"Ah Annie, there's no point wastin' my time with those pretty little porcelain things. By the way, our visitor comes from your neck of the woods. Says he may even know you. Name's Vincent Landreville. Does it ring a bell with you lass?"

I must have blushed to the roots judging from Cyril's expression. I do remember the tears welling up. I ran to the parlour and strained to see him over the crowd. Someone pushed me to the centre. Suddenly we were standing face to face. He had grown tall and slender, his face was even more angular than I remembered. And though cleverly tucked into his collar, I could see that his jet-black hair was long again. I recognized him by his eyes, those burning, fathomless black eyes.

"Aanen Meya'wigobiwik. My heart knew it had to be you," He smiled deeply into my spirit and spoke like a waterfall in the language that only we could understand.

"Debwe Gidagaakoons Sundancer. Welcome to this place of friends." I whispered back. We hugged each other, oblivious of the curious silence of all gathered around.

"Well Miss Graham, will it be that you will know every person I bring into Oshweken?" Seth Crow Catcher's words brought us back to the moment.

"Forgive me, Chief Crow Catcher," Vincent replied breathlessly, "but this woman is my relative and I haven't seen her in many years."

The Present: Cathleen broke from her reading when Nookomis Mina swung open the kitchen door carrying an old cooking pot chocked full of a steamy meal. "You'll need something good on your stomach, Waseya-Cathleen to carry you over tonight. We will not eat again until we have finished the ceremony. Mano'min, I cooked it with maple sugar and blueberries so it would stick to your ribs for a long time." Mina spooned a large portion into a bowl and passed it to her.

She pushed a sticky wad of the mixture into her mouth. It tasted a bit like rice pudding, plain and satisfying.

"Did Nana ever speak to you about Vincent Gidagaakoons, Nookomis Mina? Did she ever tell you how she felt about him?"

"Oh no. To say anything about that would have dishonoured them both. Nothing needed to be said. All you had to do was go look at that little baby Vincent brought back with him to know how they felt about each other."

"But if Vincent didn't say anything about it, how did you know that Nana was the mother?"

Mina seemed pleased with her question. "Well now that was the funny thing. We couldn't know for sure where this baby had come from but he had the look of Meya' and her quiet strong way. And Vincent. He was a changed man. His restlessness had turned to calm, his anger to tolerance. Though he was wounded, he walked taller, with more confidence. He saw his path clearly and knew where it was taking him."

"Wounded?"

"So you haven't read that far yet. Well I guess there's no harm telling you since you're going to find out anyway."

She paused for a moment looked intently at her hands and knit her gristled eyebrows. When she looked up again, her gaze was so serious it sent a shudder through Cathleen's shoulders. "Vincent came back to us with his left leg missing just below the knee. He brought with him another man, his Needjee, friend in our language, a Wayaabiishkiwed named Brennan. He had been taking care of them, Vincent and the baby."

"Didn't Vincent tell you what happened?" Cathleen continued.

"No, he never spoke of it," she replied quickly.

"What about Brennan, then?"

"Brennan was a quiet man weighed down with a heavy spirit, didn't say much of anything to anybody. He stayed with Vincent, took care of the child for many years." Mina brushed imaginary tears from the deep crow's feet of her outer eyes. She sighed a bittersweet sound and smiled into Cathleen's soul. There was pain in her eyes. "When Elijah was old enough, Brennan asked the Elders' permission to go live on Ickwesai'gun's island. He died there many years later. Vincent and No'dinens found his body on one of their visits and buried him."

"Did you know that Brennan was a Catholic priest?" Cathleen asked.

"Debwe. Well he never tried to save us for Jesus. Did your grandmother write that?"

"Yes, Nookomis, but haven't you already read Nana's book?"

"No, the words are for you, not for me." she answered.

"But then how did you know what I would find?" Cathleen tried to delve beyond the old woman's eyes into her spirit the same way Mina had probed her these past three days. White light, like looking into the sun struck her, blinded her train of thought. Joy, bittersweet, mixed with loss, profound sorrow flooded through the corridors of her mind.

"See, you have shaman powers you don't even know about." Mina nodded, but her lips didn't move, her voice didn't sound. "I know what my eyes told me. And I know what your grandmother carried around in her heart just as you now know what I carry in mine."

"I think you need to finish reading about this thing before the ceremony begins, Waseya- Cathleen." Her words broke the spell cast in Cathleen's spirit. "I will leave you now so you can get back to it."

Nookomis Mina dumped another spoonful of manomin into her bowl before throwing her coat around her shoulders and trudging back to her cabin.

Chapter Nine

Windigo

As I think back on my last two years at Six Nations Reserve I am gripped with pain and joy at the same time. How can I write about these things? I pray to my father who met his death in the same violence that nearly claimed Vincent, in the same blood that heralded the coming of our child. There are no words that can possibly capture what happened. And yet I will need to find them and give them to you, my Cathleen, my shaman child. I pray to you for the strength to speak them.

The Present: Her grandmother's words burned in her spirit. What could possibly have happened to evoke such emotion? To her, Nana's life had been one long summer smile, warm milk hitting a galvanized bucket, Rosary beads clicking in the dark.

Cathleen lay her hand over the ink, closed her eyes and tried to draw into her mind the vestiges of Nana's spirit that had formed the letters. Sadness washed in from all sides. But it was mixed with strength and resolve, like Nana's Indian name; she felt her standing strong in the face of overwhelming sadness. How could one live so long without letting so heavy a secret slip? So many missed opportunities for comfort, Cathleen thought, for drawing close in mutual sadness.

The Past: It was settled then. Since Vincent was my kin he should stay with me. After all, there was room, and Bridget was not opposed to having him around the house. At first Cyril frowned on the plan.

"You are among Indians now." Seth reminded him. "White rules have little bearing on this. They are family, and family should stay together."

Vincent began his work immediately. He filed his Intent to Represent in Brantford within the week of his arrival and issued subpoenas to Ottawa, Toronto and Brantford for all treaties and documents relevant to land claims and transactions on the Six Nations Reserve. At the council office he took depositions from tribal Elders on the details of the burial ground. He charted out and verified every grave, secured letters of protest from every family whose ancestors were buried

there.

At night he would spread papers and law books over the kitchen table and commit the details and obscure language to memory. He welcomed my presence, asked for my help in organizing his files and ran facts and ideas past me for my opinion. On occasion I would catch him looking around the pleasant little room, and smiling at me. "Just like old times, eh?," he would laugh and pinch at my skirt.

And then of course there were the heated meetings with the tribal council. If he wanted to get some difficult point across, he would invite them back to our house and feed them tea and cake until they understood or until they agreed with his strategy.

The first hearing took place in the Brantford Courthouse at the end of December, 1916. School was out so I could go with him and act as his assistant.

It was on the steps of the courthouse that the first sign of trouble made itself clear to us. A group of local thugs headed by Yorke himself stood directly in our path. Vincent nodded to the left to indicate the way we should try to go around them. The thugs moved to block our way again as we mounted the broad stairs. There was rank hatred in their eyes. Some of them clenched their fists in anticipation. Vincent signaled for us to stay put then continued by himself until he was face-to-face with Zachary Yorke.

"Excuse us, we have business here." He spoke softly but the menacing edge in his voice was apparent to all who heard him.

Yorke chuckled and looked around to his followers. He waited an uncomfortable moment then stepped aside. "Well isn't this rum, the blind leading the blind. One goddamn savage leading the others. What can you possibly do to stop me?"

"Councilman Yorke, I presume." His tone was flat, defiant, like the way he used to answer the teachers back in White Earth "My name is Landreville, KC. I hold licenses to practice law in Canada and in the United States. My expertise is in settling Indian land claims. Now will you let us pass to conduct our business or shall I notify the judge that our way was barred so we could not have our day in court?"

"Why not, Chief? You're going to lose anyway." Yorke stepped to the side and motioned his men to do likewise.

On Vincent's signal we joined him and moved cautiously through the group. As Vincent strode past he bunted one of them sharply with his shoulder. It was his way of counting coup.

Yorke's amateurs were no match for Vincent. Within two days the county judge ruled in favour of the Iroquois on the basis of the treaties, and of the long-standing precedence presented by their lawyer.

"I wouldn't celebrate quite yet, Mr. Landreville," the judge admonished, "as I am sure my decision will be appealed to the Federal Court."

As we left the courthouse we again had to face Yorke and his men. He stepped in front of Vincent and knocked his briefcase out of his hand. "I suggest you go back to where you came from. You're only making a lot of trouble for yourself and your ignorant friends."

Seth retrieved the briefcase and handed it to Vincent. He brushed it off, slowly and deliberately.

"We don't scare easy, Mr. Yorke. And as for ignorance, it is in the eye of the beholder. Now, are you going to let us pass, or shall I send one of these people for the police?"

As we passed, one of them grabbed at my arm and called me "squaw whore". Vincent rushed back and placed himself between my assailant and me. "Are you all right?" He asked in Ojibway.

"Please Vincent, let us leave this place." I answered in the same language. He put his arm over my shoulder, all the while not taking his eyes off the thug who had reached for me. We walked slowly to our carriages and buckboards aware of their knives on our backs.

The celebration that followed chased away the bad taste of the incident on the steps of the courthouse. Fires glowed brightly in the two hearths of Sour Spring Longhouse and a feast of maize, duck and venison greeted us upon our return.

To honour his hosts, Vincent dressed in the clothes of an Anishinaa'bee warrior. I helped him braid and tie his long thick hair with coloured cloth and put the beaded necklaces around his neck. My eyes filled with tears as he gently donned my father's blue serge coat. The first night in Oshweken, he told me that my father and Gi'wita'wisek had died warrior deaths at the hands of white men who coveted their island. I had turned away to hide my sorrow.

"Wear deerskin Meya'. You have done much for these people, too." He touched my shoulders gently as I finished the last plait in his hair.

"No Vincent, I have been away too long."

At the feast, Chief Alexander General, Deska'he? and speaker for the Turtle Clan side of the fire motioned Vincent to join him. When he reached the chief, the crowd shouted their approval at his appearance and he bowed his thanks to them.

"Who sponsors this man's adoption into the Hode'nosaunee?" Chief General's voice rang out in the crowd.

"I Crow Catcher of the Gan-e-e-ar-tehgo'wii (Turtle Clan), claim this man as my son and with this amulet I name him Sa-go-ye-wat'ha, Keeper Awake. May his gift for words and his powerful medicine bring us through this time of trouble as it did for our people so long ago." The people shouted and clapped once again as he put the amulet around Vincent's neck.

Alexander General, quieted the crowd with his hands. "Handsome Lake once said that our people should never step out of the Indian canoe into the white man's scow. But this day I have learned that in order to keep our canoe from being swamped, we must at least put one foot into the scow to push it away. This man has shown us how to do that. For his efforts on our behalf we are grateful and we make this celebration in his honour."

Drums and singing sprang forth from the people gathered round the longhouse fires. Bridget and I joined hands with the rest of the women and stepped lightly in the great circle. "Your cousin cuts a fine figure, Annie," Bridget shouted to me above the singing. "But I think he's looking for you." She pushed me out of the dance toward him and then circled away from me.

Vincent took my hand and led me to the doorway where the sound eased enough for us to hear each other. "We need to go somewhere and talk, Meya'," he shouted into my ear.

The night was unusually warm for December and the moon unusually bright. We listened to the crunch of the gravel road under our feet as we walked. Vincent took my hand.

"Meya' I want you to know that there hasn't been a day in all these years that I haven't thought about you. When I saw you here, I believed that the Gitchi-Manitou had created a miracle for me. I know we are supposed to be cousins, same clan and all, but I also know we are not related. What I feel may be wrong but I am drawn to you as I am drawn to no other. It has been that way from the beginning. K'zaug-in!"

A calming breeze whistled through the branches as we walked along and I imagined his voice intertwined with the voice of the wind. I turned away in the dark to smile at the wind, to cherish this moment when the wind spoke to me.

"So Meya', I need to know how you feel about me."

"You already know how I feel about you, Gidagaakoons. Your words speak for me as well. K'zaug-in!" which in our language meant "I love you."

Do I need to tell you that we embraced, that this moment was the most beautiful moment of our lives? Do I need to say to you that we ran the rest of the way home and made love over and over again until we were so tired we fell asleep inside each other? I only pray, my little shaman child that the Gitchi-Manitou one day grants you the love that was granted to Vincent and me.

From the depths of our passion we understood that the Gitchi-Manitou had also spun a trick. Our union could not exist within either of our worlds and yet it did. It was a trick worthy of daebaudj'imoot, storytellers around the winter campfires or romance authors in women's magazines. And yet to us it was our fate.

"It is like the Sundancer's ecstasy," Vincent once said, "pulled back to earth by the dragging buffalo skulls."

In the dead of that winter, we moved to a log cabin about a half-mile from Sour Spring Longhouse. Seth Crow Catcher refused to accept my resignation and instead provided a horse and carriage to bring us to and from Oshweken. Throughout February and March, Vincent worked feverishly by candlelight preparing briefs and position statements for the Federal Court of Appeal case. The band council could not afford a typewriter and my handwriting was better than Vincent's. He taught me to transcribe his notes into the form required by the Courts.

"Look Meya' it is all here for anyone to see, first in the Haldimand Deed of 1784, then in the Simcoe Deed of 1793; "...six miles on each side of the Grand River from its mouth to its source." The Simcoe Deed even forbids the sale of any land to a non- Indian."

"But Seth says the Indian Affairs Bureau has always claimed the land is under their control. They have sold pieces of it before without consulting the tribal council. How will you argue this?" I asked one night as we worked together.

"Trusteeship is not ownership, Meya', although for years the Wayaabishkiiwed have fooled us into believing otherwise. Their law says you cannot sell what doesn't belong to you unless you have the expressed permission of the owner. So long as the tribal council refuses permission to sell, the government cannot proceed. That will be our argument."

I stroked his hair and his neck as he spoke and thought back to our time on my father's island. So it has come to pass, I thought. This warrior has learned to defeat his enemy with his own weapons.

Before we knew it, Ash Wednesday and Lent had overtaken the festivities of mid- winter and

Christmas. It was the time of year when I felt in need of clearing my spirit for the rebirth of spring. This year it was especially important to seek the comfort of my confessor.

"Cyril, I think I am pregnant." I whispered in the silence of the confessional.

"Oh God, Annie. Does Vincent know?" he asked.

"Not yet."

"You must tell him immediately, child."

"He's got so much on his mind without this."

He sighed deeply. "Marry him, Annie dearest. If any two people were ever meant for each other, it is you and your Vincent."

"Will you marry us?"

"How can I do that? He's not even a Christian. Besides I don't relish the thought of dyin' at the hands of your Aunt Lizzie."

"It doesn't have to be in the church, Cyril."

"Where then, the Longhouse?"

I chuckled at his joke, tried to picture the faces of the traditionalists at the sight of a priest performing a white ceremony at their sacred fires. "At the cabin, with a few friends."

"Annie dearest, you deserve better than that."

"Oh no Cyril, I don't even deserve what God has already given me."

The wedding took place April 15, 1917, just as the first flourish of wildflowers conquered the fields. The Longhouse women festooned the cabin walls and all the lintels with chains of early daisies and dandelions. Seth Crow Catcher and Bridget Donnelly stood as witnesses for us in the civil ceremony that Cyril reluctantly agreed to perform. After the ceremony we packed a lunch and headed off to watch the sunset from the top of Stony Hill.

As I write this scene, I am looking at the yellowed photograph taken that day. It lay hidden in the bottom of my trunk until this very moment when I needed to recall these things. It is a bittersweet remembrance Cathleen, especially when I think that within the week it was taken; all that it shows was forever lost."

The Present: Cathleen rushed over to the trunk and rummaged through the photographs that littered its floor. Finally she came across it, tucked away in a corner. The picture itself was amazingly sharp for the time although it bore tiny scars of mildew stains. There was no writing on the back to identify the figures, but they were easily distinguishable to her, now that she knew the context. Nana in a white blouse and skirt, Vincent in soft-textured buckskin stood proudly in the middle, their arms wrapped securely around each other. They were flanked by a priest on one side and by a serious Indian elder on the other. Bridget was missing, probably because she was the photographer.

She traced the outline of the people in the photo with the ball of her index finger imagining that she could feel the crispness of Nana's blouse and the warmth of Vincent's shirt. She closed her eyes and felt the

laughter and sunshine of Nana's wedding day.

"My God, Nana."

The Past: April 22, 1917

"I often ponder the events of that fateful night, and wonder why little things fell into place as they did and what would have happened if they had not. Why, for instance, did Cyril Brennan decide to ride out to the cabin that evening? Had he not come, Vincent would surely have died and Cyril would still be an Oblate Father. Why did Seth Crow Catcher choose to stay in Oshweken and finish his correspondence? Had he gone home as I know he had planned, he would have escaped the assassin's bullet. But the greatest imponderable of all concerns you, dear Cathleen. Had these events that I am about to relate not unfolded as they did, I would not have returned to The Hollow, and you would not have been born.

I am reminded of these questions whenever I look in the mirror and see the jagged line that cuts across my mouth or when I run my fingers through my hair and feel the ridge of scar tissue just above my eye. My grandmother, Nookomis Dinah, used to say that all things come to pass in a much greater circle than our immediate existence. "The spirit within is the only reality," she used to say "The history of a single life in the progression of the spirit is only one piece in the great circle of all life." It is only now that I am able to see the outline of that circle. And though I still live with the pain of that day, I can see why it had to happen.

They came after sundown. I remember small things, like Vincent and Cyril arguing over the meaning of the word manitou. I was absorbed in Lew Wallace's Ben Hur when we heard the truck rattling up the dirt path. Without warning, Thomas Corbin, a Yorke thug from the courthouse steps, burst through the door and pointed a shotgun at us. He ordered us to lie down on the floor and then called out to someone named Brian. I later found out that Brian, his brother, had already shot Seth Crow Catcher dead as he sat at his desk in Oshweken. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Brian enter the cabin and press the muzzle of his revolver to the back of Vincent's head. I leapt at him screaming and knocked him to the floor before he could pull the trigger. Thomas Corbin smashed the butt of his shotgun into my face and head until my ears rang and the blood steamed down into my eyes. Through the blows I could hear Vincent and Cyril shouting at them.

"He said: ' make it look like an accident, you idiot. Tie them up. I'll deal with the whore.'" Thomas yelled at his brother as he landed his last blow.

He dragged me by the hair into the kitchen and then returned to help bind Vincent's hands behind his back. I gagged on the blood streaming into my mouth as I lay there but figured my best chance for doing anything was to lie still and then find a weapon when they weren't looking. The kitchen table obscured my view of the men, but I could hear Vincent's struggling and their cursing as they tried to drag him to his feet. Cyril must have used the moment to make his own move. I saw the flash of black, heard furniture toppling over and blows being struck.

"Shit! He's got my gun." Brian headed toward the door to run Cyril down.

"Let him go. He's that goddamn Croppy priest. What's he going to do, shoot us? Help me get the Indian outside, will ya'."

It took the two of them to drag Vincent out. He cursed them in English and called back to me in Ojibway as they struggled down the path. I sprang to the drawer and found my best carving knife.

I stumbled into the table and then toward the doorway clutching the knife to my body. Once outside I tried to establish where they had taken him.

"Vincent." I yelled at the top of my lungs and then stopped to orient myself toward them. I could hear the truck rattling as it headed down the path, so I started running toward the sound. I vaguely remember seeing them throw Vincent out of the cab and then turn the truck around. The engine roared as they started back toward his still shape. As it neared him, Cyril jumped into its path. Sparks and then the sharp report of gunfire cut through the night. The truck swerved but not enough to miss the dark figure on the ground.

"NO." I screamed and stumbled down the path toward them. Still holding the gun, Cyril moved swiftly toward the truck to check on the occupants.

"You killed my brother." I heard Brian scream from inside the cab as I closed the distance to Vincent's still form on the dirt path.

"Get the hell out of here or I'll kill you, too." Cyril shouted back.

Vincent was conscious when I reached him, but I could see the pool of blood under his leg spreading out rapidly. "Your face, Meya'." He struggled to get onto his shoulder.

"Lie still Vincent." I laid the knife down and untied his hands.

"Cyril." I called out in the direction of the truck. He turned and sprinted over. "Give me the gun and take your cassock off. Run up to the cabin for a blanket. Bring the ax down as well."

I felt Vincent's leg for the source of the bleeding. It seemed to be coming from a point in the back just below his knee. It needed to be stopped so I formed a tourniquet out of the rope that the Corbins had used to tie his hands and tightened it with the slender bore of the gun. As I tightened, I clicked the barrel open and shook the remaining bullets out. Vincent set his jaw against the pressure.

Cyril returned with the ax and the blanket. "Tear this into strips. I handed him his black robe and the knife and then covered Vincent with the blanket. "We'll use the ax as a splint and tie it round his leg with your robe. Is that truck still working?" I noticed Vincent slipping into unconsciousness as I spoke. "Stay with me Vincent, Stay with me."

"No, the axle broke when it hit the tree."

"Then go hitch up the wagon and bring it down here. He's still losing blood and I think he's going into shock." Memories of Arthur bleeding to death in front of me on the mountain ripped into my consciousness. I brushed them away with the warm blood that was still flowing into my eyes. "Hurry, Cyril."

As I waited I cradled his head on my lap, pressed his cold hand to my chest. "Gidagakoons, K'zaug-in, Debwe K'zaug-in." He squeezed my fingers in acknowledgment. The buzzing in my ears grew louder obliterating the sounds of the night. It seemed an eternity until I heard the horse's footfalls come down the path.

I took the blanket and spread it on the ground. We eased him onto it and then lifted him into the carriage. Vincent cried out as we set him across the bench. "You drive, I'll hold on to him. Easy over to the road, Cyril, then go like hell."

Oshweken was teeming with people. Cyril drove directly to the dispensary where a crowd had

already gathered when Crow Catcher's body had been brought there. He dashed through the door and returned almost immediately with Bridget and some of the elders. Each of them took an edge of the blanket and raced up the steps. We hoisted Vincent's limp body onto an examination table and stepped back to let Bridget assess the damage.

"Get me some scissors." She cut away his pant leg but left the tourniquet in place. Bridget reached for some gauze to clean away the blood as it seeped slowly out. "This is very bad," she sighed and ordered someone to get a basin of water and iodine. "If we don't take his leg off now he'll bleed to death."

It was nearly morning when I woke to Bridget's gentle hand on my shoulder. I stared up at her from the bench in the reception room of the dispensary, too dizzy to move. She was probing the gash on the top of my head. "I'll need to stitch this up. Looks like you'll need stitches in your mouth too."

"Is he all right?" I slurred.

"He's out of immediate danger. But he's lost a lot of blood." She looked into my eyes and then broke down. "I had to cut his leg off, Annie. I'm so sorry but I had to do it or he would have died."

I struggled to sit up, clutched her arm as the room spun around. "You saved his life. That's all that counts."

We clutched each other in the strengthening morning light knowing that the worst was still ahead of us.

"The Elders moved Vincent to our house. Cyril is with him and so is Hannah Peter. Best you stay here, Annie 'til I can stitch you up."

The reality of our situation swiftly closed in around us. At sun-up, the whites came to collect Thomas Corbin's body and the broken truck. Cyril's bullet had caught him between the eyes and killed him instantly. Zachary Yorke and Brian Corbin walked boldly behind the flatbed that bore the body through Oshweken.

The police burst into the dispensary while Bridget was working on the tear in my lip and badgered her to hurry up. When she was finished they pulled me roughly from the treatment room and led me away in handcuffs. Bridget followed by carriage behind the paddy wagon and was forced to stand and wait in the reception area while they pushed me into an interview room.

"What's your name, squaw?"

"Am I under arrest?" I closed my eyes to the harsh light of the room.

"I asked you your name." The detective yelled into my ringing ears.

"Am I under arrest?" I repeated my question slowly to make my point.

"No. Now what's your name?"

"Then why have you handcuffed me?"

"Constable remove the handcuffs. What's your name?"

"May I have a glass of water, please?" I squinted at the detective asking questions.

He sighed and motioned for someone to get me some water.

"My name is Anne Graham. I am the schoolteacher at Six Nations Reserve."

"You're the Indian lawyer's squaw whore, you mean. Where is he?" Someone interjected from behind me.

"What about the priest? Is he a Fenian spy?" another voice broke in. "We know he murdered Thomas Corbin and he'll hang for that alone."

I slowly got up and went toward the door. "If I'm not under arrest then I assume I am free to go." I stood with my back to them, my knees shaking with fright or with the dizziness pounding in my head, I couldn't tell.

"That's all right, squaw. There's only so far anyone can go on a bad leg, even an Indian." One of the detectives got up and opened the door for me.

Bridget rushed over to help as I stumbled back toward the reception area.

"He is safe, Annie. But we had to get him out of Oshweken. You need to rest." She pleaded with me as we drove back.

"I'll go to bed after I have seen him."

She shrugged heavily in response, turned the horse off Iroquois Line and headed down toward Sour Spring Road. Where the trees seemed the thickest, she guided the buggy into the bush and then jumped out. "You stay put." She said as she took the horse's head and pulled it through the tangle of ironwood and creeping vines. In time the bush gave way to a sheltered grove and a rough-hewn cabin overgrown with weeds. Several hobbled horses grazed nearby and another carriage was pulled up to the house.

"The doctor is with him." Hanna Peter whispered to Bridget as we entered. Bridget went into the room at the back while Hanna guided me toward the kitchen. "Have some tea while you wait."

"No." I pushed past her in the direction of the back room. The doctor was bent over him, working on the exposed stump of his leg. "You did a good job, overall. But I can still feel bone chips. We'll have to open the suture line and clean them out before too long. He'll need to build up his blood before we make an attempt."

They stopped their conversation and looked up at me. "This is Annie, his wife." Bridget assured the doctor in a low tone.

"You're next." he said scanning the damage done to my face.

"A poultice of boiled valerian root will draw the bone chips out." I offered.

"Valerian root?" He chuckled back. "Don't try any of your bush medicine on him until the wound heals over. Amputations infect easily."

He strode into the main room to the sink and washed his hands. Hanna poured steaming kettle water into a basin and brought him clean cloths. "Come over here, into the light." He said gently guiding me to a chair under a window. "Your nose is broken. It needs to be set. I suppose I can't

bring you to a hospital either."

"No, do it here, or don't do it at all."

"That's not much of a choice. It will hurt and I can't put you under here."

"I think she may also have a concussion, Doctor Steele." Bridget appeared at his side.

"If she's made it through one night, the concussion's under control. Let's deal with the nose while we still can."

The procedure took an hour under our harsh circumstances. But the pain was no greater than what I had already suffered at Thomas Corbin's hands. I think in all, Dr. Steele did a good job. Apart from a whistle or two, I have never had a problem with breathing, and one needs to look closely to notice the slight shift in the ridge of my nose.

I insisted they set a cot up in Vincent's room so I could be there when he needed me. He woke only twice in the next twenty-four hours, to relieve himself and to take some weak herbal tea before falling back into unconsciousness. He was comfortable, especially with the morphine shots Bridget showed me how to administer.

Sometime during the next day, Cyril appeared at the doorway to Vincent's room. I hadn't seen him since that night in the dispensary. I tried to smile through the bandages. We hugged each other and went outside to speak.

"You had no choice, Cyril." I knew what weighed heaviest on his soul.

"I killed a man, Annie. That's all that matters." He looked off into the bush where a cacophony of birds fought for territory. "How's he doin'?"

"The drugs are helping a lot."

"How are you doin'?" He peered at my swollen black-rimmed eyes under the dressings that shrouded my nose and tried to make me smile.

"I'm fine, Cyril, just fine."

"Sweet Jesus, how did it come to this?" He pushed his hand through his hair and started to cry.

As the days passed, the healing began to take hold. Vincent was able to sit up for short periods and take broth and tea. "What is that?" He asked as I swabbed the back of his arm with alcohol in preparation for the shot.

"Morphine."

He pulled away from me and forced a taut smile to his lips. "No, Meya'. It makes my mind muddy."

"It kills the pain, Vincent."

"It is time I faced the pain."

"All right. But don't let your head make your body weak"

At the end of the first week, Maria General came with the news of the manhunt massing in

Oshweken. "They have papers accusing Vincent and the priest of murdering Thomas Corbin."

"Of course." Vincent winced as he struggled to the side of his bed.

"We can't avoid this." Cyril said. "At least we'll get you to a hospital."

"They're armed and will shoot to kill." Maria interjected. "Even if they take you alive, Keeper Awake will never see the inside of a hospital and you wouldn't last long in their jail."

"How does it feel to be one of us, Cyril?" Vincent sighed. "This whole thing was orchestrated to divert attention from the claim. They are betting that they can slip the land issue behind the bigger questions of who killed Seth Crow Catcher and now, who killed Thomas Corbin. Their original plan to deal with their problems failed, so they have fallen back to this one."

"Vincent, we can't run for the rest of our lives." Cyril pleaded.

"You're right. But we will have to run at least until the appeal is concluded. Just as the Seneca will have to wait for justice for Seth Crow Catcher. Maria General is right. Our lives are more at risk in their hands than on the run."

"Well that's another thing, isn't it? If they're out lookin' to arrest you, how the hell are you goin' to represent the band council? There's no point lad; they've got us one way or the other."

"With Crow Catcher dead, the path ahead is difficult; with Keeper Awake dead, the path is closed," Maria answered.

"What about Annie, for God sake? What about your unborn child? Are they worth riskin' for the land claim too, Vincent?"

"What are you talking about?" Vincent looked from Cyril to me. "Meya', what does he mean?" He changed to Ojibway.

"The child will come midwinter," I replied sheepishly in our language. "I did not wish to tell you until I was certain and you were well enough to hear it." He nodded approvingly of the news, lay back against his pillow.

"It changes nothing, Cyril." I said in English.

"So you'll just lie down on the ground, while the bullets are flyin' and give birth on the spot."

I could feel Vincent's smile behind me as I answered. "It's how my mother gave birth to me."

Maria General pulled a stool up to the side of the bed and touched Vincent's arm. "A white farmer, named Lavictoire has agreed to hide you for as long as it takes. His wife is Hode'nosaunee and a member of the Onandoga Longhouse. He is coming here now to take you back to his place. So you must hurry and pack your things. They have a son who has just graduated from Osgoode Hall and is working as a lawyer in Toronto. The Council has already spoken to him and he is waiting to hear from Keeper Awake."

As Vincent had predicted, the whites sent investigators to press the council for information concerning the death of Seth Crow Catcher so that they could lay charges and divert attention away from the land claim. At the same time, they used the manhunt for Thomas Corbin's killer to harass the community and break their resolve to refuse permission to sell the land.

Honore Lavictoire took up rooms in Brantford, filed his Intent to Represent the band council in the land claim appeal and became the conduit through whom Vincent continued his fight. The council developed methods for passing information back and forth, and I continued to transcribe court documents from our hiding place. Maria General took over my teaching responsibilities and brought papers and tests for me to grade. She and Bridget came regularly to the Lavictoire farm, Maria to bring us news and keep our spirits up, Bridget to care for Vincent and later me.

We eventually did use my valerian poultice to draw the bone chips out of Vincent's stump. And it did every bit as well as the doctor's solution, only we saved him the pain of healing twice. It proved beneficial as well in shrinking the scar so that Bridget could get a proper fit for a prosthesis. Under Dr. Steele's guidance, she took the measurements and necessary molds at the farmhouse. The leg was made secretly in Toronto and then delivered to a sympathetic white farmer outside the reservation.

"Like a glove, Bridget," Vincent beamed as he slipped his stump into the molded cup. "Thank you so much."

"You'd best wear double stockings over your stump until it toughens up." She extended both her hands and braced her body as he hauled himself to his feet. "How does it feel?"

"Good." He held on to her arm until he could handle the balance himself. Then he let go.

"Kick your stump against the front of the cup. It will move the leg forward." Bridget instructed. "Use a cane to support yourself 'til you master the movement. But he waved it away.

He toppled to the ground with his first attempt. "Let me do it myself," he admonished as Bridget and I rushed to help him. We watched him with tears in our eyes as he struggled to his feet and tried again. This time the foot moved with a jerk before he crashed to his other knee.

"Do you have that cane?"

Vincent was quick to master the false leg. Despite the pain and initial blistering he persisted in reestablishing his balance and natural movement. Before long he had abandoned the cane completely and walked with only a slight limp. When he was deft enough, he began to slip secretly into Brantford for meetings with Honore Lavictoire.

Early in December he returned from one such meeting greatly agitated. He gathered us all around to deliver the bad news. "The hearing has been postponed until the new year. Honore says the provincial police are preparing to sweep through Six Nations again. He's also heard rumours that they are applying for a warrant to search the farms outlying the reserve boundaries."

"Do they know where we are hiding?" I asked.

"No, but when they get the warrant you can be sure this will be the first place they hit for no other reason than to get back at Honore. Casimir, Hilda, I suggest you hide everything you value so it won't be destroyed. Cyril, Meya', we must prepare to leave immediately."

"Where will we go? Cyril asked.

"Honore has spoken to a man named Liam Connell. He owns a small cabin in the bush along Turtle Creek and has offered it to us. The roads are too dangerous, so we'll have to get there on foot."

"Annie's in no condition to be trekkin' cross-country in the snow. Leave her here, or send her back

to Oshweken," Cyril responded.

Vincent looked at my round belly and swollen feet and silently weighed the alternatives.

"She is welcome to stay here," Hilda added.

"No," he concluded. "If they get to her, they will have all of us. We give ourselves up now or we make a run for it."

"Then we make a run for it," I said.

Chapter Ten

Manitou

Snow started falling just as we set out across the field toward Turtle Creek. Within an hour it became heavy and the wind came up to cover all signs of our passing. The rhythmic pain in my lower back had increased overnight, but I did not tell Vincent lest we delay and be caught. We traveled northeast alongside the frozen creek bed, Vincent scouted ahead. Cyril struggled to keep upright in the wide-panned base of his snowshoes and I fought the urge to go down on all fours and pant like a dog. Vincent appeared ahead waving us on, keeping us moving.

"God's teeth. We'd be lost if he had two good legs, Annie." Cyril puffed beside me. "How are you holding up?"

"I will be glad to see the inside of that cabin." I replied.

"It better be soon, by the looks of you. Your belly's dropped. If you're not in labour now, it will come soon."

No sooner were the words out of his mouth when a pain caught me by surprise. I had to bend over to restore my control.

"I stand corrected. You're in labour now, aren't you?"

"How would you know so much about childbirth, Cyril?" I asked breathlessly. "Did you learn it in seminary?"

"Not likely." he laughed and threw his arm around me for support as we resumed our trek. "But then being the oldest of twelve children in a family too poor to be affording doctors, something of the subject had to have rubbed off. My sister and I were all my mother had for the last three. My father was away most of the time, in the Merchant Marine. He got home enough to beget children, but was never there when any of us were born."

We forged on making good time, despite my need to stop frequently. As we walked, I could feel rivulets of sweat tracing their way down my back and between my breasts. Walking eased the pain in my back somewhat, but every once in awhile it took me by surprise and forced me to my knees.

Each time it happened, Cyril would jump down and press his deft hands into the small of my back exactly where the pain was the greatest. Through my pain, I could not help wondering how ironic the Creator had been, providing me with a Catholic priest as my midwife. But then how perfect his choice, for Cyril knew how to bring peace to my soul as well as my body. He was the Creator's gift to all of us.

We stopped late in the day, just short of the main east/west road that connected Brantford to Hamilton. Cyril and I hid in a thicket while Vincent crept to a ditch near the road's edge.

"The raids on the farms must have started this morning. There are armed men stationed about every quarter mile." Vincent reported upon his return "They're betting we're somewhere south of this point and that they can flush us into their net."

"So we're stuck here," Cyril concluded.

"No. There is bend in the road about a half a mile up. It creates a blind spot between two of them when they walk to the furthest point of their patrol. We may have to wait awhile, but I think we can get across if we're quick about it."

We tracked silently to the vantage point and waited in the bush for our opportunity. The sun was quickly setting through the white haze of snow

"I'll go first and signal for Meya' and then for you." Vincent scuttled across the road and plunged into the ditch. I waited, my heart pounding in my ears and then sprang forward when I heard his muffled voice through the snow. Pain seized me in the middle of the road and I dropped to my knees breathless. I struggled to get up but could not find the strength. Vincent and Cyril converged on me just as one of the point men rounded the corner. The shot whistled through the snowflakes high above our heads. They hauled me to my feet and we bolted into the tangled ditch on the other side. We lay flat and listened as they called out to one another, running to where we had crossed.

"She's in hard labour now, Vincent." Cyril pleaded.

"No. I can still go on." I spat in my defense.

Vincent looked from Cyril to me and then searched the road for signs of the enemy.

"The deeper we get into the bush, the better our chances." He whispered. They supported me on either side as we stole into the thick scrub. Once there, he hollowed out a spot and had Cyril and I crawl into it. "You stay here. I'll lead them away and then circle back. It may take a few hours. If I am not here by daybreak, make your way to the creek again and follow it north to the cabin. I'll meet up with you there." He smiled his cocky young buck smile and then slipped silently into the swirling snowfall. For a few moments we could hear him brushing away our snowshoe prints.

Pain seized me again and I clutched silently at Cyril's coat for support. All around us we could hear voices and movement in the snow. "Over here" One of them called. "There's fresh prints over here." Their footfalls went off to a spot removed from our hiding place. "Looks like he's headed in that direction. Let's go."

We lay huddled together like fawns in the grass, as the movement and the voices melted away into the distance. Cyril ventured a peek outside our brush cover as I struggled to all fours.

"Lie down, Annie."

"No, I feel better like this." As I sat upright and back onto my knees, I felt a warm and wet sensation slide down my inner thighs. It only confirmed what I already knew was happening. "Cyril, the child is coming."

Pain gripped me again. I shoved my fist into my mouth to stop the scream from emerging and then fell forward. "Blanket." I managed as the contraction mounted across my back. I listened

through the pain as he spread it beside me and then touched my shoulder. I rolled onto it. The pain had subsided. Cyril reached under my petticoats for my underwear and rolled them down over my hips. They felt cold and clammy. When they emerged in Cyril's hands I could see them soaked in pinkish fluid.

"It's your water, Annie. Nothing to be worried about."

Night fell quickly like a protective shroud over us and for the next long while I careened between two worlds. Cyril kept vigil, rubbing his knuckles hard into my back when the contractions came, mopping the sweat from my forehead when they gave me respite. In the mist rising from the snow I saw my mother form beside us, smiling, singing a windsong into the night. Behind her, my father emerged with a plait of burning tobacco. He fanned it toward me with a long goose feather. How I wanted to call out to them. But voices deep inside my head told me to be silent.

Vincent appeared in the midst of my mother and father and moved forward to stroke my cheek.

"I am here now Meya'." He wrapped his arms around me, whispered power words into my ear, and guided me into a squatting position between his legs. My pain soared into the night, up into the clearing sky and the stars that winked out from behind dark rushing clouds. My body bore down, pushed outward, opened up to Muzzu-Kummik- Quae, the earth mother in her snowy mantle. The wind rushed in my ears and through the branches of the thicket. The warmth of Vincent's arms encased me, the smell of the forest in his snowy hair strengthened me.

"I can feel its head now, Annie. Stop pushin' for a moment so I can check for the chord." Cyril whispered from somewhere close. I bit my lip and willed my muscles to stop while his hands moved inside me.

"It's not around his neck. But I'll keep my hands on his shoulders just in case. Okay Annie, push hard now."

I clenched my teeth and bore down with all my might. At some point I heard a whimper.

"Keep pushin', Annie, only his shoulders left," Cyril whispered.

And then it was over.

"You have a son." Cyril laughed. "And he's a good-sized healthy baby."

"You did it, Meya'." Vincent buried his face into my neck. I laughed to feel the tickle of his warm breath against my skin.

Cyril rubbed the tiny form vigourously with his spare shirt until it called out for him to stop. Careful to keep the chord from tangling, he wrapped the baby in the blanket and handed it to me as I relaxed against Vincent's chest. The boy baby stared wide-eyed into the sky where the stars winked their approval. Suddenly the aurora burst out above us, like a bird flexing its broad wings.

"Gitchi-Manitou has sent a name to this child." Vincent whispered. "He calls him Weza'wange."

I nodded as I reached for his hunting knife. Cyril took it from me and washed it in the fresh-fallen snow. Vincent tore a piece of rawhide from his beaded hilt and wrapped it tightly around the chord a couple of inches from the baby's belly. Cyril handed me the knife so I could separate the baby from my body.

"Wesa...." Cyril tried to repeat the Ojibway word.

"Weza'wange." I smiled to him.

"What does it mean?"

"Yellow Wing," Vincent answered.

"Let's see about deliverin' the afterbirth now." Cyril whispered. "You'll have a few more cramps, Annie. Just bear down when your body tells you."

At the first brightening of the sky we gathered our packs together and prepared to leave the thicket. I tied the baby across my chest with Cyril's spare shirt and then covered myself in layers to keep him warm and secure. Vincent approached me as I finished wrapping the deep red afterbirth in several large rubbery leaves.

"Bury it so the Wayaabishkiiwed will not find it."

"No, it is manitou," I replied and I stuffed it into my pack.

Along the way to the creek we took time to lay false trails and diversions so that our pursuers would lose themselves in the snow. Once there, we removed our snowshoes and waded upstream in the shallow water to leave no trail at all. Mercifully, the day had turned bitter cold, enough to freeze the still-flowing creek water to ice on our feet and keep us dry. Weza'wange slept for most of the journey and when he did wake to feed, he looked quietly to me as if he knew that his very survival depended on his silence.

We reached the cabin an hour after sunset. Liam Connell had left wood to dry by the hearth and plenty of clean blankets and pillows on the two rope beds. I went outside and filled the kettle with snow as Cyril and Vincent lit the fire. At last we could shed our ice-etched clothes for the warm, scratchy blankets piled high in the corner. And we could break out the corncakes and beans Hilda Lavictoire had packed, wash them down with a strong cup of tea. By the time we had finished our scant meal, the fire had warmed the cabin enough to let us sleep.

I rose early to feed the little one, to wash the rags that I had used to catch the flow of blood from my womb and to do what my mother had bade me in the midst of my birthing vision. With the child wrapped close to my heart, I took Vincent's knife and trudged to the edge of the clearing. There I sat down and cut up the placenta.

"Gitchi-Manitou who created the earth and all beings, thank you for bringing us to this place of safety. Thank you for bringing this child into the world to serve his people and to serve you." I started draping the pieces across branches and putting them in tree roots. Vincent came up behind me and watched in silence.

"My mother told me to take your hunting knife and cut up the afterbirth. She said to place it in the trees and on the ground so that the forest and its people who nourished us would be themselves nourished. She said this is how we should thank the Gitchi-Manitou for commanding the forest to protect us from our enemies."

He looked as one who had seen a spirit, first at the pieces that hung in the tree branches, then at me as I went about my work. When I was finished, he put his arm over my shoulder and guided me to a place where we could sit. I could feel the upheaval welling up in him as he searched his mind for the words he needed to speak.

"When I lay in that cabin after they had taken my leg off, I had an ina'bandomo'win much like the

message your mother sent you." he told me. "I have been thinking on it and praying about it these many months. But the meaning of it has escaped me until now when I see you feeding the forest with your own body."

*The baby stirred. I pulled him from his warm place so he could void his bladder and empty his bowels. Vincent took him from me and rubbed snow on his bottom to clean the last remnants of the yellow substance from it. When he was stowed back into the safety of my breast, he continued. "In my vision I go hunting in a vast green forest, sunlight streaming through the canopy, guiding me to my quarry. I come upon a magnificent spotted buck in the clearing so I nock my arrow and aim for the heart. The buck falls dead before me. I pray to it; "You have in life served your kind in goodness. By your life, I will serve my brothers. Without you I hunger and grow weak. Without you I am helpless, nothing."****

"I take my hunting knife and first cut out its tongue and give it to a mute one who appears before me. Next I cut out its eyes and give them to someone who is blind. In turn I give each part of the buck's body to one who is without."

"I see now that this is a sacred path vision, Meya'," He said brushing his fingers across my brow. "The Gitchi-Manitou sent me here as ogimah, leader for this one enterprise only. My vision reminds me that I must return to our people when this mission is over so that I might continue to feed them with the skills your father gave me on that island so many years ago. Your mother teaches us about the wider circle in her vision, about how the Gitchi-Manitou provides for the future of the people as well as for the present. We must nourish our people until we are called to the other side. Those whom we bring forth from our bodies will rise to take our place. But they will be different from us. They will be proud to call themselves Anishina'abeg and practice the old ways. The future is good, Meya'. Our people will survive despite all that is being done to wipe them out. To know this brings me great peace."

**from The Manitous: The Spiritual Word of the Ojibway by Basil Johnston. p.118*

Chapter Eleven

Funeral

Birdcall, piercing, so close, so intimate, roused her from Vincent Gidagaakoons' vision. Cathleen closed the notebook, put it on the lamp table and made her way to the call's source beyond the kitchen window. The sunset was brilliant against the round white landscape. Backlit in blood-sun red, the bird sat on an old rusted wheel rim half-immersed in the snow. It was a hawk of some kind she speculated, puffed out against the cold, large, serene and fixed in its stare. Her beveled shape, moving in the rough glass, must have caught its sharp eyes. It turned to look at her. She met its gaze, lost herself in the depth of its hunting instinct. It remained still for what seemed a long time, watchful, about to strike, she thought. Then it spread its wings and disappeared into the fading horizon.

"Did you see it?" She asked as Mina and Elijah stepped into the kitchen only minutes later.

"See what?" Elijah asked.

"The hawk, just outside the kitchen window. It was sitting in the yard, over there, staring at me for the longest time"

"Hawk brings message," Nookomis Mina snuffed.

"What does that mean?" she asked.

"Just what I said, hawk brings message. Something is going to happen."

"We are going to get moving, that's what's going to happen," Elijah interjected. "You need to get dressed now, Cathleen. The ceremony will start soon."

She padded into the bedroom and opened her case. "What shall I wear, Uncle Elijah?"

"Clean jeans and shirt will do," he called back from the kitchen.

She pulled out her best pair of Levis and a plaid flannel cowboy shirt with pearl buttons. Nookomis Mina suggested Nana's leggings to cut the draft in the assembly hall. The old woman went over to where they lay on the rag rug and retrieved the medicine bundle from the trunk as well.

"Wait." As they were about to pile into Elijah's pickup, Cathleen ran back into the cabin and gently lifted the single brass button suspended on the bead chain from the crucifix and put it around her neck.

Anthony McCaffrey was already at the hall when they arrived. He stood over Nana's open coffin, gazing wistfully at the corpse as it lay in its pretended sleep.

"Daddy." She roused him from his thoughts and embraced him. "We need to go somewhere and talk."

She guided him to the small kitchen at the back and sat him down on a stool. "You are going to hear things tonight that will surprise you, maybe even shock you. And I think it would better if you heard them from me now, before the rest of the community gets here."

"What things?" He seemed agitated, she thought. He glanced impatiently at his watch. "I don't know why I'm putting up with this nonsense."

"These people are part of our family, that's why we're both here, daddy. Elijah Landreville is Nana's son, your half-brother. There are others who are our cousins. " She paused to let her words sink in before continuing. "Nana married someone from White Earth before she married Grandpa. In fact, he was still alive when she married Grandpa."

"Who told you that cock-and-bull story?" He spat the words at her.

"Nana left a journal. I read about this very thing last night. And everyone here knows for a fact what I have just told you." She put her hands on his shoulders, and looked directly into his eyes. His turmoil bolted into her mind, without her even trying to find it. His shame and disgust spilled over from behind her eyes into the back of her throat.

She cleared her throat and spoke slowly. "Nana was not a white woman; she was a full- blood Ojibway Indian. That's why she came back here ten years ago, to be among her own people."

"Cathleen, I already told you, her father was Anthony Graham and her mother was..."

"Delia Landreville, daddy, a White Earth Ojibway woman, not a missionary. Nana was born during a massacre, shortly before Delia Landreville met Anthony Graham. Her father was an Ojibway-Sioux warrior who fought Custer. Anthony Graham came along after the fact. According to Nana, he even knew about her real father.

"Bullshit." His laugh was shallow.

"Look, daddy." She took the button from around her neck and placed it in his hand. "The button says US 7th Cavalry. I found it in Nana's cabin along with a blue jacket with more buttons like these. The jacket

belonged to Nana's real father. He took it from a soldier he killed at the Little BigHorn. There's a whole trunk full of relics and pictures to back up what she wrote."

"She would have said something before this," he hissed at her.

"She didn't. Not to you, not to me. Maybe because she knew how you would feel."

He shook his head and laughed. "This only proves what I knew all along. She was mad, Cathleen. Her own life wasn't good enough so she had to invent another one. And we weren't good enough either. Papa and me." He sighed sadly and rubbed his hand through his graying hair.

"Well at least now I know why she always seemed so disappointed. We just didn't fit into her fantasy. Just before she left, I remember thinking her mind had snapped with all her talk of greed and retribution. But telling me that I was dragging you down with me was the last straw. You want to know why she left The Hollow, Cathleen? I told her to get the hell out. I was sick and tired of listening to her, of taking her silent sorrow routine. She's lucky I let you visit her here."

"No, daddy." Tears welled up as she listened to him. She could feel his pain enter her, a child cast away, a woman dislocated, too wounded to nurture her son. In a flash she understood that Nana believed that she had made Anthony McCaffrey what he was, and in so doing, bore the responsibility of his actions. How must it have felt to understand that in giving Vincent and Elijah back to the people, she was creating the same monster that devoured them?

"She moved back here to protect her people, daddy, to give them the strength and the tools to rebuild their lives. Ask Aunt Bridget and Aunt Lilith, they'll tell you about Nana's vision quest. That's why she left The Hollow."

"I'm supposed to change my life on the word of an old bat and a cripple?" he scoffed.

"They know about Elijah." She glanced off the barb. "Bridget was with Nana when it all happened. And she stayed with her all these years out of devotion."

Drums and chanting rose into the air behind them. "We'll talk about this later." he hissed and jumped down from the stool.

She made her way over to Elijah, who was placing something in the coffin.

"Red gloves. When a member of the Midewiwin dies, we put red gloves and tobacco in the coffin to help them in their journey to the other side." He turned and smiled. "You told your father about his background, about us, didn't you?"

"I had to, before he heard it from the people here."

"He's taking it pretty hard." Elijah motioned with his head to the corner of the room where her father sat sullenly by himself.

"What can I do, Elijah?"

"He needs to find his own way, just like you need to find yours," he answered quietly.

Elijah started toward the double doors at the end of the hall, and then turned back. "I will be making a speech in a little while. I'll invite anyone else who wishes to speak to come forward. If you are planning to say something, tell me now. As her female descendant, you will be expected to speak right after me."

"I want to say something. But I'm not sure I can stick to the rules."

He smiled the same smile that had so often lit Nana's face, but with the eyes of Vincent Gidagakoons, she thought. "Just follow my lead. Besides, I think everyone here will understand." He reached into his shirt pocket for a little pouch. "It is customary for a speaker to put tobacco into the coffin before they speak. I brought this pouch along because I didn't think you would have any." He led her through the crowd to the circle Mina had drawn in chalk around the coffin.

Together they greeted the townspeople as the Drum Society sang quietly behind them. "This is Meya's granddaughter Cathleen McCaffrey, Wase'ya to us," he said proudly and in turn introduced all those who passed by both their white names and their Ojibway names if appropriate. Through the smiles and the handshakes, she marveled at his easy familiarity with all the people. She watched them proceed from the reception line to the coffin. It was almost ghoulish, she thought, the way they touched Nana's hair and cheeks. They lifted her lifeless arms to deposit small gifts underneath her, knotted dried herbs in her hair and waxy hands.

An old man supported by two women approached Elijah. The chief kissed his leathery cheek with reverence and then referred him to her. "Waseya, this is No'dinens, Wolf Clan Elder, friend to my father and my spiritual guide."

Here was the wild child from Nana's journal, shadowing his father in the forest; she smiled. "I will call you uncle if you will let me."

"It makes me happy to hear you say so," he answered quietly in the voice of a child strangled by age.

Someone familiar made his way up to Elijah and shook his hand sheepishly. The braids she had put in his hair were still in place. Only he had enhanced them with rawhide and feathers. "I believe you and Douglas Fairchild have already met, Wase'ya." Elijah grinned knowingly at both of them, then turned away. Douglas took her hand and gave her a quizzical look. "Wase'ya?"

"Maybe I should tell Elijah what you call yourself," she whispered back.

He winced at the blackmail and looked around to see if anyone could hear them. "Can I talk to you later, Kate?"

When all had been formally greeted, Elijah raised his hands for attention and stepped in front of the coffin. "We are here to help Nookomis Meya'wigobiwik enter into the land of her ancestors to join her mother and father in the ghost dance. Everyone of us here has been touched in some way by this extraordinary Midi woman. And there are many stories that will be told in the coming years about her powers and her life."

"I, Weza'wange, Yellow Wing, named for the northern lights, am son of Gidagakoons Sundancer and elected chief of the White Earth Ojibway. I offer this woman tobacco for her journey and wish to be the first to tell you a story about Meya'wigobiwik."

"A long time ago, a woman and two men were forced to flee into a terrible snowstorm to escape their enemy. The woman was very round in the belly and already in labour, but she went with them anyway and did not complain when the pain struck. The Gitchi-Manitou went with them as well, and showed them a safe place where she could lie down and give birth. In a vision, her mother told her to give the child to his father so he could bring it back to the people. She herself could not go back because duty led her down another path. So she served by sacrificing her own happiness to the greater happiness of her people. For her decision and on behalf of the People, I say Miigwech."

The assembly repeated his thanks. "Who else wishes to speak?" He found her where she stood in the crowd. "This woman wishes to come forward." He motioned her to his side and then stepped back.

"I am Cathleen McCaffrey whom Yellow Wing has called Wa'seya: Light." She cast about for her father and found him still in the corner staring intently at her. She spoke tentatively at first, but then took courage in the accepting looks that greeted her story. "I am the granddaughter of Annie McCaffrey, who you knew as Standing Strong, Meya'wigobiwik." She pulled out the pouch Elijah had given her and placed it in the coffin near her hand. "I give you tobacco to help you find your way to our ancestors. This is my story."

The crowd grew silent and leaned forward. "There was a child whose mother died when she was young, a child who badly needed the love of a mother. She found it in a wise old woman who lived on a farm tucked away in some very old mountains. The old woman taught the child to see magic and healing in all the things of the earth and to thank God for everything. She told wonderful stories of a magical world where spirits took the form of men and animals to show the people how to live. But she never said where the stories came from. When the child was ten, the old woman moved away, for no reason, the child thought. So she followed her and found the magic world of the old woman's stories. Time passed, the child grew up and got lost among the many false ways of the world. But when the old woman died, her spirit took the form of a story to help the child find her way back to herself. The child is still lost, but she understands that if anything can lead her to the right path, this story can. And though the spirit of my grandmother goes out of this world, or as you would say, passes over to the other side, she will always be among us in her story, to guide her people back to their path. For your story, Nana, we give thanks. Miigwech."

She felt a slight shift in the air as she stood listening to the stories that followed hers. Douglas Fairchild had come to her side. He touched her elbow and motioned her over to a quiet corner of the room. "Look, I just wanted to tell you I've been thinking a lot about what you said the other night." He shifted uneasily from one foot to the other and looked around

"I'm impressed you remember anything about the other night, Douglas. It's a bit of a blur to me."

"You told me to look inside myself for the strength to stop feeling like a victim." He chuckled..

"Did I? Not bad advice for the both of us."

"Maybe I need to read that story Meya' left you." he added

"It's a start," she smiled.

They stood in awkward silence, listening to an Elder talk of Nana's exploits with the child welfare people. "She never lost her temper with them, but she never stepped back from what she wanted." the old woman said.

"You heading back to Canada after this?" he asked.

"For awhile. I need go back to my grandmother's farm, settle some things there and I need to be with my father."

"Then what?" His voice took on more than a casual concern she noted.

"Maybe I'll come back here for the summer. Elijah has been pestering me for a long time now to help straighten up his files."

She felt his heart leap at her words noted his poor attempt at remaining cool. "I remember something else

about the other night too, Kate."

"What's that?"

"Your skin's the same colour as mine. Especially right there." He smirked playfully and touched his own breasts. "See you around, Kate. Or should I call you Wase'ya now?" She watched as he swaggered off.

By the door she noticed Elijah speaking to her father. She closed the distance to them and put an arm on her father's shoulder. "What do you think, daddy?"

"You both tell a good story." he mumbled. "Is it going to end soon. Elijah?"

"I think this is the last person to speak." He left them and quietly to take his place at the edge of the circle.

As the crowd intoned the last Miigwech, Elijah made his way once again to the centre. Mina joined him, and from there, she proceeded around the circle chanting and shaking a turtle shell rattle at the four cardinal points of the earth. Along with two elder men, she approached the coffin, cut off a piece of the dead woman's hair and slipped it discretely into the medicine bundle that she had brought from the cabin. The men closed the coffin, then stood at either end and slowly turned it four times on its gurney wheels.

"We release your spirit, Nookomis Meya'wigobiwik to find your place among the ancestors." Mina spoke clearly though quietly from Elijah's side. "Head up-country toward that stand of Douglas fir you can see outside your window. That's where you'll find the curtain that separates our world from the ancestor world. Cross over there with the tokens we have given you and tell everyone you meet that The People are well and await the lighting of the Seventh Fire."

She stepped out of the circle and looked at the assembly. " Mi'in , the service is ended. Go home."

The hall emptied quickly and the undertaker from Duluth moved in to supervise loading the coffin back into the hearse. Cathleen was talking to her uncle when her father came up. "I'm heading back to Duluth," he said straightening the collar of his coat. "I've got a hotel room by the airport. Are you coming with me?"

"It's almost midnight, daddy. Why don't we spend the night in Nana's cabin and start out first thing in the morning?"

"I'm leaving now. Are you coming with me or not?" He cleared his throat, looked desperately into her eyes.

"I'll go with you." she sighed and turned to Mina. "Could you pack everything back into the trunk and send it along to Breckenridge, Nookomis?"

"Shall I send your suitcase there as well?" The old woman put her arms around her and nuzzled her cheek.

"Thank you, yes." She turned to Elijah and hugged him as her father went off to retrieve her parka. "Bye, Elijah. I'll call you as soon as I get home."

For the first half-hour they drove in heavy silence. She looked down at her hands, empty without Nana's black notebook. It sent a lonely shiver up her spine. The road shone slick before their headlights and stretched quietly into the abyss of a moonless night. They were alone, together in a metal cosmos letting time slip wordlessly away from them. Around the bend, headlights from another car dropped from high beam in acknowledgment of their passing.

He betrayed himself with his sleeve wiping the emotion away from his nose and eyes. "Did I ever tell you what she said to me when my father died?" He looked quickly at her and then back to the road.

"No."

"We were at Whelan's Funeral Parlour. Mom and I were standing there, looking down on Papa's body. She put some Rosary beads around his fingers and then said "Poor Mickey, I never really loved him, you know." Just like that." His foot went heavy on the gas and then eased up a little.

"I wanted to ask her then and there, if she ever really loved me either, but I think I already knew the answer."

"She hurt you, daddy." Cathleen reached for his hand but he withdrew it to the steering wheel.

"No she didn't," he replied. "She made me strong. From the time I was a kid on the farm, she taught me to anticipate her moves. She taught me how to shut down my emotions, distance myself from anything that could hurt me, how to be hard and go for the jugular. She was a master of it all."

"I can't believe she didn't care deeply for you. You just came along at a bad time in her life. If you read her notebook, you might understand."

"Damn her notebook. Damn her for that matter." He bit his lip and looked at his daughter with wild eyes. "It's all fantasy, Cathleen, ravings of a lunatic mind. I should have had her committed ten years ago."

"Why are you so worried about whether it's true or not? It doesn't change anything, daddy. It might even explain some things to you, give you the power to forgive her, the strength to look at your own life."

"That's enough, Cathleen. I won't hear anymore of this. I am proud of who I am and what I've accomplished. Neither of you can take that away from me." The pain and the terror in his voice shocked her. His anger tore through her mind like a knife through silk. He accelerated quickly after slowing down to go over some train tracks. She watched helplessly as his anger traveled to the gas pedal and the car leapt down the narrow road at break-neck speed.

"Please daddy, slow down. There may be black ice." He set his jaw in response and accelerated even more.

As they crested the turn, the right front wheel slipped from under them. He slammed both feet on the brakes, spun the car around and down the steep grade. The first roll caught her in the face. The second one caught a Douglas fir mid-trunk, sheared off the roof and the top of Anthony McCaffrey's skull. The car landed akimbo at the bottom of the great tree. She lay exposed to the waist in a cradle of snow, her seatbelt pinning her face down. The rest of the car twisted around her legs in a smoking knot.

Warm breath, a snuffling sound against her cheek brought her to the surface. She heard the snap of his antlers in the branches when she flexed her hand. He bent down and sniffed her again as she opened her eyes.

"Gidagakoons." she whispered. It sprang back and eyed her curiously from a safe distance. Propping herself up as much as the metal would let her, she probed the smoky wreckage for movement. "Daddy," she called. The buck disappeared into the ragged brush.

She commanded her legs to pull free but the metal held them fast. Searing pain, the smell of blood met movement and she lay back down in the snow to deal with it. Now she could feel the blood cooling on her face, running into her eyes. The forest was quiet, the only sound, a faint breeze in the pine needles above her. She tried to stretch out to ease the spasm in her gut but instead fell back groaning the pain into

the snow.

As she lay still, she felt movement around her. A woman, dressed in buckskin approached. She traced a tight circle with fist-sized stones chanting quietly as she bent over her work.

"Who are you?" she cried out. But the woman did not respond.

"Needjee, Needjee," the sound tripped up and down the branches of the tree above like the inquiring call of a chickadee. The woman turned from her work and smiled warmly to her. "I am your friend."

"Help us." she answered breathlessly through the fog clouding her senses.

"You are safe inside the hollow. It can only see outside."

She heard a snarl and smelled death as she lay half-conscious with the woman by her side. A dreadful wind blew up, chasing the snow into a hundred whirling demons. Somewhere close she heard the voice of her father plead for his life. In her mind, she felt his terror, and knew instantly the agony of one about to die. As quickly as the tumult had arisen, it dissipated into the mist rising from the wreckage.

"The Windigo has passed by." the woman whispered in the trees while wind fingers stroked hair stiff with blood.

"Oh, daddy. I'm sorry, I'm sorry. She sobbed in the snow that mingled with her tears.

"It's okay. We'll get you out."

She felt flashing lights somewhere above as she tried to focus on the voice in her head. "Huh?"

"What's your name?"

"Kate." She felt the dark descending once again.

The voice gently shook her shoulder. "Stay with me, Kate. Keep talking to me, Kate." Sound became warm hands passing over her body. A blanket appeared from the heart of the voice. "I need some oxygen over here."

"What happened, Kate?" The voice intruded into her desire to let go.

"Windigo." She felt a mask, heard hissing. The air was sweet and fresh as it filtered into her lungs.

"What did she say?" someone asked.

"She's hallucinating." another voice burst in her ears.

"Kate, can you hear me?" The first voice returned. She nodded from behind the mask. "We have to cut the metal away from around your legs. Can you stay perfectly still?"

"My legs hurt."

"I know Kate. Keep perfectly still now." One pink hand held the mask over her mouth while another held her by the shoulder. The buzzing in her ears turned to a roar.

"Got it." A distant voice announced

"Get me a back board and some Ace." They were all over her now like the returning demon. She struggled to get up, to run away from it. "Hold still, Kate. Hold still." Pain shot through her hips and her groin before the shroud descended to claim her.

Everything was white like the snow, she thought as she lay pinned to one spot. She looked around for a break in the white landscape but there didn't seem to be any. Something rustled, a cool hand wrapped itself around her wrist and stayed there momentarily. Then it moved upward to check something above her. "You're awake." A kind voice broke through the white landscape. A smiling face came into view."

"Where am I?"

"You're in Duluth General Hospital. You've been in a car accident."

"When?"

"Yesterday." the nurse intoned as she wrote her observations into a chart. "The doctor will be in to see you shortly." She swept out of the room leaving a fresh breeze in her wake.

No sooner had she gone when Elijah and a white-coated physician came through the door. "Cathleen, do you know who I am?" His worn face and jagged-cut hair gave him away.

"Aanen Weza'wange." she whispered so that only he could hear.

He smiled solemnly and took her hand. "Cathleen, your father didn't make it. I'm sorry."

"I know." Tears welled up and overflowed. She turned away to gain control.

"You know?" He sounded mildly surprised. A moment of silence followed before Elijah continued. "Cathleen, this here is Doctor Ekhart."

"How are you feeling?" the doctor spoke in a low compassionate tone

"Like a bag of dirt." she smiled.

"That's good, judging from what you've been through. Your pelvis is broken and we have you in traction. That's why you can't move. Your left ankle is broken too. Where the car fell on you, your legs were badly lacerated. The cut on your forehead wasn't even deep enough for stitches. You got off pretty easy; no internal injuries."

"It feels real easy."

He smiled wryly, nodded approvingly. "You'll have to stay here for a couple of weeks before I can let you fly home. And you will need someone to take care of you for several months after that. Now I'll leave you two alone. See you tomorrow."

With the doctor gone, Elijah relaxed and pulled a chair up to the bed. "How did you know your father was dead?"

"A woman in the forest, she put a circle of stones around to protect me from the Windigo. The Windigo came and took my father's soul away, Elijah." She reached out for his hand and drew it back under the covers.

"Muzzu-Kummik-Quae, the earth mother protected you, shaman child," he whispered to her and stroked

her hair with his other hand.

She woke the next morning to a profusion of colour and light. People moved about at the sink, just beyond view, speaking in hushed tones.

"Flowers. They're beautiful." she whispered to voices beyond the curtains.

"You're welcome, dearie. Mina and I brought them." Aunt Bridget's voice. She rejoiced silently as the old woman leaned in to kiss her cheek. "Bathtime." She drew the curtain back enough to let Nookomis Mina carry a basin of steaming water to the rolling table nearest her.

"I don't know about this." She tried to shrink away from them.

"It's either us or the nurse. And we have at least fifty years experience on her. You just lie back and enjoy."

She closed her eyes and tensed up at first. But as their warm hands caressed her aching muscles, she gave herself to them, bathed her senses with the water vapour scented with dried lavender and other herbs she could not recognize.

"The herbs will relax your muscles and help the blood flow to them." Nookomis Mina cooed quietly as she sponged slowly down her arm. "If they let me at those wounds on your legs, I could heal 'em up in a week."

"What would you use, Mina?" Bridget asked, her fingers making small circles with camphorated lineament where Cathleen's spine joined her neck..

"Juniper and poplar bark, boiled and mashed. Apply it as a poultice." She moved down to Cathleen's feet and began working deft fingers into the ball of her good foot with pumice and oil.

"What about white pine?"

"Only if there is an infection or gangrene. Juniper and poplar prevent infection in clean wounds," Mina instructed in a matter-of-fact way.

"Nana used valerian on Vincent's wounds." Cathleen leaned into Bridget's strong hands and relished the tingle of herbs against her skin.

"Spikenard valerian," Bridget jumped in. "But then it's best for drawing foreign objects out. How on earth did you know that, child?" she asked as she tied the johnny-coat at the back.

"The notebook." Mina chimed from the foot of the bed.

"I better read this notebook, then." She finished by rubbing scented lanolin cream into her cheeks and kissing her. "There, I challenge any nurse to do a better job than we old witches with our potions."

"Thanks for coming, Aunt Bridget, Nookomis." she whispered.

"I only wish I could stay longer, dearie, but Lilith and the cows need me too. God knows what those Murphy girls will do if I stay here past tomorrow. They're insane, you know -- drive us to distraction. Now rest, my little Katie, it's the only true healer. We'll be back in later."

Cathleen dozed off and on in the bright afternoon sun thankful for the respite from pain that daylight

brought. The sound of crisp white uniforms and muffled voices eddied just beyond consciousness. The tightening pinch of a blood pressure cuff and the feel of her own pulse against cool fingers reassured her that she was still alive.

Through the corridors of half-sleep she felt a pair of warm brown eyes looking down on her, imagined they belonged to a spirit-protector sent to stop the coming sunset and the crashing pain it would bring.

"Douglas." she smiled sleepily at him as he stood over her. "Been here long?"

"A few minutes, I didn't want to wake you." He cast about for a chair and then dragged it closer to her side. "I'm sorry about your father, Kate. Seems like all the shit's coming down on you at one time."

"Thanks." She lay quietly watching his concerned face, smelling the hint of gasoline from his coveralls.

"Sorry." He winced at her attention. "I came over from work. I must look like hell."

"You look just fine, Douglas." She stretched her hand to meet his. "Well here I am, in bed, just the way you wanted."

He smirked at her. "Not quite." He cleared his throat uncomfortably and continued. "Elijah told me you were going to need someone to take care of you for the next while. So I gave my notice at the Golden Eagle. I'll be heading to Canada with you."

"That's very sweet, but why? Aunt Bridget is a nurse. She can take care of me."

"Elijah say she's got her hands full running a farm. She'll need someone to fill in for her while you're getting better."

"But your job."

"The boss is an asshole. I was going to quit anyway."

"You're a terrible liar."

He blushed deeply. "Well the part about my boss is true. He leaned close to stroke her hair, his voice a whisper. "I need to get away from this place for awhile, Kate. It's mixing me up, makin' me crazy. This feels right." His eyes told her that this time he spoke the truth. What could she say, she thought. Besides, it would be nice to have someone from White Earth around.

"Okay. Only let's make a promise to each other."

"What's that?"

"No more booze."

He flashed an arrogant smile. "Only if your invitation to sleep with me is a promise as well."

Chapter Twelve

Pauguk's Legacy

"Maybe the painkillers are wearing off, Kate. I'll call the nurse." Douglas closed the cover of the black notebook and looked over his shoulder toward the door.

"No, keep reading." She set her jaw against the next spasm. This time it came from her ankle. So far she

had been able to ride the crests by concentrating on his voice, on Nana's words. Douglas was right; the morphine shot was nearly due, but if she asked for it now, it would be denied later, when she was alone, when her shattered bones would have complete dominion over her.

He pulled his chair closer, stroked the hair back from her face. "You sure you want me to stick around?"

"Keep reading." She smiled through the pain.

"Okay, Kate. I'm here 'til they kick me out." He opened the black cover to the point where he had left off and cleared his throat.

The Past: June, 1918

For Indians, race and power determined the balance in the hand of the blindfolded woman. We hid at the cabin until spring breakup and until the Federal Appeal case was heard. In the presence of all who lived on the Six Nations Reserve, Vincent and Cyril surrendered to the provincial authorities. They were taken in chains from the courthouse and thrown into the deepest cell in Brantford jail until an inquest, not a trial, into the events surrounding the death of Thomas Corbin could be held. Officially, they were not even under arrest.

For two months they languished in jail, denied all privileges save that of a brief weekly visit from Honore Lavictoire.

"It's a good thing they prepared their statements before giving themselves up," Honore observed to me one night over tea. "Else I would have no basis for petitioning the circuit judge to come down here now."

On the other hand, the police dropped the investigation into the shooting of Seth Crow Catcher once the land claim had gone against the City of Brantford for the second time. Brian Corbin remained free despite two more assaults against Six Nations people; and Zachary Yorke, his keeper, busied himself acquiring land above the burial ground to house his garbage dump.

To everyone's surprise, the circuit judge denied a police petition restricting public access to the proceedings. Even if I could not speak to him, I thanked God that I would finally be able to see my husband and my friend who had saved his life and given life to our son.

The people of Six Nations packed the courtroom on that warm June day to give their spiritual support to the man they had named Keeper Awake and the Catholic priest who had turned warrior and midwife. At their bidding, Bridget and I were seated as close to the prisoners' box as possible. The assembled Iroquois rose reverently from their seats as the prisoners entered, ragged and dirty. Vincent was without his wooden leg. He had his arm over Cyril's shoulder for support. Thus he was forced to shuffle and hop to reach his seat. They stood facing us, Vincent smiled defiantly, as the judge took his place before the court.

"This proceeding is an inquest into the death of one Thomas Corbin, late of Brant County, His Honour, Collin Mackenzie presiding," the bailiff announced as we settled back into our seats.

"Bailiff, why are these men in such a sorry state?" The judge scowled in the direction of the prisoners' box and then over to the officer in charge.

"If it please the court, may I respond, Your Honour?" Honore stood up and addressed him. The judge eyed him closely before answering, probably wondering as we did, how one so young, so

lost in his black morning coat and white collar would fare against seasoned lawyers on the other side.

"Go ahead, Council."

"Your Honour, these are my clients, Mr. Vincent Landreville, King's Council and Reverend Father Cyril Brennan, a priest in the Roman Catholic Church. They have been detained in Brantford jail for some time now, without due process and in the most primitive of conditions. Under the circumstances, sir, I would ask that they be released immediately and be allowed the time to make themselves presentable to the Court."

"Your Honour, the Crown objects to this request. These men have shown themselves to be unreliable and will flee the jurisdiction if given the opportunity."

Honore rose again to counter the prosecutor's argument but was waved to silence by the judge.

"If I read the docket correctly, Council, these men gave themselves up. Why would they now be at risk of flight?"

"Sir, they eluded capture for seven months," The prosecutor responded.

"May I speak now, your Honour?" Honore blurted out before the judge could respond. The judge waved him on.

"My clients' intention all along has been to comply with the law. Their delay resulted from their desire to see a land claim dispute with the city of Brantford settled first. I might also add, your Honour, Mr. Landreville was seriously wounded in the encounter with Thomas and Brian Corbin and needed to heal before enduring the conditions he has recently been subjected to."

"That's all very well, Mr. Lavictoire. If Mr. Landreville wishes to press charges against either Mr. Corbin or the City of Brantford, he will be given the opportunity. What I need to know now is whether or not they will bolt if I set them free. Will you vouch for them?" The judge asked Honore.

"With my life, sir."

"I'll ask only for your license to practice law in Ontario, Mr. Lavictoire. Very well. I see no reason to detain these men at present. This inquest will adjourn until two o'clock."

Though his face was drawn and tired, his arms were still strong in their embrace. After me, he hugged Bridget and then shook hands with the people as they gathered round us. Cyril's eyes filled with tears as he accepted my embrace and the comforting arms of his friends. Honore whisked us off to The Joseph Brant where he had secured rooms with baths in anticipation of the judge's ruling.

"No Indians allowed. This is a respectable establishment." The proprietor challenged our disheveled group. "This one can stay. The chief and his squaw will have to go."

"But you already let me book the rooms." Honore blurted out.

"You didn't tell me they were for savages." Honore drew himself up for a fight.

"Let it go." Vincent responded from behind him. "We don't have time to argue this. Cyril, you get cleaned up here. I'll go to Honore's place."

Behind the door to Honore's bedroom we held on to each other as if perched on the edge of a cliff.

"I may have headlice, Meya', " he whispered as I combed his knotted hair out with my fingers.

"I don't care."

"What about fleas?" he asked kissing my lips and throat.

"I want them too." I stripped the rags from his broad chest, caressed the old Sundance scars with my fingertips.

"We've only got a couple of hours," he said drawing me down onto Honore's bed.

"It will have to do."

The Present: "Visiting hours were over an hour ago, young man. You will have to go." The nurse whispered to them both as he leaned in close to Cathleen to use the light above her bed.

"We're just getting to a good part." he whispered back. "Can't you let me stay a little longer? It takes her mind off the pain."

"It's all right, Douglas. I'm tired now anyway." She reached for his hand and worked up a sleepy smile. "Will you come tomorrow?"

"I'll be here after work." He laid the journal on the bed table and kissed her forehead before dissolving into the shadows by the door.

The morphine washed in through the intravenous line, leaving a sour taste in the back of her throat. She sighed and closed her eyes to the dizziness that followed. Gradually the throbbing in her groin and in her legs became once removed from her perception of it.

Her mind eddied back to earlier in the day. Elijah had come with papers for her to sign releasing Nana's body to him. She would lie where her heart already dwelled, he had told her, beside his father and Cyril Brennan on Wolf Medicine island. She thought about Nana's description of cathedral-like pines that defined the horizon and the razor-backed rocks that guarded the shore, Manitou fingernails. Someday she would go there, she decided, with Elijah and Nookomis Mina and maybe even Douglas Fairchild.

Elijah had brought papers concerning her own father as well. His body would be flown to Ottawa where her mother's family and his lawyers would take care of arrangements. She remembered him telling her that he wanted to be cremated, his ashes scattered in The Hollow.

"Let them have their funeral now," she told him, "but leave the ashes to me." She turned her head to the pain of his crying soul in the woods, carried off by a demon of his own making. Tears burned into her pillow, their flashpoint a mix of drugs, pain and sorrow.

She thought back to a night long ago under the summer moon, children clutching each other in fear as Nana told the story of Pauguk the dismembered. For betraying and killing his brother, his bones had been scattered across a rocky shore and the Manitou had cast him out from every resting-place. Waub-kookoo, the owl, took pity on him and gathered the bones back together so that Pauguk's soul could rest in peace. Even then the Manitou would not let him enter the other world, Nana had told them. Instead they banished him to a place between the sun and the realm of ice where he would always be either on the point of burning up or freezing.

"Are you in pain?" The voice came from the shadows in the doorway.

"No. I mean yes. Drugs won't help." she sobbed quietly.

Warm white arms reached down to her and wrapped around her heaving chest. "It's all right. Let it out now," the soothing voice whispered. She surrendered to it and opened the floodgates to the gentle stranger in the darkness.

Four days into recovery, they released her from traction, from the intravenous lines and the catheter. The immobility of the sling and the pulleys was replaced by the immobility of a cast stretching from her waist down to the toes of her left foot. She leaned in terror on the nurse's shoulder as they set her in a semi-sitting position. Pain seared through her groin but then faded as the cast hardened. As Dr. Ekhart cut away the gauze wrapping on her bad leg, she swallowed her shock at seeing the black stitches running along the bruised and mottled surface of her thigh and shin. Her ankle, swollen, black and blue, stretched lifelessly before her.

"What does my good leg look like?" she asked him as he probed the wounds for signs of infection before covering up the rest of her leg with plaster.

"About the same as this one."

"Great." she sighed.

"Look on the bright side, Kate." He spoke as he soaked the plaster-laden bandages in water before layering them around the gauze stocking that covered her leg. "You're mobile. In a few days we'll let you get up on crutches. Once you can handle walking, you can go home."

Now she could explore the space beyond her bed, use the toilet with a little help, look out the window, and eat food in an upright position. Now she could appear stronger, more independent for her own benefit, for Douglas. Maybe she could even resist the pain and the drugs, she mused, like Vincent did after he lost his leg.

She rolled the wheelchair over to her night table and picked up the notebook. Now maybe she could read it for herself, in her own voice, in Nana's voice, and make the pictures in her own mind. She thumbed through pages, over words spoken in Douglas' voice, words that she had only half-understood through a shroud of pain and morphine.

With the same fingers that had braided her child-soft hair and wiped her child-lonely tears, Nana had felt the sultry ripple of Vincent Gidagakoons' skin, the tautness of his muscular frame. It made her blush to think that this woman who had epitomized the love of a mother could also be rocked by the sexual response of a lover.

The Past: June 1918

Vincent looked quite fetching, despite the ill fit of Honore's gray wool suit, and the pinned-up leg. Now that his hair was clean and combed back, he was himself again, none the worse for two months in jail.

"They split my wooden leg for firewood." he chuckled, "I'll have to get another one." For the short-term, Honore scrounged him a set of crutches.

He insisted upon the two of us facing the concierge at The Joseph Brant when we drove round to

pick up Cyril. He swept in dramatically in front of me and stopped mid- lobby to make sure that all would notice not only an Indian standing there, but an Indian with one leg.

"Could you tell me what room Cyril Brennan is in?" He boomed at the man behind the desk.

The concierge fumbled with the register for several tense seconds before answering him in a whisper. "Room Three-O-Four."

"Send someone to fetch him, then. Tell him Keeper Awake and his wife will wait for him outside because they are not allowed in this establishment named for the great chief of the Hodenusaunee." He smiled wryly, and then hopped out to a point just beyond the door.

The inquest lasted only a day and a half. Motions to strike my testimony as biased and unreliable, motions to strike the testimony of other Indians and an Irish priest were raised repeatedly by the Crown and defeated easily. In the end, the judge ruled Thomas Corbin's death a justifiable homicide on the basis of self-defense. But he would go no further than that. He declared the question of why the Corbins had attacked us in the first place as 'ultra-vires' to the matter at hand, outside his jurisdiction. The death of Seth Crow Catcher, the involvement of Zachary Yorke and the City of Brantford in what had transpired, were declared things to be taken up at a later date.

And yet Justice Mackenzie did feel comfortable dealing with the matter of an extradition order to be served against Vincent.

"Vincent Landreville, resident of White Earth Minnesota, you are an American citizen presently residing in the Dominion of Canada. For acts of sedition and for fomenting sedition among the Iroquois people of Six Nations Reserve, you have been deemed persona-non-grata by the Government of Canada acting on behalf of His Majesty King George the Fifth. You are herewith ordered to leave this country and not return for the length of time that this order is in effect."

"In other words, your Honour, I should quit while I'm ahead." Vincent responded.

"That is one interpretation, Mr. Landreville. But it is clearly not for me to say." The judge smiled as he spoke and then struck the desk with his gavel. "This proceeding is dismissed."

To our surprise, Justice Mackenzie invited us to dine privately with him before he returned to Toronto. Vincent accepted as much out of curiosity as admiration for the degree of honesty the judge had shown us.

"You are a dangerous man, Mr. Landreville, an educated Indian with brains." The judge observed over wine and rack of lamb. "When I was assigned this case, I took the time to acquaint myself with some of your work against the Bureau of Indian Affairs."

"I'm flattered." Vincent downed the rest of his glass of wine. "Good fire water, judge. I didn't know you could still get French wine in these times."

"One can. But it's expensive." Mackenzie smiled.

"You didn't have to waste it on us. We would have been happy with corn whiskey. Right Annie?"

"Gidagakoons, try to be polite." I admonished him in Ojibway and then blushed at the judge.

"She told me to mind my manners." Vincent chuckled quietly.

The judge turned his attention to me. "What language were you speaking, Mrs. Landreville?"

"Ojibway, your Honour." I had hoped to lurk in the background that night. Maybe if I kept my answers short, he would redirect his attention.

"But I assumed you were Iroquois."

"No sir, Ojibway."

"My wife is a warrior, born of warriors." Vincent took my hand under the table and smiled warmly. "She was born in the snow during the Wounded Knee massacre at Pine Ridge, South Dakota. You don't get much tougher than that."

The judge cleared his throat uncomfortably. "I guess I don't need to tell you that the governments on both sides of the border would like you and your kind out of the way."

"It's easy enough for your side", Vincent replied. "You just send me packing. It's a little trickier for the other side since I have a right to be there."

The judge nodded, poured another glass of wine for Vincent. "I like you. I might even say I admire your skills, Mr. Landreville. You sort of shake my opinion of Indians in general." He paused before continuing, nodded toward Vincent's crutch against the wall behind him. "You've already had a taste of how far people will go to get rid of bothersome obstacles. One of these times they might just succeed."

"There is an old saying among the warriors in my culture. It has gotten us through many battles, Mr. Mackenzie. It goes something like this; it is a good day to die. The whites may succeed in killing one smart Indian. Lord knows, they have killed many already. But behind that one will rise another, and then another. Eventually you will have to deal with us."

"So you consider yourself a warrior, like Crazy Horse, maybe." The judge amused himself with Vincent's quaint words.

"I am your sworn enemy," Vincent answered through eyes harder than stone.

The Present: "Look at you." Nookomis Mina beamed from the doorway. "You will heal fast now that you can move around." She glanced over to where Douglas sat sprawled over the Laz-ee-boy in the corner of her room. "And you will hurt yourself sitting like that."

"So now you're my ninga too, old grandmother?" He shot back as he pulled himself into a more natural position.

"You are in need of one." She fished around for something in her handbag and walked over to him. "Here is something from Elijah. He said I would find you here."

He took the packet from her and pulled out a blue-black booklet emblazoned with a golden eagle. "My passport. Far out. How'd he get it back so soon?"

Cathleen wheeled over to inspect it as he thumbed to the photo. "You look like a member of a rock band." she smirked.

"Yeah man, Mick Jagger." He jumped onto the armrests of the chair, face twisted into defiance, body

undulating suggestively.

Mina shook her head. "I can see why Elijah decided to go with you to Ottawa."

"What?" Douglas jumped down to the floor. "Doesn't he trust me to get her home safe?"

"I'm sure I'll be fine with Douglas, Nookomis." Cathleen added.

"He has his reasons," Mina replied.

"He doesn't think I can do it, that's his reason." Douglas shot back.

"Have you ever crossed into Canada before?" The old woman challenged him.

"No."

"Then you must trust Elijah. He knows a lot more about these things than you do. Now go down and get yourself something to eat while I give Waseya a bath."

Mina shook her head as she watched him leave. "That boy's pride is his greatest weakness. But then I suppose it's better to suffer from pride than not to suffer from it."

Cathleen drank in the crisp fresh air, rejoiced in the brilliant sunshine as Elijah pushed her out to the waiting taxi. She could feel the promise of spring against her face and almost smell the mud in the driveway leading up to The Hollow. With her back to the open door, she stood tall on her good leg supported by the familiar feel of the crutches before swinging easily into the front seat of the taxi.

Douglas was waiting for them at the Air Canada ticket counter. "Okay, so I checked in all our luggage, showed them our passports and got the boarding passes. Is there anything else I need to do?"

"Relax, Douglas." Elijah patted him on the back. "Why don't you go and find a wheel chair for Cathleen so she won't have to struggle with crutches through this crowd?"

"Right." he smiled nervously and dashed off.

"Maybe he'll calm down once he's on the plane." Elijah betrayed his own apprehension with a sigh. "You all right?"

"Fine. You should take some of your own advice, Elijah."

The flight was half-full so she could spread herself out from the window to the aisle. Douglas slid into the centre seat, piled pillows on his lap to support her cast and nestled down to listen as she read from the journal.

The Past: "It was Cyril who suggested the white name Elijah. "He has the look of a prophet." he pronounced one day. And though Vincent would not agree to have him baptized, I believe he wished to honour and comfort his friend in some way. So he acquiesced to calling the child by his white name whenever Cyril was around.

The Present: "Hear that, Elijah?" Douglas leaned across the aisle and poked his arm. "You're a prophet."

Elijah smiled from behind closed eyes. "My uncle Cyril used to say I had burning ears as well as a burning tongue, like the prophet I was named after."

"What do you remember most about him?" Cathleen asked.

"He was an important person to me. After my father, the most important. Together they taught me because my father would not allow me to go to the white school. He was kind and patient and he made me laugh a lot. That's what I remember the most."

The Past: August, 1918

Soon after the inquest into Thomas Corbin's death, the archbishop in Toronto accepted Cyril's request to leave the priesthood. Cast adrift from all that was familiar, he slid into sorrow and withdrew from us as well. We feared for his spirit. It seemed ironic. In all that had happened to the people of Six Nations, to Vincent and to me, a white man, one of their own, ended up taking on the greatest burden of their greed.

"What will you do now, Cyril?" I asked him one night in our little Oshweken house. Alexander General, interim chief of Six Nations had won the argument with the provincial police over where to house us until the expulsion order could be carried out.

The old sparkle passed briefly across his eyes. "I haven't a clue, Annie Graham, not a clue. And damned if God in Heaven won't speak to me."

I sat down and faced him in the semi-darkness of the quiet parlour. "If God can forgive those who killed his son, do you not think he can also forgive you?"

"I took a life."

"And you saved one and you brought another into the world."

He smiled faintly and nodded. "Yes, I need to keep tellin' myself that, don't I?"

"It's time to celebrate again, Cyril. Time to do God's work. I think you already know what that is."

"I suppose. But then it all seems too easy, doesn't it?"

"Maybe being easy is the best sign of God's will," I countered.

He nodded and put his hand over mine. "Sure you were always one to be pointin' me down paths, Annie Graham. So, I'm off to White Earth with Vincent and the child to find the Celts of the New World."

I hugged him with all my might. "Pray for them, Cyril. See that they come to no harm."

"That's a pretty tall order, given your husband's nose for trouble. No doubt the wee one will be just as bad."

He sighed and searched for answers in my eyes. "What about you, Annie. Will you be coming with us as well?"

I reached into my pocket and drew out a folded letter. "Uncle Frank has died. Lilith said it was the influenza that carried him off."

"God rest his patient soul. So now there's no one between Lilith and her mother. Lizzie Corcoran won't be carin' for her that's for sure, what with her guilty conscience and her wicked temper. I'm convinced it was she who drove poor Arthur to his end, though for the life of me, I don't understand what was so terrible that he had to go that way."

My shoulders tensed at the mention of my stepbrother, my gentle Arthur whose only sin had been being born into that family.

"She'll put her in St. Vincent's home for the Crippled and the devil take her." Cyril echoed the sentiments that had gone through my mind when I first received Lilith's letter. "Sure it will be the death of that poor child, to lose her freedom and the only place she's ever known."

I nodded heavily and looked through tears into my friend's eyes. "That's why I've decided to go back."

"I'm not surprised to hear you say so, Annie. Lilith is special, a gift to this world worth protectin' from the likes of Lizzie Corcoran. I know how much she means to you. But what of Elijah then? I can't see your Aunt Lizzie lettin' you into the house with him."

"His future lies with you and Vincent, not with me, Cyril. We both know that." My heart broke to say the words out loud, but the mother in me knew it was for the best. This was the only way he would keep his dignity and inherit the best of The People. In The Hollow, he would learn only the shame that the white man heaped on all of us.

"It's the only way, Cyril. Would that there was another." I whispered.

"Is the old witch still expectin' you to marry then?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. She's already made arrangements with a bachelor named Donal McCaffrey."

"Dear God in heaven." Tears welled up in his eyes. "Have you told Vincent?"

"Yes. I know it hurt him terribly, but he has accepted it like a warrior."

The Present: Cathleen stopped reading aloud at this point, distracted by the envelope taped down at the bottom of the page. It was sealed and addressed to her. I understand, Nana. she said to herself. These words were meant for her eyes only.

August, 1964

"As I write this, Cathleen, my heart is crushed by the pain I knew my Vincent suffered thinking of me in the bed of another man. From what Mina and Elijah have told me, he bore it with dignity and courage, transformed it into love for his people and our son.

God blessed me with your grandfather, Donal McCaffrey, a good and loving man. But God did not bless Donal McCaffrey with a loving wife or Anthony with a loving and protecting mother. I, too, bore my suffering with dignity and courage, but I could not bring myself to translate it into

anything more than duty to them. I could not love them. And in that, I fear I failed them both.

Perhaps I am responsible for the greed and evil that now fill Anthony's heart. I rather think so. I used to say there was nothing easy about that child when he was growing up. Maybe I used his rebelliousness as an excuse to push myself away even further. The best I could do was hold Donal's hand back from beating him as often as he wanted to.

It is not my intention to form your opinion about your own father. And so I will not write his story as I have seen it so far. When the time comes, it will be your task to understand who he is and write your own story.

Sometimes I think part of my reason for returning to White Earth was to love as many children as possible to make up for the love I did not give my own son. Forgive him, Cathleen, and love him. It would bring my spirit peace to know that Anthony grew old in the love of at least one person.

May the Gitchi-Manitou bless you, my dear child.

The Present: "I think we're landing." Douglas touched her hand. The 'fasten seatbelt' and 'no smoking' signs flashed and the sequence of three bells confirmed his observation. She scrunched her left leg under the seat in front of her and pulled the seatbelt across the hard ridge of her midsection.

Elijah joined them as the plane shook into its final descent to Uplands Airport. "Okay, here's the drill. When we go through Customs and Immigration, don't offer any information other than straightforward answers to straightforward questions. Keep your cool, no matter what. And if we get into trouble, you let me do the talking, right?"

"What's the big deal? I've never had any trouble crossing the border before," she said.

"You've never crossed with us before." His face tightened as the wheels touched down and the engines roared in their ears.

"Give me your passports; we'll go through as a unit." He whispered as he guided them to the back of the Customs line.

The Customs and Immigration officer inspected their documents and checked photos against faces. "Why am I looking at two American passports and one Canadian?"

"This is my niece. She was in a car accident while she was visiting us in Minnesota and we are bringing her home." Elijah replied.

The officer looked them over again. "You'll have to follow me to the office."

"What's going on?" Cathleen whispered. Elijah waved her into silence as they made their way to the back of the airport. The officer directed them to an area in reception, while he went off to a place behind the frosted glass.

"What gives, Elijah?" Douglas whispered when he was sure they would not be noticed.

"The Wounded Knee thing, it's got the whites spooked about Indians crossing the border," Elijah whispered back.

"So we're all suspects?" Douglas nodded.

After a few minutes, a different man from the back office approached them, passports in hand. "This is your niece, is that right," he paused to reference the name from the passport, "Mr. Landreville?"

"That's right."

"She's white, you're Indian. Your names aren't even the same." he challenged him.

"I'm as Indian as they are." Cathleen retorted angrily.

Elijah motioned her to keep quiet and then addressed the officer. "Her grandmother was an Ojibway, like us. As for our names, we don't use them the same way you do."

"What about him?" the officer pointed to Douglas. "His name is different from both of yours?"

"He's my friend. He came back to help me until I can walk again." Her tone was hot, one step from abusive.

"What she says is true," Elijah responded quietly.

The officer contemplated the situation and then returned to his desk to consult with someone by phone.

"You two will have to remain here until we can run an FBI check on you. You're free to leave, Miss McCaffrey."

"Bigot. You're holding them up because they're Indians, nothing else." She fumed at the officer.

"Cathleen, this isn't helping us," Elijah cautioned her in a low voice.

"Maybe you should listen to him, Miss," The officer added. "Shall I call someone to come and get you?"

"No. I'll stay right here. If they're not welcome in my country, neither am I."

The officer sighed heavily and trudged back to his office, leaving them to cool their heels in the stiff chairs of the reception area. She scanned the walls covered in Department of Tourism posters. Multiculturalism was all the rage in Canada these days. It translated itself in the smiling faces of people dressed up in ethnic costumes. She poked Douglas and pointed to a surreal portrait of an Indian decked out in full regalia against a panoramic background of unnaturally brilliant mountains and sky.

"White man speak with forked tongue," he said, feigning the same expression as the Indian in the poster.

"He was probably well-paid for that picture." Elijah leaned into their game. "You might call it his victory. Lately we've been having a lot more of them than we used to."

"What kind of victory?" Cathleen watched as Douglas added yet another piece of art to her cast. This time it was the tongue from a Rolling Stones Classic.

"Mostly land claim disputes. Some of them date back more than seventy years. My father kept track of a lot of them. There's so many, the Grand Council has me working on setting up a registry so we can submit them all at once. I'm up over two thousand."

"Two thousand. I didn't think there were two thousand of us left," Douglas looked up from his work.

"Not in White Earth, maybe. But if you take count of the people spread all over Minnesota, the number is significant." Elijah looked toward the back office. "They're probably having a field day with my file back there."

"Why is that?" Cathleen probed.

"Right now, I'm involved with an important case making its way through the Minnesota court system. If it succeeds, it will call into question most of the land owned by whites around the reservation," Elijah sighed.

"George Aubid's grandfather, Zay Zah's land, right?" Douglas asked. "There's a lot of talk in White Earth about it."

"Right." Elijah seemed pleased at Douglas' interest in the issue. "It's got the white landowners up in arms. There have been several incidents that I've been called in to deal with, mostly kids involved with AIM showing their solidarity with the standoff. I'm sure my activities on their behalf haven't made me any friends in the government."

"Are you saying they might kick you out of Canada?" Douglas asked.

"No, they haven't got the power, especially when I'm here to bring a sick niece who is also a Canadian citizen back home." Elijah smiled dangerously.

Douglas stopped his work and looked at Cathleen. She rolled the wheelchair closer to her uncle so that her question could only be heard by the three of them.

"Why are you really here, Elijah?"

"To raise money for Dennis Bank's defense fund and to counsel the Dene people."

"Jesus." Douglas whispered.

This was a move worthy of Vincent Gidagaakoons, Cathleen thought and smiled in admiration. "How did you know that I'd stay here with you rather than call Aunt Bridget?"

It was Elijah's turn to express admiration. "You are Waseya', grand daughter of my Bear Clan Shaman mother, Meya'wigobi'wik."

Chapter Thirteen

Lilith

In the failing light, in the deep shadows of the old purple mountain, Cathleen's eyes played tricks on her. The tall old woman walking up the lane, "wellies" flapping around her ankles, heavy breasts tucked behind the faded blue lapel of her overalls looked so much like Nana. Cathleen wiped a tear from her cheek, felt the sharp breeze dry the remains into a chalky powder.

"Lord sakes! Where have you been? We were expecting you for tea, and here it is well past supper." Bridget chided them as the taxi bumped into the last muddy rut in front of the gaping shed door.

"Immigration." Elijah sighed as he lifted Cathleen into his arms.

"Damn them." Bridget hissed. She dipped deeply into the pocket of her overalls for the money to pay the taxi driver. "Well you're here now, thank God, and supper's still warm enough. Lilith is in the parlour waiting for you."

Elijah took each rough-hewn step carefully, waited for Douglas to open the screen door to the kitchen. The familiar smell of the shed mixed with the smoke from the woodstove and the lime from the bathroom

caught their noses as they pushed into the bright glow of the low- ceilinged room. Electricity and indoor plumbing had come to the homestead only after Nana had left. But, as Aunt Bridget was always quick to note, old man Bissonnette hadn't sunk the septic tank low enough.

"Aunt Lilith." she reached for her tiny hands as Elijah placed her beside the doll-like apparition on the sofa.

"Cathleen. I'm glad to see you so well." she sang and kissed her cheek where the salt had dried.

The men retraced their steps to the kitchen across squeaky floorboards and faded rose- patterned linoleum to retrieve their bags.

"When you finish there, go in and talk to Lilith while I dish the food out." Bridget ordered from the other room.

"Elijah Landreville. After so many years I am finally blessed with meeting you." Aunt Lilith's eyes filled with tears, her voice quivered. She took his hands in her own and searched his face. "You have the look of my sweet Annie. And you move with her gentle ways."

"I suspect you are as Meya' told me," he replied, "a Manitou who visits us in the shape of a dove."

Lilith blushed at his words and shifted her body to include Douglas in their group. "You will be staying with us for awhile, I hear. Welcome, Douglas Fairchild. I hope you can understand that we aren't all like those people at the airport."

Cathleen glanced over to the window overlooking the yard and saw that it was open. But then she had learned long ago that nothing passed by Aunt Lilith's notice.

"I take each person as they come, Miss Corcoran." He spoke softly, as if louder words would topple her over.

"I am Lilith to all my friends, Douglas. And I hope we will be friends."

"Ladies and gents, dinner is served." Bridget announced from the doorway leading to the small dining area adjacent the kitchen.

As Elijah lifted Cathleen into his arms, Bridget motioned Douglas to the kitchen. "It will take some time before Lilith feels comfortable enough to move about in front of you. 'Til then lad, stay out of her sight when she needs to get from one place to another."

"What's wrong with her?"

"She had polio when she was young. So she can't walk. But I dare say, she gets around just fine."

They sopped up the chicken stew with rashers of heavy bread still warm from the oven. Bridget ladled more onto their plates as the first portions disappeared.

"How long will you be staying, Elijah?" Lilith asked as she dipped at the corner of her gravy with a crust.

"A couple of weeks, I suppose. Cathleen here wants me to come with her to talk to her father's lawyer about the estate. And I've got some business of my own to take care of."

"Oh yes, Annie wrote and told me you had become a lawyer, like your father." Lilith beamed.

This was the first Cathleen heard of Elijah's offer, but she understood why he was making it. It would be

good to have so powerful an ally along to represent her interests. "Daddy's lawyers are like a pack of wolves, Aunt Lilith. I'm going to need Elijah to keep them from eating me alive." She smiled her thanks to her uncle across the table.

"God love you, child. It doesn't seem right to expect you to deal with this so soon."

"I'll be fine." She tried to wash the fear from Lilith's intense blue eyes with her smile. "I'm cut from the same cloth as Nana, remember?"

"Put her down here, Elijah" Bridget twisted on the bare bulb above Nana's bed. Cathleen pulled herself deeper into the high mattress and burrowed her head into the pillows. "You know I've been thinking about this bed for the last week."

Bridget chuckled and stroked her cheek as she lay, eyes closed, inhaling the dried lavender tied to the wrought iron cross bar. Lavender was Nana's scent. Even when she was not wearing it, its aura always lingered marking the air where she had passed. She turned away from Bridget's hand.

"I know, dearie, I know." she sighed and then smiled at Elijah where he sat at the foot of his mother's bed. "I've set up cots at the far end for you and Douglas. I'm afraid there's not much privacy up here."

"This is just fine." Elijah smiled.

From the time she had started coming to The Hollow, Cathleen could only ever remember one large room upstairs. That way heat from below could be distributed evenly to all who slept up there. "You just get used to the sound of other peoples' dreams." Nana would say and then laugh. And the dreams did come in abundance when all the lights went out and the room became silent in the pitch-black darkness of the country. Occasionally a car would thunder down the dirt road at the end of the lane. The headlights would cast crazy patterns across the rough-stuccoed walls, or illuminate a face masked in sleep or a human mound rising and falling with each breath. There was magic upstairs, ever changing, ever revealing itself in the heavy void.

When all the lights had been switched off, when everyone else had found their place upstairs, she listened for Aunt Lilith, knowing that Bridget was listening, too. The floorboards squeaked as she dragged herself across them to the stairs. Then came the familiar quiet thump as she lifted herself up, one step at a time. The air moved around her like wings flapping in the dark. Cathleen nestled down into the memory of so many years.

"Goodnight Cathleen," the form on the floor whispered, almost imperceptibly as she passed by.

"Goodnight, Aunt Lilith. Sweet dreams."

Cathleen woke to the smell of bacon and the lull of hushed voices in the kitchen. By now Bridget and Lilith had already said the Beads once, she figured, fed last night's scraps to the wild six-toed cats in the shed and stoked the woodstove to a roaring fire. Upstairs, the chill was quickly banished by the heat that rose from where stovepipe met grate. In the corner she noted Elijah stirring and Douglas lying on his stomach, still asleep.

Elijah had leaned her crutches against the wrought iron foot of Nana's bed so she could get at them easily. She hobbled over to Douglas' cot and lowered herself to its foot. Her uncle rolled over and smiled at her as she poked at Douglas' back.

"What time is it?" Douglas stretched and grunted into his pillow.

"Do you want to know in white time or Indian time?" she answered.

"Indian time?" he muttered the question.

"Near dawn."

"Ok, white time, then." he sighed.

"Five-thirty."

"Jesus Christ."

"C'mon Douglas, cows need milking." Elijah threw his pillow at the cringing figure and then pulled himself out of his own cot. "You need help getting down?" he asked her as she pushed herself up onto the crutches.

"Thanks, I can manage by myself today."

"So this is it." Lilith passed her hand over the rough black cover of the notebook. The house was quiet now with breakfast dishes washed and the others working down by the cowshed. She donned her reading glasses and opened it to the first page. Cathleen watched the corners of her mouth tighten as she read, watched the tears well up in her eyes and then tumble over onto the translucent skin of her cheek.

Lilith drew a tissue from her sleeve and set the book aside. "She wanted so much to tell you when you were little, to raise you in the light of this knowledge. But she was afraid, Cathleen. If Anthony had ever caught wind of this, he would never have let you continue seeing her."

"I understand." she whispered.

"We live in better times now. You can't imagine how devastated your father would have been to know he was a half-Indian." Lilith continued.

"I think I do." Cathleen looked out the parlour window to the woodlot where Douglas was busy splitting logs for the stove.

"He had to hear the truth eventually, Cathleen. Perhaps it was best coming from you. Maybe he understood from you that there was no shame in it."

"I don't think so." she sighed, cringing at the memory of her father's terror as the Windigo took him into the forest mist. She retrieved the notebook from the sofa and flipped through it to a section she had skipped over in White Earth. It was entitled "Lilith".

"Shall I read aloud, Auntie?"

The Past: August 1904

That first night in The Hollow, I was quite at a loss for finding the bed that Aunt Lizzie wanted me to share with her daughter Lilith in the dark room upstairs. What to do? I was too tired to think, too desolate to retrace my steps and ask for help.

"Over here." A little voice lit my way. Feather-like fingers found mine as I leaned against the woodframe to push my bag under the bed.

"You're Annie Graham, aren't you? Mama says you're my cousin, but Uncle Anthony told me that you weren't my cousin anymore. You were my sister."

"When did he tell you this?" I asked, my hair prickling on the back of my neck.

"Last night." she chirped quietly. "You see, I can fly. When God took my legs, he gave me the wings of a bird. But they only work when I'm asleep. Last night I flew over the river, then down a road made of water, a canal I think it's called, until I reached a place with railway tracks. I met a man, the same man as the one in the photograph in the parlour. He told me he was my uncle, and that you were my sister now."

While she spoke, I took off my black dress and climbed in beside her. She wrapped her tiny arms around me and kissed my cheek. "God gives us what we need, Annie."

And so he did. For every act of cruelty, every harsh word and cold look meted out by Aunt Lizzie, I also received love and unconditional acceptance from this magic child with wings instead of legs. She drew pictures for me of her dreams and journeys in the sky, took messages back to White Earth and set them down in the thoughts of my Nookomis, my Nindede and my cousin, Vincent. She was indeed the Manitou of my father's vision, my protector and my guide. And I was her teacher, the one who freed her from the four walls of The Hollow.

She was light and small, like the bird she became every night. I could carry her easily on my shoulders down to the barn or to the henhouse or into the fields. I taught her how to use her arms like the legs of a bird, how to tuck her withered legs underneath her like the wings of a bird and use her hands to guide her lifeless feet.

"When I walk, I am a duck." she once said to me. "But when I fly, I am a dove."

"Do you still fly in your dreams, Aunt Lilith?" Cathleen asked as she closed the notebook to help prepare for a mid-morning break.

"Oh yes, Cathleen, every night, as always, every night." She hoisted herself off the sofa and duck-walked in front of Cathleen's thumping crutches.

The sweet smell of hot-milk cake wafted through the kitchen and the black enamel kettle was steaming on the metal plate when the rest of them came through the door.

"Smells good in here." Douglas noted and went for the sink to wash his hands.

"Where'd you learn to handle an ax like that, Douglas?" Elijah asked.

"St Joseph's Residential School. Used to imagine each log was a priest's neck." He caught himself and looked at the women. "Sorry, no offense intended."

"There's a few necks I wouldn't mind you thinking about, Douglas." Bridget reached around him for the pumice stone to remove a stubborn bit of grease.

"Like Zachary Yorke." Cathleen added from where she sat at the table.

"That's a name I haven't heard in a long while, but it will do for starters."

The sun still went down quickly at this time of year. Douglas tucked into Cathleen's shoulder, bone weary from a day of hard farm labour. The fresh air had made her sleepy too, but she wasn't quite ready to tackle the stairs and pride held her back from asking Elijah to carry her once again.

"Go to bed." She ordered Douglas.

"No, I want to listen to you read." he mumbled and nestled more solidly against her.

Lilith looked over her half-moon glasses and smiled. Her fingers twisted rhythmically to the formation of perfect French lace.

"Where are you?" Bridget asked from the dining room table where she pored over today's Citizen. Elijah had suggested she make a grocery list, since he and Cathleen would be heading into town tomorrow to see the lawyer.

"The Hollow, before Six Nations." She thumbed to her place in the black notebook.

The Past: Fall and Winter, 1904-1905

Lilith was a quick study, although she tried to convince me that it was because of my skill in teaching rather than her aptitude for learning. Her lightning mind soaked up everything that I had brought from White Earth. After that, all I could offer her were Uncle Frank's treatises on bovine diseases, and of course, the Bible.

On warm summer nights I would carry her up into the hayloft and read Dickens, borrowed from the Chelsea Library, to the cooing of pigeons and chewing of cows. Sometimes Arthur would join us, his shy smile, tense shoulders asking for acceptance into our magic circle. Of course it was given. Summer passed into Fall, idyllic evenings in the hayloft bled into backbreaking sunsets in the hayfield bringing in the last cutting before winter. All except Lilith were consigned to the feverish task of beating the frost to the harvest. But then she contributed in her own way with pots of steaming tea and hot sconebread to fuel our efforts. By the end of October our arms were raw with hay wounds, our hands blistered and swollen, our shoulders, stooped with pain. The first snow hailed our freedom from the land. Apart from milking the cows, tending to the chickens and their eggs, and a never-ending litany of household chores, Lilith and I were free to sew and knit, free to read.

"This story is similar to how the Anishinaabeg believe the earth was created," I let slip one day as we curled up on the sofa together with the Bible. Maybe it was because Christmas was fast approaching and memories of my mother and father, our last Christmas together, my last Christmas in White Earth kept flooding back.

"Tell me your story, Annie." Lilith was combing my hair, braiding it with ribbons as I read from the Holy Book.

"No. These are things that don't belong here."

"You have to tell me, or you might forget them." she whispered. "I'll keep them a secret."

Aunt Lizzie and Uncle Frank were out visiting the Mulvihills. Arthur was down at the barn. It was only the two of us and I knew she was right.

"First, you must understand that we call God by another name. We call him the Gitchi-Manitou, the Great Mystery, in English. But the more I think about it, the more I am convinced that God and Gitchi-Manitou are the same."

"Gitchi-Manitou," she repeated quietly wriggling under my arm for warmth.

"The Gitchi-Manitou dreamed of creating everything we see around us, everything we know to exist. In his vision, he saw, heard, tasted, smelled, sensed and knew all that was in the universe. And so he created his vision, the world, the manitous, plants, animals and human beings. When he had finished, he told all the living beings on the earth that it was up to them to complete what he had begun, to use all that he had created, wisely and with honour in order to find their own visions. And so he freed every living thing to follow its own path."

"Did the Gitchi-Manitou create everything in seven days, like God." she asked.

"Maybe. Time isn't important to us."

Her sense of wonder, her consuming curiosity and my growing love for her opened the gates of my spirit. I told her of Geezhigo-Quae, Sky Woman and the creation of the land of my people from a handful of dirt on the back of the turtle; of Winonah and Ae-pungishimook, and the coming of the Anishinaa'beg whose name meant The Good People. She hungered for more, and I gave it to her. With each story I told her, the loneliness within me diminished and I began to love myself again. She made me forget that who I was and what I was did not fit into the world that I now occupied.

On Christmas Eve, I trudged down to the barn to give the cattle their last ration of hay for the night. As I pushed the scratchy flakes into the hay crib, Uncle Frank appeared from the darkness. He was holding the deerskin bundle of my Bear Clan ancestors. I had hidden it, carefully I thought, behind a loose board in the loft and then nailed the board tight.

"What is this, Annie?"

Blood rushed to a place behind my eyes and my fingers and legs went numb. "It is mine, from White Earth."

He sat down on the milking stool and began opening it up.

"No, you mustn't do that." I reached out to grab it from him, but he held fast and stared menacingly at me.

He dropped the pieces of bone, the braided plaits of hair, shiny pebbles and feathers into the straw. I stood horrified, watching him desecrate my ancestors.

I fell to my knees and started gathering up the bits into my apron.

"Leave them there, Annie." he threatened, but I picked them up anyway and clutched them to my chest.

"You're a goddammed heathen savage, aren't you?" He slipped his heavy leather belt from his pant loops. "As God is my witness, Annie, it is my duty to save you from Satan and his ways."

He beat me, as I knelt there clutching the remains of my family. The metal buckle bit into my back and my arms and my head until I could feel blood tingling against hair and clothes. I offered my pain to the bones and hair of my ancestors, my father and my mother pressed tightly against my chest. I bit my lip until it too bled so that I wouldn't cry out and shame their memory even more than it had already been shamed. And still the blows came punctuated by prayers for salvation falling like the blows from my uncle's lips.

The Present: "Goodnight everybody." Douglas' face was red, his eyes fearful as he took the steps two at

a time. One moment he had been relaxed, then she felt his muscles tighten.

"I'm ready for bed, too." Elijah stretched his legs out and then tucked them under to hold his weight.

Cathleen pulled herself closer to Lilith and nestled into her shoulder. She watched her fingers as she created cornflower patterns out of fine white string and a needle-thin hook.

"It was terrible, Cathleen, just terrible. But my father thought he was doing the right thing for her. Don't judge him too harshly for acting the way he did."

She reached for her crutches and pulled herself up. "Think I'll turn in too. Good night Aunt Lilith, Aunt Bridget."

In the stillness of the pitch-dark room and the sound of bodies deep in sleep, she felt him crawl into bed. He lay his head on the outside pillow waiting for permission to move closer.

"Douglas?"

"Is it okay if I stay here for awhile? I won't touch you or anything," he whispered.

"Sure." she turned on to her side so that she could feel the warmth of his body close to hers.

"I used to crawl into bed with my sister when I was afraid, when the men came over to drink and screw around with my mother."

"You afraid now, Douglas?"

He chuckled quietly "Yeah, I guess."

She reached over and began stroking the hair away from his forehead.

"What you read tonight. It was like Nookomis Meya' meant the words for my ears." He paused, turned toward her, but she could not make out his face or his eyes in the dark. "Don't suppose anyone ever beat you with a leather belt."

"No."

"They used to pray too, like Meya's uncle."

"The priests at St. Joseph's?" she asked quietly.

"If you were lucky they only wanted you to bring them off. But I was too pretty to be lucky. When they were finished, they beat you anyway, and prayed, for your fuckin' Indian soul."

She pulled herself close to his warm body so she could feel his pain, take some of it on for him. Torrents of shame ran through her mind, shame and pain. The skin on her back stung with his memory of the beatings, and her anus tightened to another pain. He cuddled into her chest like a little boy.

"My sister used to do that too. Feels good."

"Where's your sister now?"

"Dead. Sniffed one too many glue tubes."

"And your mom?"

"Drank one too many bottles of rubbing alcohol."

She lay cradling Douglas Fairchild's head in the black magic of The Hollow, grateful for the privacy it gave them, amazed at the strength of her feelings for him.

The drive to Ottawa from Breckenridge was beautiful, down a gray dirt road stained patchy black with used motor oil to keep the dust down. On one side, the mountains rose straight up camouflaged in bushes and saplings. Just before Beamish Hill there was a lace-like waterfall that flowed abundantly with spring runoff but dried to a trickle by fall. She pointed it out to Elijah as they rolled past in Aunt Bridget's old Ford Fairlane. On the other side of the road was farmland as far as the eye could see, rich with soil scoured by glaciation off the mountains.

In university she had learned that the area had been covered by a great inland sea that stretched from the St. Lawrence to Lake Superior during the Precambrian era. It explained the presence of all the tiny shells and trilobites in the pink clay by Blue Sea Lake. Nana had told her that they had been put there in Noah's Great Flood. But then the miracle spoke for itself, didn't it? It didn't matter which story was true. She turned from her study of the scene rolling by the window and smiled warmly at her uncle. He placed a big hand over hers and smiled back to the road.

"First we'll see your father's lawyer," he intoned cheerfully. "Then on to our next meeting with some Inuit and Dene leaders. Seems they're going through the same kind of legal battle with the Canadian government as we are with Minnesota. I'm bringing them my father's writings and the case notes he left on the Six Nations claim."

"But Six Nations happened so long ago, and it involved the Iroquois," she observed.

"The treaties may be different but the issues and the white man's tactics are always the same. Gidagaakoons' strategies are considered fundamental reading for Indian land claims specialists. We pass them around secretly to our brothers to help them in their battles. The Six Nations file will help brief the Dene and Inuit on what to expect from the Canadian Feds and the provincial courts."

"Can I see them?" She asked.

"Sure, my briefcase is at your feet."

The handle of his worn black case was within easy reach. She withdrew the legal folder containing the photocopied pages of handwritten text and began flipping through the pages. When she reached the Six Nations section, she stopped. The documents were written in her grandmother's hand and were heavily annotated in another hand. A shiver went up her spine to see something so strange and yet so familiar.

Elijah glanced down to what she was reading and smiled. "I think Meya' and Gidagaakoons would be happy to know how much their suffering has helped The People, don't you?"

"I was thinking the same thing," she replied.

The law offices of Fogarty, McLeod and Klein occupied several floors in a high-rise on Rideau Street. From the window of the reception area one beheld a panoramic vista of what the old timers called Lower Town, edged by the Ottawa River and the rounded ancient mountains beyond that cradled The Hollow. Elijah stood in awe at the sight, just as she had the first time she accompanied her father here.

"Cathleen. How are you doing?" William Fogarty swept over and shook her hand. "I can't tell you how shocked we were to hear the news."

"Thanks Bill. I'd like you to meet Elijah Landreville, a friend of mine from Minnesota, and my personal

council."

"Mr. Landreville." Fogarty shook his hand too quickly, obviously taken aback by Elijah's presence, she noted. Good. That would let him know that he couldn't con her.

"Why don't you go down to my office and I'll arrange for some coffee."

They made their way to an opulent room where the panoramic view of the reception area continued. Coffee and pastries set elegantly in silver and bone china were rolled in by a smartly dressed woman. Bill Fogarty assumed his position at his desk, the ceiling-to-floor window at his back.

"You must excuse me if I seem surprised, Cathleen. But I was under the impression that your father had placed me in charge of the family's affairs. Of course you're not obligated to continue this arrangement."

"Just so, Mr. Fogarty." Elijah responded. "Cathleen has suffered a great deal of loss in the last few weeks. She thought it best to have the arrangements reviewed independently, especially since she is the sole heir to her father's estate."

"Right." Fogarty replied, resigned to his presence. "I guess the first thing we should deal with is the will then."

She could almost feel the imbalance in the air as Fogarty listed her assets, delineated her skyscraper kingdom. And all the while he rattled on, she could only think about how she might make it all right.

I should just chuck it all, spread the wealth like ashes in the wind, she mused to herself. Elijah sat quietly writing, his massive hand dwarfing pen and paper. Every once in awhile he looked up at Fogarty as if to measure his honesty.

Or maybe I'll turn it all over to Elijah to use as he sees fit. Yes, my way of healing, Nana. You had your herbs and magic, I have my money.

"Is there a complete list of the assets attached to the will, Mr. Fogarty?" Elijah asked when the reading came to an end.

"Yes there is. But all assets are frozen until claims against them have been addressed." He turned to Cathleen. "Your father arranged a trust fund in your name. It will pay you an allowance of ten thousand dollars monthly starting from the date of his death. Here is the account information." He passed her a sealed envelope. "Have you any idea what you want to do with the two companies, Cathleen?"

"I'll need to talk to Elijah first," she sighed. "Do I need to make a decision right away?"

"Of course not. Anthony transferred a lot of his responsibilities over to his directors a little while back when Revenue Canada started getting interested in him. They can work on the five year plan until you decide."

"There is one last issue we need to address today." Fogarty went over to a cabinet and returned with a simple black urn. "I believe you wanted his ashes turned over to you."

Elijah met the Dene and Inuit leaders at the Ottawa House tavern. It was a perfect spot for them, Cathleen thought, they were invisible among the rough-cut working-class clientele. And though the faces of the Native leaders were hardened by poverty and betrayal like the rest of the patrons in this place, their eyes mirrored serenity, and their bearing spoke of pride.

"This is my niece, Waseya'-Cathleen of the Bear Clan." Elijah introduced her immediately to dispel their

discomfort of being so close to someone who looked like the enemy.

"Could have fooled me." One of them chuckled from behind his mirrored sunglasses. Nevertheless, they accepted her for who her uncle said she was without question or misgiving.

They ate quickly and in silence, anxious to get on to the reason for their coming to this place. She knew there was nothing she could contribute to their agenda, so she made her way to the bar and a fresh jug of beer while they slipped into a back room. There was an old sofa in the lady's- and-escorts lounge where she could stretch out and read the paper while she waited.

"Sorry to hear about your father." She recognized the voice immediately though she had only heard it once before.

She looked up from the paper. The man standing before her was large-framed but athletic, and buzzed jet-black hair. He stared down at her with deep brown eyes, and his skin was a tone darker than hers. For a moment he looked like he should be in the meeting with Elijah and the rest, she thought. But then a vague familiarity crossed her mind. "Hooper, right?"

"I'm flattered. Let's see how memory serves me. You were in car accident last February somewhere between White Earth and Duluth, Minnesota. Your father was killed and you were seriously injured. You returned to Canada three days ago with two American citizens who are also Ojibway Indians of the White Earth Reservation in Minnesota. Their names are Douglas Fairchild and Elijah Landreville. You proceeded to the residence of Bridget Donnelly and Lilith Corcoran in Breckenridge Quebec. How am I doing?"

"You forgot the colour of my underwear?" she snarled.

"I'd be guessing on that one." Hooper sat down in the chair opposite her. "So I see you've traded white acidheads for red anarchists. It's got to be an improvement," he shrugged. "What on earth are you doing mixed up with an Indian radical like Elijah Landreville?"

"You tell me, Hooper. You seem to know everything else."

"Immigration said he claimed to be your uncle taking you home." Hooper smirked.

"He is my uncle and he was taking me home,"

"So what's he doing back there with those other Indians, then?"

"None of your business. That's not why you're here anyway."

"Can't blame me for trying," he shrugged. "I just wanted to tell you that the pressure's off, now that your father's gone. I'm not supposed to say that, but I will anyway because I think you've been through enough. What I'm supposed to say is that although we can't go for an indictment, we could sue the estate for punitive damages on the basis of your evidence. But it hardly seems in your interest to do that. Revenue Canada will comb through the books anyway when his assets and companies are turned over to you. They'll get their pound of flesh one way or another."

"What about the punitive damages? Does the money go back to the people who got hurt?" she asked.

Hooper paused before answering. She watched a look of satisfaction cross his face.

"No, it usually goes to paying our legal bills. Whatever is left over is absorbed by the RCMP to cover expenses related to the investigation."

"I see." She called the waiter over. "Want something?"

"No, thanks; I've got to be going." He stood and searched his overcoat pockets for his car keys.

"Look Hooper, I want you to know I've been thinking really hard about getting in touch with you about this," she blurted out then turned away. Why the hell am I saying this, she wondered. When she looked back at him he was nodding, as if he understood what she was trying to tell him.

"You're not your father, Cathleen. But then you're no Ojibway squaw either. Why would you want to be?" Hooper strode quickly toward the door, his overcoat fanning out behind him. She turned inward to the place in her mind where people left the troubled bits of their spirits for her to examine. Fear and shame; that's what Hooper had left behind. But it wasn't directed at her. No, it was focused on her uncle and the others who sat planning their future in the back room of the Ottawa House.

She tried to feign conversation as they negotiated the beginning of rush-hour traffic along Boulevard Ste. Joseph, but Elijah was as adept at reading her as Nookomis Mina. "It's just money and ashes, Cathleen," he observed pulling the visor down to block the angling late- afternoon sun.

For all these months she had been holding Hooper's option in her mind as a means of purifying herself, burning the white bridge before embracing her Ojibway family. Now her confession would be empty of meaning, another senseless piece of self-destruction. No, worse, she mused, doing the right thing would strengthen the enemy and weaken her ability to heal. She would have to live with her father's white greed legacy if she wanted to do her best for The People. And those whose lives her father had ruined would remain unvindicated by her actions.

"It's much more than that, uncle." she replied. "It makes me Wayaabishkiwed."

"You're too hard on yourself." He cast a quick smile at her before focusing his attention on the road.

"Where does that road lead?" he pointed to a break in the trees, barely the width of their car.

"It's a back way to Pink's Lake."

He swung the car onto it and drove slowly down the snaking path until it stopped abruptly on the top of a cliff. There was a rock outcropping not too far from where the road ended. He pointed without speaking and then carried her to it.

"I like to be near water when I think." Elijah stared down into the black depths below. A bird flying up from a precarious branch angled into the cliff face caught his attention. "Long ago when someone died among the people, the closest relative would carry a bundle symbolizing the dead one's life and deeds around for one year. At the end of the year, a great feast would be made and the relative would give away the contents of the bundle to whoever needed it the most. Only then could the relative be sure that the path he took was truly his own."

They sat on the mottled black rock listening to the rush of water below and the chatter of barn swallows above. The rock was cold in spots, warm in others, creating a patchwork of sensations. Trees swung lazily in the breeze, still naked, unconvinced that winter had departed, yet soothed by the sharpening angle of the sun.

Lilith had tea ready for them when they got back. Elijah pulled out a chocolate quick bread from his bag of groceries and set it down beside the pot.

"What have you done here?" Aunt Lilith laughed. "Chocolate is a weakness with me."

"Is it?" He smiled enigmatically. "Think I'll change into some workclothes and see what Douglas and Bridget are up to."

The two women settled down in the fading light of the parlour. Cathleen picked up the black notebook. "Aunt Lilith, what things symbolize Nana to you?"

She knit her brow looking for an answer to the question, looked around the room for clues. "Can't say I rightly know, Cathleen. Annie didn't take to things much. Sometimes she would bring in one of the wild cats from the shed and raise it in the house. Or when the priest came from Old Chelsea to say Mass for me, she would take down that candlestick over there and use it on a makeshift altar. But to say it symbolized her." She shook her head slowly and smiled. "I guess you might say you symbolize her."

"Shall I read for you Aunt Lilith?" Cathleen asked basking in the glow of her answer, wondering if the notebook was more a symbol of Nana than anything else.

The Past: February, 1905

It was Lilith who told Arthur to retrieve the deerskin bundle from the back compost heap and clean the leather as best he could with saddle soap. They returned it to me late one night after Aunt Lizzie and Uncle Frank had gone to bed.

"Don't worry Annie," Lilith told me, "they won't find it again."

The next morning, when it was safe, Arthur wedged open a floor board underneath his own bed and gently placed my ancestors' relics, alongside his own prizes, a waistcoat watch, an old pen knife and the baby teeth of his favourite dog.

She could feel The Hollow winding its magic around her as days turned into weeks. In the pitch darkness of each night, healing found her shattered pelvis, a tingle here, a sharp jab there, as if pieces were moving back into place guided by unseen hands.

Douglas waited until the rest were asleep to find warmth beside her, to lie in her healing arms. He didn't speak of his pain again. She knew in his soul that enough had been said to let her find his open wounds and move the pieces back into place. His need animated her own healing, gave purpose to its continuance. This is what Nookomis Mina had meant about the healing circle, and what Nana called closing the hoop, she thought. Douglas was teaching her with his own need, his own trust in her healing power. But there were so many who need this. How many arms how many heartbeats would it take to heal them?

"Uncle Elijah, I need to talk to you alone." Cathleen whispered one night just before bed. They waited until the others had made their way up the stairs.

"Take this back with you." she said pressing a thick white envelope into his hands. "It's a year's-worth of postdated checks drawn on my trust account. You'll have to convert them to American funds, though."

"You need money to live on, Cathleen. That's the purpose of the account," he cautioned.

"I know, I'm only turning half over to you for now. I'll need your help figuring out how to turn it all over to The People, so the government doesn't get it." She leaned into his strong arms, rested her head on his broad chest. "In the meantime, I suppose I'll have to carry it with me."

"I know some tax lawyers in Toronto and Minneapolis. They can help with the details when the time comes. Just don't let Anthony's things blind you to your own path, Cathleen." He drew her close encircled her in his heartbeat.

On Elijah's last day in Breckenridge they all bundled into the Fairlane, food and ashes in the trunk, and headed to Nana's favourite spot on the shore of Blue Sea Lake. Cathleen asked that they gather on the spot where her grandmother's final odyssey had begun ten years ago, spread the same red and white Hudson Bay blanket on the ground that she had used as the launchpad for her vision. They laid out their feast of egg salad sandwiches, ice tea and cranberry bread and ate in quiet joy and contemplation.

Tall grass pushing up from the warming ground and defiant little forget-me-nots swayed cheerfully in a mild breeze. Aunt Bridget pulled out a dried braid of sweetgrass from her shoulder bag and then some matches. She stood and offered it to the four directions and then guided the smoke over her face and head as if the ritual was one she performed often. She passed it next to Elijah who cleansed himself in the same manner. Douglas was next. He fumbled with the braid and coughed as he guided the smoke over his head. Lilith's actions were delicate and reverent, like the wingbeat of a fledgling. Cathleen closed her eyes as she felt the sweet smoke flood over her. She passed the glowing braid over the urn and fanned the smoke against its shiny surface.

Gently she worked the lid off and handed the urn to Elijah while she pulled herself up to a standing position. "We are your family, daddy, whether you like it or not. In wanting us to spread your ashes here, I think you understood this, deep down." She reached in and scooped the gray dust and bone fragments into her fist before passing the urn to Elijah. He too reached in for a portion of Anthony McCaffrey and then passed the urn along. On a silent cue, they opened their fingers and let the wind claim him.

Chapter Fourteen

The Razor's Back

St. Stephen's church in Old Chelsea was a clapboard structure, inside and out. Except for the new coat of graywash covering the walls and floor, it remained as it had always been. Cathleen plied her way slowly up the narrow aisle casting her eyes left and right, to the Stations of the Cross and the hard wooden pews painted the same gray as the walls. Along the perimeter of the side walls, someone had meticulously traced a brown line, edged it in a lighter shade of itself to create the illusion of wainscoting and molding. At each corner was a perfectly executed rosette like the plaster ones in wealthy Victorian homes. Only they, too, were illusion.

In stark contrast to the simplicity of the congregation part of the church, the altar rose in ornate magnificence from the sanctuary. As if carved marble and worked plaster were not enough, large baskets of flowers festooned the surface, ringed the stage. Must have been a funeral, Cathleen speculated.

She had to pass in front of the tabernacle to go out the side door. Even if she could have genuflected, she wouldn't, she thought. Not anymore. The path brought her into the graveyard. She retraced childhood steps from the memory of a cold November morning. There were a few weeds sprouting from the base of the tilted gravestone, too small to be plucked. The words on its surface were in need of repointing. "Eternal rest grant unto him, oh Lord." To the left of Anthony Graham's grave were those of Elizabeth Corcoran, nee Graham and her husband Frank. To the right, was the grave of Arthur Corcoran, born September 5, 1888, died June 26, 1914.

"Let's head home now," Aunt Bridget touched her shoulder. "Lilith is expecting us."

They left town by the same road Nana must have traveled with Uncle Frank. Only now it was paved,

bright yellow lines separating the lanes. But the towering maples and Jack pines, the smooth rock outcroppings must have been the same, she thought.

"How does it feel?" Bridget asked.

"Strange, like I'm floating on air." she replied, knowing that her Aunt was asking about having the cast removed, not the feeling of *deja vu* that was welling over her.

"You'll have to be patient with yourself. Don't go too fast or you'll regret it," she continued.

Cathleen smiled inwardly at her advice, then looked out at the green canopy cut rhythmically by flashes of sunshine as the car rolled down the road.

"C'mon Douglas, jump in. Save your feet for tomorrow." Aunt Bridget yelled out the window as she screeched to a halt on the hill by the far pasture. He was on his way back to the house from a day of fence mending, what was left of a bale of barbed wire hung from the pliers in his tool belt. He tossed the belt and muddy boots into the back and then squeezed in beside Cathleen in the front. His face glowed when he looked at her. He grinned broadly in some secret joke. Six weeks in The Hollow had softened the lines, broadened his shoulders, lengthened his jaunty gait, she thought. A sense of humour, an easy laugh had emerged from the shadows.

"Nice legs, Kate."

"Get lost." She bunted him playfully in the ribs.

Flexion returned quickly under Aunt Bridget's skilled and soothing hands. A cane soon replaced the crutches. It too was abandoned in short order. Now she could go down to the henhouse with Lilith to collect eggs, and to the barn with Bridget and Douglas to help with milking and feeding. Spring had taken root, first in the garden, then along the slick grassy pathway between house and barn and finally in the trees. The white sorrow of winter had melted into the ground to come back as life renewed.

Every night when chores were done, when the sun bent close to the horizon, Cathleen returned to the black notebook and to the puzzles her aunts so willingly pieced together for her. Lilith took up her half-worked miracles and bent toward her voice. Douglas nestled into her shoulder and closed his eyes, and Bridget would pretend to read the paper.

"Why was Cyril Brennan so attracted to Nana?" Cathleen asked them as she took up the story of the Irish Priest.

"I think he was looking for something." Auntie Lilith offered.

"She touched a place deep within his soul. He needed her to remind him that it was okay to have a wild spirit and be a priest, too. And when the time came, he needed her to call down God's forgiveness on him." Bridget added wistfully. "He was a grand man, Kate, with a heart as big as the world."

The Past: 1905

At first, I saw him as one of them, an extension of Uncle Frank's leather belt. Only he was more dangerous. His buckle could pass through flesh and make contact with spirit. Slowly, I came to know otherwise, that my ancestors had sent Cyril Brennan to St Stephen's Church so that I could learn the lesson of the hoop, the lesson of the circle that bound all men to each other. He taught me with an impish and ancient smile and a glass of lemonade.

"Did you ever hear tell of the Celts?" He asked one Sunday as we sat on his porch after Mass. We were well into the religious instruction he had promised Uncle Frank on condition that he never laid a hand on me again.

"Who were they?" I asked, more interested in the fragrance of lilac wafting past me than another one of his morals.

"They inhabited what is now England, Scotland and Ireland long before Christ," he continued. "Over the centuries, they were pushed west and north by invaders from the European mainland, from Rome and the like. The invaders wanted their land, wanted to destroy their identity and culture, replace it with Christianity. Does it sound familiar to you, Annie?"

I nodded eagerly, wanting him to tell me more.

"Whereas you see the world born on the back of a turtle, the Celts saw their world existin' in a hazelnut at the lip of the Well of Saegis from where all knowledge came."

He took paper and pen and drew a circle. Inside the circle he drew a cross with its ends reaching to its perimeter. "This is the holy wheel, most sacred of the Celtic glyphs. In Ireland, you can't walk 'ere five mile without smackin' into an ancient upright bearin' this mark." he chuckled.

"It is the sign of the sacred hoop." I too drew the symbol, as the people had always drawn it on their tipis, on their medicine shields and on the birch bark story scrolls passed down from generation to generation.

"Aye, that's it. To the Celts it symbolized the cycle of life, the four directions, the four seasons, just as your hoop does for you, Annie." he twinkled. "Man stood at the centre of the circle, in the Middleworld. He looked up to the birds and to the blue sky and clouds as the Upperworld, and down to the earth and the beasts and all that grew as the Underworld. The earth was sacred, the reason why he existed."

I was dumbfounded. It made him laugh as he refilled my glass.

"Long before Christ, the Celts named their seasons in ways not unlike your own. Im'olk, the season of childbirth and milk-flowin' started on February one, Bel'ta-na, the season of the greater sun, an ghrian mor in Celtic, May one, Loo'nas'a, harvest time, chief-choosin' time, time of gettin' together for business and fun started August first, and finally Sa'wen, dead time, Celtic New Year, time for ghost dancin' started November first."

He leaned forward and clasped his hands as if in prayer. "And though the invaders tried for centuries to wipe every vestige of this ancient culture from the face of the earth, they did not succeed. The Celts live on, in their music, in art and literature, even in their religious beliefs and practices."

"How did they fight them, Father? How did they manage to keep their spirits alive?"

He tapped his chest with his fingers and smiled. "In the end, the only thing that counts is what's held inside. The Celts remembered, and they whispered their memories, their language to their children who in turn, whispered it to their children. So it is that I can tell you about their world today. You can't kill an idea, Annie. Given time, it comes back to claim its rightful place."

As Father Brennan spoke, hope soaked me like a sunshower crossing over the rounded mountain behind The Hollow. My body felt light, open to the whispering of possibilities. From that day, I

knew what it was that my people were asking of me, why it was that I had been torn away from them. From that day, I knew it would be my destiny to keep the idea alive.

The Present: "I saw them again, I tell you." A scratchy voice, half-hysterical pierced through Cathleen's quiet reading.

"Oh, no." Lilith sighed and looked toward the kitchen. "I guess we'll have to stop here for tonight."

"What is it?" Douglas sat up startled by Cathleen's movements, but then smiled when he recognized the cause of the commotion.

"Who did you see, Louisa?" Bridget shouted.

"Men. They were in my bedroom."

"Now what would men want with an old hag like you, Louisa Murphy?" Bridget laughed as she brought the tea tray into the parlour.

"What did you say?" The old woman followed her, hand cupped to her ear. Her eyes went as big as saucers when she laid them on Douglas.

"Lord have mercy. There's an Indian in your parlour."

"It's okay, Louisa. You've met Douglas before, remember? In the yard by the henhouse." Bridget guided her to a chair opposite.

Louisa nodded nervously. "Oh, yes. In the movies with John Wayne. You wouldn't hurt an old woman would you?"

"Do you want me to go scare the men out of your bedroom again?" Douglas shouted back. "I'll bring my tomahawk this time." Cathleen threw him a threatening look.

"Oh no. You can't do that. Elsie sleeps there too, you know." the old woman laughed nervously and then reached for her cup of tea.

"Is my crazy sister in there?" Another voice shouted from the kitchen door.

"We're in the parlour, Elsie." Bridget called back.

A cane thumped across the linoleum toward Bridget's voice.

"Don't tell her about the men." Louisa whispered loudly, "Her eyes are bad so she don't see them."

"Come in and have some tea, Elsie." Lilith said straining her quiet voice so that the old woman would hear her.

"Thank you, dear." She made her way to the chair closest her sister and plopped down. "You aren't on about men in the bedroom again, are you Louisa?"

"What men, Elsie?" Louisa's voice trembled with the lie.

"Pay her no mind, Lilith. She's lost her marbles, thinks the box of Kleenex is bread. Puts it in the icebox, you see. Why I even caught her eating it with butter." Elsie snorted and removed her thick glasses to

clean them. She squinted painfully at Douglas and then at Cathleen. "I thought you had two Indians living here."

By now they were getting used to her question. She asked it every time she came over.

"No Elsie, Elijah went home in April," Lilith responded in the same voice with the same words as always.

"Lord sakes, what's the world coming to?" Elsie ranted, ignoring Lilith's answer. "You say Annie's dead, Lilith?"

"Yes, Elsie, last winter, and so is Anthony." she answered another always-asked question.

"Anthony, too?" Elsie shook her head sadly. "Lord have mercy. And what about the little girl then?"

"She's right here, Elsie. Cathleen is right here." Lilith took Cathleen's hand and showed it to the old woman.

"So she is." The old woman laughed nervously. "So she is. You poor child, orphan for sure now. But then time makes orphans of us all."

"Louisa, finish up your tea. And don't eat anymore. You'll be up seeing men in the bedroom again." Elsie shouted, hauling herself out of the chair. Louisa reluctantly followed her sister, shoving the last cake into the pocket of her apron, and casting one more worried glance toward Douglas before making her way to the kitchen door.

The Murphy girls had been their closest neighbours, forever, like the Grahams and many other families along the Clock Road. The Crown had paid them in land rather than money for their part in the War of 1812 and the subsequent construction of a defensive canal between Lake Ontario and the lumber reserves of the upper Ottawa River. Together they had cleared the land at the base of the mountain, and sired two generations by the time Queen Victoria pointed to a map and transformed the sleepy lumber port of Bytown into Ottawa, the capital of the New British Dominion of Canada.

Nana had always cared for the two half-crazed old maids next door, left without purpose by the death of their aging parents, just as Bridget and Lilith took care of them now. Cathleen smiled in fond memory of bringing them their daily supply of eggs, milk and vegetables. They would invite her in for tea, brush her soft hair and sew dresses for her as if she were the daughter they had sacrificed in service to their parents. She remembered that she tolerated the fuss they made over her for Nana's sake, and because they, too, gave her the figurines from the boxes of Red Rose Tea.

Lilith still baked bread for them every Tuesday, along with the bread she baked for the household while Bridget and now Douglas made sure their house was in enough repair to continue sustaining them.

"I don't know how much longer we can keep them going." Bridget mused after they left. "They're losing ground fast. And now that developers want their land, their family is finally taking an interest in their welfare."

It was also clear why Nana had been so determined to keep the Murphy girls going, so adamant that Bridget and Lilith continue supporting them. Their existence was part of the idea of The Hollow just as Nana's and now her own existence was part of the idea of the Anishinaa'beg. Both were worth preserving for as long as possible because they were rooted in the idea of community, the idea of life itself.

They reveled in the crisp air of a quickening dawn as they walked behind the tiny herd of Holsteins on the way to the barn. Douglas smiled at Cathleen from the other side waving his cow switch at the

slow-moving bony haunches. "Kibosh." the only word believed to penetrate a bovine brain crossed their lips intermittently. Wet grass lapped noisily across their Wellington's as they squeaked through the rising mist in the pasture.

They worked quickly filling the crib with hay to keep the cows occupied while they locked them into position and drained their udders. What had been impossible one short month ago was becoming less difficult with each day. The doctor had said that the best therapy for her now was plenty of walking and stretching her abdomen. Milking the cows provided her the empirical gauge she needed to assess her healing.

"Steady on, girl." she spoke soothingly to her current charge who tried in vain to escape the cold swatch of disinfectant on her teats. Behind she could hear the rhythmic hiss of milk hitting bucket as Douglas tended the five cows across the aisle.

"First milking, then mucking." She remembered Nana saying. "Get them out fast. No point cleaning up more than you need to." Douglas whooped and flailed his arms about as he chased them toward the door. One of them stopped just inside, gave him a dirty look and let go of her load.

"Damn, she gets me every time." He shook his head in defeat. "I come from a long line of bad farmers, Kate. And that cow knows it."

"Was your father a farmer?" Mucking out was still beyond her. but she could keep him company. She pulled a milking stool to the aisle as he sifted the dung away from the straw.

"My mother's father, and his father were. But then my grandfather used to tell me we were full-bloods, Otter Tail Pillagers, not farmers."

He threw the shovel and the pitchfork into the barrow, pushed it over to the first stall on Cathleen's side of the aisle and began sifting the dung from the straw. "The traditional way was to hunt and fish, tap the maple trees in the spring, gather berries and wild rice in the fall. Grandpa said our family used to range from the southern tip of Lake Michigan all the way over to the plains. Our tribe was the last of the holdouts. They were removed by force to White Earth sometime around the turn of the century. The Government gave them 80 acres of grassland and told them they had to become farmers. They tried to make a go of it but lost everything when my grandfather was declared a mixed-blood by some anthropologist sent out by the Indian Bureau to determine who the real Indians were. All of a sudden he owed back taxes. Since he couldn't pay them, they confiscated his land, auctioned it off to the whites. So the family moved into town and became warehousemen, for the rest of their lives. Suppose that's our tradition now."

"Warehousemen, what's that?" she asked.

"Welfare bums," he smirked.

She watched him intently as he mucked the stalls and laid down fresh straw. His grandfather was right, there was nothing farmer about Douglas Fairchild. "Nookomis Mina told me you were Marten Clan," she noted.

"She told me the same thing." he smiled back.

"I think it has to do with telling families apart. At least that's what I get from reading Nana's notebook. But there's probably more to it than that," she offered with a shrug.

He came over to where she sat and squatted down to her level. "Doesn't all this stuff freak you out,

Kate? My mom wouldn't tell me anything because she was so ashamed. And now I find out this is what she was ashamed of. People have spent so much energy trying to make me white because being Indian is such a bad thing." He pulled a lock of his jet-black hair forward. "But there's no getting away from it, is there? I listen to you reading Meya's words and I ask myself, is this what I'm supposed to be ashamed of? Is this why my mother and my sister offed themselves? It's just a different way of life, Kate, no better no worse than any I see around me."

"Let's go for a walk." She took his hand and led him out into the pasture. They made their way down to the creek through tall grass and wildflowers. The sun was rising quickly now, bringing with it heat and gnats. Where the stream bubbled over some rounded rocks, a generous willow tree arched toward the water. They stretched out in the cool grass beneath it and listened to the symphony of birds and breeze.

"My grandmother said nothing about this, Douglas. Then she up and left with no explanation. The next time I saw her, I realized she had gone home. I knew in my heart that she was one of you. And still she wouldn't admit it. She had to die before she finally told me who she was, who I was."

She squinted toward the beaver dam looking for telltale ripples near the wood mound and then turned back to Douglas. "How do you think I felt? Every summer I would go to White Earth and try to fit in knowing deep down that it was my home, too. But who would ever believe that? No, I was just a little white girl slumming it."

He drew near and folded her into his arms. "I'm sorry, Kate."

"You were right. All my life I felt like I was missing an important piece. And I could never quite put my finger on it. Now I think I can." She drew his arms tighter around herself and leaned into his chest. He stretched his legs out so she could nestle between.

"Remember I told you I was coming here to escape?" He spoke quietly and kissed her ear. "Well it turns out that this is the place where I finally faced what I was running from. I'm tired of being angry about things you can't change, things in the past, things in the present. It doesn't matter anymore."

"So what matters, Douglas?" She raised her hand to stroke a loose piece of his hair.

"You, Kate." he whispered down to her smile, sunshine on his lips.

"No, seriously, I want to know."

"Answer's the same."

She rolled onto her side so she could search his eyes for that teasing arrogant look that belied a setup. But it wasn't there.

"That night last winter, in Meya's cabin you lit a fire in me." He rolled over and looked deeply into her eyes. "I thought it was just the booze and then hormones. You know what they say about eighteen year old males, only two states of mind; getting laid, and thinking about getting laid." He sat up, took her hands in his. "The fire is going strong, Kate. I want you, friend, family, lover, mother of my kids, all of it. And I want to be all if it for you, too."

She studied his chiseled features as he spoke, noticed the glow of his skin, the shimmer of his hair, the sweet wild smell of his body. And she realized that the pull she felt now wasn't to the white dream of the noble savage, or to the romantic image of her grandmother's lover. It was to Douglas Fairchild that she wanted to give herself. She answered him with her body against his, her lips to his. The fire in his hands set her skin ablaze, opened her to the same passion her grandmother had known so long ago with

Vincent Gidagaakoons. In their lovemaking she understood that she had found a place to belong.

That night in the silent shadows of The Hollow, he slipped into bed with her once again. Only this time she could feel his strength and his joy. He came to her whole, flushed with possibilities. She stroked his smooth chest with her fingertips, learning the margins of his aureole, the hardness of the centre. "Your skin is so smooth." she whispered into his ear.

"Don't get used to it." he kissed the nape of her neck.

"Why not?"

"I read Meya's description of Gidagaakoons' Sundance. When we get back to White Earth I'm going to ask the Elders if they will prepare me to find my own vision."

"There are other ways, Douglas."

"I know, but I want to do it. In some way I think it will make my mother and my sister rest easy."

"And you want me to be your White Buffalo Calf-Pipe Woman?"

"Yes, Kate."

Though desire coursed through them as they lay in her grandmother's bed, they did not act upon it. It would have been wrong; inappropriate, like chewing gum in church.

Nana's notebook turned to the story of Arthur Corcoran now. The worn gravestone in St. Stephen's church came to Cathleen's mind. It triggered a memory, a passing reference to him from the section of the journal that had dealt with the tragedy at Six Nations Reserve.

"Do you remember the day Arthur died, Aunt Lilith?" she asked one evening as they settled in after supper.

"Like it was yesterday, Cathleen." She put her lace work down and looked wistfully over to his picture on the parlour wall.

"What happened?"

"I expect Annie will tell you in there, much better than I ever could. She was with him."

"What do you remember, then?" Cathleen probed quietly.

"A lot of blood," her muscles tightened as she spoke. "Arthur's body was soaked in it. And Annie, it was on her face and in her hair. Her hands were bathed in it and it was all over her clothes." She shook her head and felt for the tissue in her sleeve. "Father Brennan found them on the top of the mountain."

"I'm sorry, Aunt Lilith," Cathleen cupped her hand over her bird-thin fingers. "Perhaps I should read this later, by myself."

"No, Cathleen. I would like to hear what happened. Annie never spoke of it except in the most general of terms."

The Past: June 1910

Arthur was two years older than I was, but we were more alike than either of us would admit. We concealed our joy and our sorrow behind faces trained to stone. Our outward demeanor was one of respect, obedience even, but deep inside, powerful emotions strained to break free, drove us to find solitude, escape in the shadows of the thick bracken that covered the mountain.

In my wandering, I found a path leading to the peak of the mountain that abutted The Hollow. It flanked a winding stream cut deeply into limestone for an hour or more before disappearing. The sweat on the back of my neck had soaked my collar and dampened my hair by the time I reached the summit. Without warning the dense bush gave way to polished black rock studded here and there with moss and thatches of bramble. The apex of the hill was broken and jagged. It fell into a deep chasm filled with water from the living rock.

The place was holy, filled with the echoes of water spirits and birdsong. It took my breath away.

"What are you doing here?" Arthur's voice broke through the bush behind me. He had taken his shirt off and slung it over a shotgun that he carried in his left hand. He was different on this mountaintop, tall and proud. The hesitation in his step was gone; the tightened muscles in his shoulders had relaxed.

"I guess you would have found this place sooner or later." He sounded disappointed. "You're just not a stay-put-in-the-house kind of girl are you? Still, I wish I could have been the one to show it to you. Guess I waited a little too long."

"It's magnificent." I was awestruck, as much by the change in his temperament as the breathtaking beauty of the mountaintop.

"It's called Razor Back." he squinted in the sunlight. He unbuttoned his fly and kicked his ragged pants from around his ankles. He laughed at the shock in my face. "This is my kingdom, Annie. And in my kingdom I go skinny-dipping. You can, too. I'll never tell anyone that you did."

At the edge of the cliff he stripped off his underwear and then dove into the abyss below. "Are you coming, or not?" The rock wall turned his single question into a hundred voices.

I peered over the edge at his white shape against the deep blue of the water, trying to ignore the sweat beading on the tip of my nose and forehead. Surely it would be all right if I kept my petticoat on. And so I peeled off my outer layer, leaped into the air, soared down to the icy water below. When I broke the surface I screamed my joy to the walls and laughed wildly to the sun above. I was free, for the first time since coming to The Hollow, for the first time since leaving my father's island.

Arthur swam to my side and howled to the walls. I had never heard him beyond a whisper before. I had never imagined his smile or the energy in his lanky body. We scrambled back up the cliff face and jumped again, this time hand-in-hand, feet first. For the rest of the day we cavorted like children on holiday, splashing and screaming in delight. All too soon the sun's angle told us that the cows would need our attention.

We climbed back to the top of the mountain, and paused to fill our eyes with the panorama of the valley below. But then our attention shifted from the mystery of what surrounded us to the mystery of each other. He was unashamed of his nakedness even when I touched his cool skin. So much hair, I thought, so much red hair, more tightly curled than that on his head, deeper in colour, hiding his manhood. I remembered my cousin Vincent swimming naked on the island. His chest had been without hair, and that covering his genitals was sparse, black, like the hair on his head. He too had been proud and strong, like a sparring buck, intoxicated with his own potential.

Arthur was different though, even naked he bore the weight of his limitations, the inevitability of his future.

I spread my fingers over the scars hidden among the freckles on his shoulders and his back. He guided my hand to his scalp and the ridges that lay hidden there.

"I've been at the wrong end of that belt, too," he smiled.

"And Lilith?" I whispered.

"Yes." He choked. "But she's smarter than us. Sometimes she can talk them out of it."

I stretched my arms around his back and hugged him in thanks for the strength he and his sister gave me.

It was his turn to explore. I stood still as he pulled the straps of my camisole down and rolled the wet cotton from my breasts. He looked into my eyes for permission and then cupped his large freckled hands over my nipples. He stroked them softly before turning his attention to my lower body. I slipped my pantaloons to the ground and stepped out of them. He knelt in front of me and gently parted the hair to set eyes upon the most mysterious of all places.

"I've never seen a woman before, Annie. You're so beautiful." he whispered.

"I think we better put our clothes on. It's getting late," I mumbled in response. The magic was broken. He coughed nervously and turned away to retrieve his pants. I wrung out my undergarments and quickly dressed.

We descended the mountain in silence, and quickly to beat the fast-retreating sun. Along the way he shot a couple of rabbits to staunch the tongue-lashing Aunt Lizzie would mete out for being away from his chores so long. Uncle Frank was in the barn as we herded the cows from the back pasture. As always he seemed vaguely annoyed, potentially violent, but said nothing. When uncle turned to the hay maw for another bale, Arthur kissed me furtively on the cheek whispered 'thank you' in my ear and then crossed the aisle to the waiting cows."

The Present: Cathleen sighed uncomfortably, stole a glance at Lilith. She seemed unmoved by what she had just read, she thought.

"Do you want me to go on?"

"I do, Cathleen," she answered resolutely

"Did you know about this?"

Lilith put her work down and smiled over the top of her bifocals. "No, I didn't. But if you want to know how I feel, I'm glad my brother experienced what it was like to be a man. It was a gift given in innocence and purity. And about the other thing, I told you before, Cathleen, times were different."

Were they? she thought but did not speak. She looked at Douglas and could tell that the same question had crossed his mind as well.

The Past: "All that summer and the next, we stole away as much as we could to his kingdom at

the top of the mountain. Now that we had seen each other, it was so much easier to jump naked into the chasm. Our freedom above made us strong below, strengthened our ability to abide the complaints, the disappointment the threat of reprisal. Our friendship grew strong in the sharing of our secret. I believe Lilith suspected us of fomenting happiness, but she never once asked to be let in on it. I am sure she saw how it filled Arthur's spirit with inner joy and how it brought me the solace I needed to make my life bearable.

In the summer of 1913, Cyril Brennan brought word that my application to Teachers' College in Ottawa had been accepted. I was twenty-two, imposingly tall for a woman, strikingly Indian in my features. At gatherings of neighbours on the mountain, I stuck out like a sore thumb. Even wearing my hair swept up or sporting a frilly blouse did not help. Children would whoop when they saw me or run and hide behind a mothers skirts.

Cyril had arranged my lodging with a friend from seminary for the year that I would be in school. In return for light housekeeping, I could stay, rent-free at Jeanne D'Arc Institute for Catholic Girls.

Aunt Lizzie burst into a rage at the news, accused the priest of conspiracy and betrayal.

"And where will we get the money for another hand around here?" she spat. "As it is, she lazes around with books and paper when she should be tending to her chores. It will be hard enough to find a husband for her when the time comes, what with her savage looks and big bones. And now I'll have to cover up an education on top of everything else."

"Well it's not all loss then, Lizzie Corcoran," he countered. "With such a sorry prospect for marriage, isn't it fortunate that you'll have her career to fall back on for keepin' you in your old age."

Grudgingly, they gave their permission so long as I returned each weekend to hold up at least some of my responsibilities. My heart sank at the prospect of leaving Lilith and Arthur to bear the brunt of life in The Hollow. Lilith promised to wing her way to me every night and whisper her love in my ear. Arthur tried his best to put a brave face on the situation, but his steel-blue eyes and the corners of his mouth told me the truth.

"I expect you'll be needing this," he whispered quietly the night before I left for the city. He had wrapped my medicine bundle in a towel and waited until the rest of the family was busy elsewhere.

"Thank you, Arthur." I hugged him and slipped the package to the bottom of my carpetbag. "Stay out of their way as much as possible. I'll be here on the weekend. Keep telling yourself that."

He nodded nervously, thrust his hands into his stained overall pockets. "It's just that once you're gone, you'll never come back here. Why would you want to?"

"I'll be back, Arthur, every weekend. I have no intention of leaving you and Lilith at the mercy of those two." He swayed a bit, unconvinced. "I promise you, Arthur, on the bones of my ancestors."

Teachers' College opened a whole new world before me, one that I could never have imagined, even in my dreams. The streets of Ottawa were cobbled or paved as far as the eye could see. Heavy carts laden with barrels of beer, crates of produce and animals made their way past noisy motorcars and shining black Hansom carriages to the Byward Market where vendors called their wares in French and English. My route to school took me down Sussex Drive, past the market to the Chateau Laurier, the most elegant building I had ever laid eyes on. It was attached by

underground tunnel to Union Station, where trains brought people from across the country to conduct the business of the nation. From there, Sappers' bridge took me over the train yard to Elgin Street and the college housed in a stately gray castle.

Cyril Brennan had secured a scholarship for me to teach on reservations. It was his contribution to the idea, he told me. So I was assigned to Levy Harper, a specialist in the field of aboriginal education strategies, and an Iroquois from Gahnawauge. We were only seven in his class, six zealots called by God to bring Christianity to the heathen-- and me. By default, I became the beneficiary of an extraordinary education, taught by a truly gifted mentor and spiritual guide.

Sometimes I find myself wondering if Levy Harper had any idea of how far-reaching his gift to The People would be. There isn't a day that goes by where I don't call upon one of his insights to guide my hand today in White Earth.

The year flew by so quickly, I hardly noticed its passage. Cyril brought Lilith to Ottawa for the first time in her life to attend my graduation. I only wish Arthur could have been there as well, and of course my relatives in White Earth: Vincent, Dinah and my Nindede. It was my day, Cyril said, a day to be proud of my accomplishment, the first day of my career. So he stayed late after bringing us back home to sabotage Aunt Lizzie's plan for throwing water on my joy.

As we milked the cows that evening, Arthur came up quietly with tears in his eyes. "I'm so proud of you, Annie." He hugged me with all of his might and then slipped back quietly across the aisle before Uncle Frank could catch sight of him.

Summer came early to the mountain that year. Arthur and I chaffed at having to reap the first hay when all we wanted to do was slip away to Razor Back. We worked ravenously to bale and store the abundant crop to buy more time for ourselves and for our bursting spirits. Finally the job was done. We could escape after morning chores, claiming to be fence mending in the back pastures and not be missed until evening milk.

Our feet barely touched ground on the way up the mountain that day. At the top we tore our clothes off and bound into the chasm below. We had both grown taller in the intervening year, Arthur, more muscular, me rounder, more feminine. But, in our hearts, we were still children in need of letting off steam pent up over a long winter. All day we splashed and screamed with delight.

Our muscles strained deliciously on that last climb up the cliff to the flat above. Arthur caught my arm and helped me up over the last ledge. We retreated to a place where the moss grew thick and spongy, like a broad cushion on the hard rock.

He looked deeply into my eyes and brushed the wet hair from my face. "I can tell you anything, can't I?"

"Of course, Arthur. What is it?"

He looked away, toward the failing sun and then back. "I love you so much, Annie Graham, that it hurts inside. But you see I can't feel this way, I'm not supposed to. You're my sister."

"Stepsister, so it's not wrong." I answered, hoping to ease his guilt more than to fan his desire.

"No, you don't understand. You are my sister. Mama and Uncle Anthony made me. That's why he ran away from here. Papa married Mama to make an honest woman out of her."

His words landed like a blow.

"Why do you think they hate me so much? Treat me like dirt? To Mama, I am sin, God's punishment on her. And Papa, all he sees is evil in me for being who I am. But the worst thing is that they're right. I love you and want you, and it makes me no better than them."

I came so close to telling him at that moment that he was wrong, that what he felt was pure and good, but I didn't. Dear God I didn't tell him."

The Present: "The ink is smudged here." Cathleen noted and looked up to Lilith. Her lacework lay on the floor and her hands covered her face. She had been sobbing so quietly that it had not disturbed her reading.

"My God, what am I doing to you?" Cathleen hugged her Aunt's tiny body and rocked her gently. "No more of this tonight."

"No, Cathleen, I want to hear the rest. I won't be able to fly unless I know the rest."

"Don't ask me to make you cry anymore, Auntie Lilith." Tears choked her words, stole her voice.

"I'll finish it." Douglas reached over and retrieved the notebook. He smiled at both of them and took up where she left off.

The Past: "It is difficult to remember exactly what happened. I know we both put our clothes back on and I turned my back to him, frightened by how low the sun had sunk in the sky. I heard the shot. When I turned around, he was lying on the ground, the shotgun smoking beside him, blood pooling onto the front of his shirt. I ran to where he lay.

"It's better this way," he said quietly. "I'm so happy here."

"No." I screamed, looking for where the bullet had entered. I rolled him over into my arms to see if there was an exit wound, but there was none. So I lay him back down to examine the damage. Blood bubbled out of a neat hole in his left side just below his last rib.

"You missed your heart, Arthur. You can still live. But I have to stop the bleeding right now." As I tore my blouse off, I squinted across the flat, searching desperately for the tiny red- brown flowers that would help me identify mugwort weed. There were none within eyeshot, but I knew that I had seen some close by. I sprinted away from him and searched an adjacent field. All the time I searched, I tried to imagine how Nookomis Dinah had pounded the leaves with a stone and then tied them tightly around my bleeding arm many years ago. I returned with several hearty plants and a stone. I pounded the leaves to a pulp before tying them tightly against his wound with my blouse.

"I should go for help, Arthur. I can't get you down from here by myself."

"No, Annie, stay with me please. Just hold my hand awhile," he whispered. I don't think he had pain, his face was too peaceful, his smile too relaxed. The mugwort poultice seemed to be working when I checked it. More blood was clotting now than flowing. But then I couldn't tell what was happening inside.

The sun was gone, and the darkness just before moonrise painted deep shadows in the rock. He closed his eyes and breathed heavily.

I lay down beside him. "Arthur you must listen to what I am going to tell you. I am a full- blood Indian. My mother's name was Mitig'wakik. She was an Ojibway Bear Clan woman. My father's name is Ickwe'saigun. He is a Sioux Ojibway Wolf Clan man. And my real name is Meya'wigobiwik. Anthony Graham was not my father. And you sweet Arthur, are pure of heart and spirit. Do you hear me?"

I think he nodded. I think he understood, but he never spoke again. He died some time later, in the pitch darkness of the Razor's Back, high above The Hollow. I felt his spirit slip away into the night and make for the northern star.

Sometime near dawn, Cyril Brennan's voice called my name from the bushes. I could see his dark silhouette approaching from the direction of the path and called back to him.

"Dear God in heaven." he cried as he came upon the scene. Only then did I notice how sticky my hands were, and how thick the smell of blood was around me.

"He's dead." I whispered looking into Cyril's face.

"How?" he asked.

"He shot himself."

"Eternal rest grant unto him, oh Lord. And let perpetual light shine upon him. May he rest in peace," Cyril intoned, making the sign of the cross over Arthur's peaceful face.

"Listen to me." He grabbed me by the shoulders, dug his fingers into my skin. "I didn't hear what you just said, and I don't want to hear it again. What I see here is an accident. He got his gun caught in his clothes and it went off. You understand?"

He released his grip and sat back on his heels. "I knew you'd both be here. The lad's soul was good. I tried to tell him he didn't need to confess this. There's no sin in growin' up."

I fell into Cyril's chest biting back the tears that I would not shed for Arthur's noble heart.

"I'll not be party to damning his soul to perdition. God knows there's other souls that should rot in hell for this. He'll be buried on sanctified ground, a good Catholic to the end, martyr to a senseless horror."

I believe at that moment, Cyril Brennan became more than the sum total of himself. He became Manitou. He had left the word behind and become the idea."

The Present: "Nana told me a story once," Cathleen spoke in a low reverent tone. "about a boy who accidentally shot himself hunting squirrel on the mountain. He had gone to Mass, nine First Fridays in a row and was a good boy, pure of heart and spirit. For that, she said, God granted he did not die until he was able to make a good confession and be absolved of his sins. That night there was a magnificent shooting star in the sky and she knew it was God's way of telling her that he was in paradise." She leaned her face against Lilith's soft sweet-smelling hair.

[Chapter Fifteen](#)

Medicine Wheel

Only the dawn calmed her. At the first stirring of the birds outside the window, Cathleen rose quietly lest she disturb the others. Down to the kitchen she crept to make herself a cup of tea before curling up with a blanket in the old rocker on the front porch. The purple sky on the horizon shimmered at first, reluctant to give way to the growing pink at its base. In turn the rising pink dissipated into to a corona of yellow edged in blue. She listened as the birdsong that had started as a sleepy question rose to a crescendo, like a call to arms. Suddenly the brilliant crest of the sun broke through the horizon stunning her eyes with its beauty. One of these times, she told herself, the answer will burst in my face just like that first sunbeam.

"Another fine day, Katie," Bridget pronounced quietly stepping onto the porch with her own cup of tea.

"Uh huh," Cathleen replied without taking her eyes from the quickening fireball at the end of the field. She shed her blanket in the warming air and stretched her cramped legs.

"When are you going to climb down off your high horse and tell me what's eating you to pieces?" Bridget sighed and drank deeply from her cup.

"What makes you think I'm being eaten to pieces?" Cathleen turned to her.

"I see it in your eyes, dearie. Just as I saw it in your grandmother's eyes when she was trying to decide whether to go or to stay here."

"I wish it was that easy." Cathleen sighed looking back toward the mist rising off the grass. "You know, I used to think everything was black or white. The choices you made were always between doing the right thing or the wrong thing. What happens when both your choices are wrong?" She looked over to her aunt.

Bridget knit her brow, looked deeply into her eyes, as if the answer lay somewhere behind them. "At some point we're all faced with the same question, aren't we? What are we to do when everywhere leads somewhere we don't want to go? Look what your grandmother was faced with, staying with the man she loved, staying with her child and wrecking countless lives or returning to The Hollow and lying with another man."

"So why did she choose to lie with another man?" Cathleen asked.

"To answer that would be to know your Grandmother's soul, Katie. Over the years, I've learned that you can tell if someone's spirit is pure, truly shaman if what they do comes from the same place, from the same fundamental principle held within one's heart. To the spirit, the answer is always clear."

Cathleen sighed, returning to the rising sun for solace.

"Stop thinking about it, Cathleen. Give your heart a chance to answer." Bridget heaved herself out of the chair and moved toward the screen door. "I'll get breakfast started."

Cathleen closed her eyes to stop the cacophonous noise of her mind. After a few minutes her breathing became deeper, her muscles relaxed. Slowly she became aware of the quiet. The margins of a hoop ringed her eyes. It was intersected by crossed bars, a necklace of bear claws hung in the middle. Her hand slipped involuntarily into the pocket of her bulky wool sweater and drew out a business card.

After breakfast she called the blue embossed number and asked for Brian Hooper. He sounded surprised when she identified herself, reluctant to do as she asked.

"Do you need instructions on how to get here?" she asked in a quiet monotone.

"I think I can find my way," he responded.

"Wear hiking gear and bring a tape recorder. Meet me at the house tomorrow morning, eight o'clock."

Next, she phoned White Earth. Elijah answered as if he knew it would be her. Yes, everything was fine with him. He was busy though, shuttling between the reservation and Minneapolis, meeting with State attorneys and bureaucrats from the BIA.

"Elijah, I want to make things right with the farmers daddy forced off their land, one family in particular. I want them to buy the apartment buildings. They can borrow the money from me, keep it as long as they want. I don't care. Can you run the idea by your lawyer-friend in Toronto?"

"Sure, Cathleen. I'll get him to call you. His name's Eugene Lavictoire. He's a good man, your grandmother knew his father."

Brian Hooper pulled his old Volkswagen Beetle into the gravel driveway of The Hollow and stepped out into the early morning mountain mist. He looked around at the neatly trimmed yard and compact red brick house. Attached to it was a wooden shed weathered gray with one too many winters. The vane on the top leaned precariously in a north-south orientation. A young Indian, stripped to the waist, his sleek black hair tied back in a long pony tail crouched painting the wooden steps leading to the front door of the house. He strode over to him through the thick wet grass.

"I'm looking for Cathleen McCaffrey."

"She's in the kitchen." Douglas answered without looking up. "Go through the shed and knock on the door."

"Douglas, right?" Hooper tried to keep the contempt out of his voice.

Douglas turned to meet his question and smiled arrogantly. "Cop, right?"

"Right," he answered, pointing to the wooden structure near his car. "That shed?"

"That shed." Douglas pointed with the paintbrush and turned back to his work.

"You're early," Cathleen admonished as she let him into the kitchen. "I still need to gather up some things. Want some tea?"

"No thanks."

"I'll be ready in a minute." She smiled lightly and disappeared into the main part of the house.

Hooper scanned the surroundings. This part of the house was constructed of three-quarter-cut logs caulked with plaster, the rough-hewn walls painted white. Dried herbs hung in sheaths alongside the woodstove which, judging by the heat it threw, was fully functional. A hand-carved bench and several press-back chairs crowded around an equally primitive refectory table over which was tightly slung a stained red gingham oilcloth. Where were the holy pictures, the statue of the Virgin Mary, he asked himself. No rural Quebec kitchen was complete without them. Cathleen reappeared before he could answer his question.

"So where are we going?" he asked as he watched her pull on her burnt orange Kodiaks and draw the rawhide laces taut.

"Up the mountain behind the house. It should take us a little over an hour to reach the top." She hoisted her pack and led the way out. They doubled back to where Douglas was still painting the front steps. She leaned down and kissed the top of his head. "I'll be back by sundown."

He stood up and returned her kiss, this time on her lips before casting a cold look in Hooper's direction. "Be careful up there."

They followed a dried-up creek bed for most of the ascent rather than cutting their way through the thick brush that grew alongside it. The creek bed itself consisted of bared limestone cut away by millennia of spring runoff. It was humid enough to make it uncomfortably hot after awhile. Hooper stopped at one point to tie a bandana around his head to catch the sweat that now rolled copiously into his eyes. She stood and watched him from ten feet away, tapping her walking stick anxiously.

"You look more Indian than Douglas, Corporal Hooper," she observed through a smile that seemed to mock him.

"I didn't come here to be insulted," he replied making his way toward her.

They walked on, in silence, Cathleen McCaffrey forging ahead while he picked his way across the cobbles in the creek bed. Without warning the underbrush gave way to a flat ridge of black rock slashed with gray and patched here and there with deep green moss. He stopped to take in the rugged beauty of the place. They made their way over to a grouping of jagged rocks and looked down to the sparkling purple well below.

"It's beautiful. Thank you for bringing me here, Cathleen."

She moved away from the cliff to a spot where the moss grew thick and spongy, laid an old red blanket over it and sat down. "It's called Razor Back. My great uncle shot himself here a long time ago. So you see my father and I aren't the only fucked-up members of the family."

"This land's been in your family a long time," he observed sitting down beside her.

"My father was born in the farmhouse down there. He grew up on the land, worked it with my grandmother and grandfather, experienced the same people, the same things I experienced growing up. And yet he turned out so different. I just don't understand." She glanced over to him, sorrow in her eyes.

"Are you sure you really want to go through with this?" He studied her strained face. Instead she lit a braided knot of what looked like dried grass, fanned the smoke over her face and head and whispered words under her breath. He drew his cassette tape recorder from his pack and set it up.

"Start with your name and today's date," he instructed. "If there is something specific I want you to tell me, I'll ask. Otherwise, it's your story to tell as you see fit."

That night it was Cathleen who leaned against Douglas' back, too exhausted to read but anxious to listen. The act of voiding her spirit of its heavy burden had been as physical as an enema, leaving her cleansed of poison, ready to begin again. Douglas' voice seemed brighter, his form more sharply defined. Aunt Lilith's lacework was more intricate and her semblance to the dove more distinct. Nana's notebook was warm to the touch, its cover blacker than she had imagined; the outlined bear paw, clearer than before.

They had finished reading Nana's account of her life in The Hollow leading up to Six Nations. The only section left was that which dealt with what happened when she returned after the war. Douglas flipped to the last quarter of the notebook and began reading at a point marked August 1918.

The Past: August 1918

They didn't need to send the provincial police to escort us off the reservation. They knew we had bought our tickets and had promised to leave. But they needed a show of force, a reassertion of authority over the Iroquois whom they knew were really at the heart of the rebellion. Alexander General and Milo Crow-Catcher, Seth's fourteen year- old son dressed in traditional clothes, painted their faces and arms half-black, half-white, with red teardrops-- the sign of the enemy's blood. They wore eagle-feathered headdresses and carried rounded war clubs as if they were preparing for action. They painted their ponies as well-- circled their eyes with white and tied goose feathers in their manes.

Except for the two warriors following behind our wagon, Oshweken had been abandoned by its inhabitants. The sound of horses and wagon wheels echoed off the whitewashed panels of the buildings as we rolled by

The warriors flanked our armed escort, like skirmishers ahead of the war party as we moved down Iroquois Line toward the western boundary of the reservation at the Grand River. Intermittently they issued a war cry and reined their horses up to strike the wagon with their clubs before falling back to their positions along the edge of the bush, parallel to us. I worried about this. Each time they rode up, the police reacted by readying arms and taking aim.

"Hold your fire gentlemen. It's just a show." The sergeant leaned over and winked at us. "After twenty-five years with the RCMP in Red River, I can tell a show from the real thing."

As we neared the intersection of the highway to Brantford, people began to pour onto the road, blocking the wagon's exit. The sergeant ordered the wagon to halt fifty feet short of the crowd and the two warriors quickly took position between the escort and the rest of the Iroquois gathered there.

"The People wish to say good-bye to their friends." Alexander General shouted to the leader of our escort.

"Make it quick, chief; we have a train to meet," the sergeant shot back.

Milo leaped deftly from his mount and followed the elder to our wagon. Chief General removed an eagle feather from his headdress and gave it to Vincent.

"You have earned this honour, Keeper Awake. You have slain the enemy in our name, and you have given us the tools to continue the fight." He looked contemptuously at the whites in our escort and then turned to me. "You have given us the means to take back our pride, to reclaim our greatness, Ojibway Bear Clan Shaman woman. And in your courage we have found the courage to engage the enemy." He pulled a second eagle feather from his headdress and presented it to me. Now it was Bridget's turn. He pulled a third feather and gave it to her. "You have made our bodies strong and shared your medicine ways with our faithkeepers, red-haired white woman. A people must be healthy to fight their enemy." Finally he turned to Cyril Brennan who was holding Weza'wange's cradle board and gave him the fourth feather from his bonnet. "You have sacrificed yourself for the people, like your living-dead god, nailed to the tree. Without you, we would have lost."

He stepped back to Milo's side and took a turtle rattle from his hands. Shaking it lightly he chanted a Seneca prayer. "Great Mystery, we thank you for bringing these people to our aid when

we needed them. We thank you for opening our eyes and our hearts to their wisdom and ways. And we thank them for their service to us. Go in peace as our friends and brothers. Know that there is always a place for you here, among the Hodeno'saunee."

"To you, white men of Brantford," He turned and looked deeply into the sergeant's eyes. "we renew our curse upon your town that you built on the bones of our ancestors. May it never prosper or flourish. May the shops and businesses that line its streets fail."

Alexander General stepped aside and motioned the crowd to do likewise. As we passed them, they cheered and shouted challenges in Mohawk and Seneca. Vincent pushed the eagle feather into the layers of his side braids and raised his arms in solidarity with the crowd. In turn, Bridget and I secured our feathers in our sunhats. Cyril wrapped his feather into the leather latticework of the cradleboard.

In this way, the Iroquois people of Six Nations Reserve defeated the white show of force with their own show of spirit that morning.

Saying good-bye to my husband and my son was the hardest thing I ever had to do. Had it not been for Bridget's loving hand, I would have dried up and blown away on that trip back to The Hollow. She comforted me like a mother would a child in unrelenting pain. I will always remember her stroking my brow, her melodic voice humming quietly as I lay against her breast, my eyes closed so that I would not lose sight of my baby or his father. How bitter this time was. And yet how lucky I was to have the arms of one so dear as Bridget.

The Present: Brian Hooper closed the door to his study to blot out the shrieking of his two sons playing hide-and-seek in the playroom with their friends. He pulled the cassette recorder from his knapsack, the tape of Cathleen McCaffrey's evidence still stopped at the point she had concluded her testimony, and pressed rewind. As the tape spun backward, he gathered together pen and paper so that he could take notes and identify the points that would be of particular interest to the Department of Justice lawyers. He set the counter to zero and pressed play.

"I am Cathleen McCaffrey, daughter of Anthony McCaffrey and Dorothy Noonan, grand daughter of Meya'wigobiwik, Bear Clan Shaman Woman of the White Earth Ojibway people."

He scoffed at the bit about her grandmother. Indian bullshit, he thought. How often had he heard that magic talk in the drunk tank in Kenora? More like DT talk, coming out of some shaking Red drenched in his own piss. No, can't think about that," he told himself. "The tape, play the tape."

"My reason for telling you what I know about the activities of my father has nothing to do with saving myself from prosecution or taking revenge. It has everything to do with divesting myself of the life I have been leading. It has to do with restoring the balance knocked out by greed and giving back, as best I can, what was taken from good and innocent people. You can do what you like with this information; I am only interested in the act of providing it."

He had been right about this woman, he thought, as she detailed the corruption that permeated numerous levels of government and described the numerous scams that her father had spearheaded over a five-year period. She told him where to find the secret ledgers her father had kept to protect himself from disloyalty and blackmail. They chronicled everything in meticulous detail: who, how much, when and why.

"I know about the ledgers because I kept them for him. I was the only one he could trust to do the job, he told me. I entered each transaction and then destroyed the source. Each one attached itself to my soul,

another sin for which someday I will have to atone."

These documents alone would wreak havoc throughout the city, spawn hundreds of indictments and bring the pervasive bureaucratic crime ring to its knees. As he listened to her emotion-stained words, he realized that she had given him the greatest gift of his career. With this tape he could write his own ticket, go anywhere in the force, head any project that interested him.

His hand cramped under the strain of note taking. His eyes watered trying to write and note the counter coordinates at the same time. And yet his attention was diverted by the words she used, the sorrow and compassion in her voice, the pain of shedding her hideous secrets, of betraying her own family.

Her candor would be a liability to her own future, he noted sadly. She did not hesitate to incriminate herself, made sure he knew where she had taken a more active role in her father's crimes. Beyond recommending clemency for her cooperation, there would be little he could do to protect her from the years of litigation that would surely follow. She would be forced to relive her sins over and over, if not as an indicted accessory then as a chief witness. Perhaps this would be how she would atone for her part, he mused.

The abrupt click signaling the end of the tape jostled him from his thoughts. The house on the other side of his study door was quiet now and dark. He stood and stretched; he went over to his desk lamp and switched it on. How could it be eleven thirty already? Adrenaline in his gut would keep him up for some time yet. He went back to the tape recorder to rewind to the point where his mind had gone wandering.

"Maxwell Hendry represented my father's worst fear, open and direct confrontation by someone who was right and righteous. He was eloquent, charismatic, a born leader and organizer. He was every bit as smart as his opposition and every bit as determined to have his way. Daddy tolerated him at first, even raised his asking price on the land to a less insulting level. Hendry wouldn't budge. Instead he used the time to convince the others to stand and fight the system. He got the media involved for awhile, that is before my father got to the editor of the paper and the owner of the television station. You'll find the price for their cooperation in volume four of the ledger. In fact volume four concentrates on the Hendry case almost exclusively."

"Tell me about the harassment that went on." Brian Hooper heard his own voice at this point.

"The police played a special role in that," she continued. "Every time Hendry stepped inside his car to go anywhere, they were down on him, checking for seatbelts or open bottles of liquor, searching his family for weapons, issuing tickets for anything and everything. They knew eventually they would wear him down and find his flashpoint. Then they would be able to arrest him. A couple of days after my father had sent thugs to burn his barn down, the police stopped Hendry for something or other. While one cop did a body search in front of the whole village of Manotick, another one started roughing up his four-year old son. Hendry exploded and broke the cop's nose when his son started crying. So of course they arrested him and dragged him off to jail in Ottawa. You know the rest. The next morning they found him dead, hanging by his shirt. How awful, but how terribly convenient for Anthony McCaffrey's pending land deal."

"You're telling me the two are linked some way?" he asked.

"Volume four will give you the evidence you need for a murder charge, Corporal Hooper. Daddy was so pleased, he even gave the cop who did it a five thousand dollar bonus."

"Jesus Murphy." Hooper interjected, but then apologized. "Please continue."

"I think that was the last entry I ever made into his ledger. I couldn't take it anymore. For years he kept me going with his guilt and his need for me, but this was the last straw. I told him I was leaving. He

pleaded with me, yelled at me, accused me of abandoning him, like Nana--I mean his own mother. But this time I couldn't hear him. I just slammed the door in his face and took a taxi to Glen Avenue. I spent the next month so stoned and drunk that I can't remember if I even talked to him. We saw each other off and on after that. If I needed something, I'd spend the night at home. But I never listened to him again, and I never wrote in that ledger again."

"So is that it then?" he asked.

"I guess so. What you said about the government being the only one to benefit from my testimony--I want you to know that I'm making arrangements to compensate all the farmers who were screwed out of their land, especially the Hendry's. If at all possible, I'd appreciate it if you could make sure that those arrangements aren't touched in any way."

"I don't know if I can do that."

"That's okay, I know you'll try. You should also know that I'm planning to return to Minnesota soon. I'll make sure you know how to reach me so I can deal with this shit."

The cassette stopped once again at the end of the interview. Brian Hooper listened to the hiss of the open channel, his heart pounding from too much coffee. He quietly made his way to his bedroom where his wife lay sleeping. There was no way he would ever get to sleep with all that was crowding through his mind. He pulled on an old tee shirt, a pair of jogging shorts and his Adidas and slipped quietly into the night.

As he ran along the dark bike path that led from west end Ottawa to downtown, he pictured the furor Cathleen's testimony would let loose. He imagined her strained to the limit by accusations, more betrayals, and media hype. Why was he so interested in protecting her interests, he asked himself. Her remark about him looking like an Indian rippled back across his mind.

How could Cathleen McCaffrey know what he had buried deep in the earth so long ago? Buried with a shaman's red gloves and tobacco. And yet something inside him whispered that she did know. She had seen the shaking drunk in Kenora jail, seen him through a grandson's eyes, heard his crazy words of demons and ghosts waiting to devour him. "Old Cree bastard, drunk on shoe polish," the other Mounties had laughed at the muttering figure slumped on the floor of the cell, stinking of urine and vomit. But he hadn't shared the laughter because he knew this man. He turned his back ashamed of their kinship and let him die alone in the white man's jail.

"He was your grandfather, Brian. And once he was proud, an important man on the reservation, able to heal the sick with his hands. Don't you forget it." His mother took him aside in the funeral parlour when she heard him describing the old man's last hours. Her words were like a brand, burned into the colour of his skin, in the texture of his hair and the set of his eyes for all to see.

Brian Hooper shook these thoughts from his head and ran harder. Maybe he could leave them behind, toss them away like the sweat off his half-inch hair. But the thoughts coalesced into substance and gained on him. Before his tear-streamed eyes they formed an Indian medicine wheel with a ring of bear claws in the middle, brass buttons where the crossbars met the hoop and four eagle feathers hanging from beaded leather thongs. It moved with him as he ran. An old woman's face materialized in the bear claw ring. She was chanting some tuneless Indian song to the beat of his pounding heart. It was as if the chant was bending his thoughts, changing his mind. He resisted it for as long as he could, but it worked its way through the barriers of will he had set up, like an eddying stream of light. He stopped where the asphalt path met a huge oak tree, panting, his hands braced against his tingling thighs, sweat dripping to the ground.

The ledgers are more important than the tape, his mind-voice chanted. There's no point dragging Cathleen McCaffrey through hell, punishing her for giving you the gift of truth, opening the light on the real perpetrators. The entries speak for themselves; you don't need anyone else to tell their version of a story that tells itself in the money and power that crossed hands. Let her go in peace, back to her people. Leave her alone to repair herself, find her way and heal others.

"I can't do that," he shouted to the tree and to the medicine wheel still before his eyes.

You can do what is right, just as the shaman child did what was right," his mind voice countered.

"Shaman child," he repeated to the tree and realized that the medicine wheel was swaying, creating a breeze that seemed to blow through his flesh and massage his heart, dispel his doubts, and calm his fears. He sat down beneath the dark arms of the oak tree. A great sadness filled his heart as he stared at the wheel, like the sadness on the face of his grandfather as he lay dying in Kenora jail. He covered his eyes and wept tears for those without hope, without identity, tears for those who hid themselves in shame. When he glanced up, the medicine wheel was gone. His mind felt extraordinarily clear, purged, eager to engage its path. He jogged home without feeling winded, without raising a sweat.

Back in his study Brian Hooper replayed Cathleen McCaffrey's testimony, this time so he could commit her words to memory. He reached into the front pocket of his knapsack and pulled out a key and a piece of paper. She had written down the address of her father's apartment and the combination to his safe where the ledgers were kept. Also written was her permission for him to enter and remove the books as evidence in case he wished to act without a warrant.

He understood now why he had taken a vacation day yesterday and said only that he was going hiking to his wife, why he had driven his own car up to the farm rather than signing one out. The medicine woman, or maybe even Cathleen McCaffrey must have taken possession of him even then. He removed the tape from the recorder and took hold of it where it looped slightly at the read/write head. Soon it was shiny brown pile at the bottom of his wastebasket. He added his notes to the tape and took the whole thing out back to the barbecue grill. The flames leaped up for a brief moment as they consumed his hard work. Now he felt tired and looked toward the east. He noticed a shimmering purple where the sky met the horizon and knew that dawn was about to break. He pulled up a lawn chair and sat down to watch the spectacle.

Chapter Sixteen

Children of the Seventh Fire

The canoe skimmed silently across the steel black surface of Gilby Lake. Elijah Landreville stretched his long arms forward to find the perfect point in the water that would steer them toward the one safe inlet of Wolf Medicine Island. Douglas Fairchild watched him out of the corner of his eye so he could match his efforts from the bow.

"There it is." From the centre of the canoe, Cathleen McCaffrey pointed to a deep green spot on the horizon and then turned to look at her uncle.

"Yes, we'll be there within the hour," Elijah squinted hard. His paddle dipped once again into the still black water.

It had been almost two years since she had opened Nana's notebook. And now it called to her to finish what she had begun. Oh yes, she had finished reading the words, and by now it had been photocopied at least ten times and was making the rounds of White Earth. But she still needed to complete the circle, to

take her place among The People.

She remembered barely having enough time to record Bridget and Lilith's accounts of Nana's life with Donal McCaffrey and her father's childhood before Brian Hooper pre-empted her efforts. And though they could point to major events like her marriage, her father's birth and troubled youth, they could not give her the truth of what had gone on behind closed doors. Maybe it was better that way, just as Nana had said. The story of Donal McCaffrey could be summed up in the light-hearted album of pictures she had found in the trunk. And the story of Anthony, her father, was for her to write, for her to make sense of for her own children.

Funny she thought, Brian Hooper had played such an important role in bringing her to this point. It was like the ancestors had picked him out of all the people on the earth to open the door to her second coming, and then to close the door of the first behind her.

It was he who ended her stay in The Hollow, three days after she had taken him up the Razor's Back. He turned up unannounced after supper.

"I've booked you both on a plane back to Duluth, tomorrow," he told her in the kitchen as soon as she opened the door. "I paid cash used false names so you won't be traceable through receipts."

"Why?"

"I want you to clear out before I turn the ledgers in."

"You haven't answered my question," she persisted.

"When they ask me to check on your whereabouts, I'll draw a blank."

She remembered pausing to let the importance of what he was saying sink in.

"No Brian, I can't let you do this."

"I don't need you anymore, Cathleen. Your involvement will only complicate matters."

But she sensed the lie in his words, reached easily into his mind and verified it. "I told you I'm prepared for what happens."

"No." He took her by the shoulders and sat her down in one of the pressback chairs before pulling up another chair to face her.

"You okay out here, Kate?" Douglas appeared at the doorway and leaned against the lintel.

"I'm fine. But stay and listen to what Corporal Hooper has to say."

Hooper knit his brow.

She touched his hand and smiled. "Douglas will have to know about this sooner or later. I won't have secrets between us."

Hooper sighed and cleared his throat. "There is no mention of you in the ledgers, only your handwriting. I compared it with a sample of your father's and it's close enough to pass muster. Without you around I can focus all my attention on those bastards who took the bribes and killed Maxwell Hendry. But if you're here, everyone involved will use you as a lightning rod. You'll pay for what happened; not them."

She returned to the place in Hooper's mind where she had found so much hurt. It was still there but

alongside it she also found a kernel of hope spreading its roots, feeding on the pain, growing strong.

"That's not your reason for doing this." she smirked.

Hooper recoiled at her words as if she had pulled a trigger at point blank range. He looked away for a moment. "I think you already know the real reason."

"You won't find peace 'til you go back, Brian. You need to embrace your shame so it will stop holding on to you."

The Mountie nodded his head heavily and then looked pleadingly at her. "Will you go--for all of us then?"

"I'll go--for all of us," she sighed.

He pulled the tickets from his overcoat pocket and dropped them on the table and left without another word.

"What was all that about?" Douglas asked as she listened to Hooper's Beetle fire up and drive away.

"He just figured out he's an Indian." she answered as she turned out the kitchen light and made her way back into the parlour.

What a year it had been since she had returned to White Earth, she thought. So much had fallen into place, so much accomplished in such a short time.

It was only six months since Douglas had opened the doors to Warehouse Rez Cars and there were already twenty students honing their skill at keeping old wrecks on the road. Six rebuilt pickups sat waiting out front for owners in need of cheap transportation and a sweet deal. They were especially sought by people who had just won back their land and were once again starting out with nothing.

"Pay me something when your first crop comes in." How many times had she heard Douglas utter this and smiled to see his own brand of healing work its magic?

Two months' back they had taken in their first broken combine harvester and made it whole again. This fall it would start making the rounds of first-season farmers. As it turned out, there weren't many people in the area who could repair farm machinery. So even the white's who only a year ago had been breaking windows and burning sheds on the rez were beginning to call on them for service.

The community had come together last winter to construct an arena for hockey and larger tribal gatherings. And though the White Earth Otters' first season had been a bust, the kids had seemed more excited about their uniforms and their skates than anything else.

Electricity was still an issue for most of the village, including Nana's cabin. But somehow it didn't matter. The only renovation they had needed to make was to replace the single bed with one big enough to accommodate the two of them. Nookomis Mina and Douglas' two aunts were frequent visitors, showing up without notice, catching them in awkward moments. They brought food or something to spruce up the place. Douglas' Aunt Burnice would leave old wedding magazines lying around the kitchen table. "I borrowed them from Gloria's Beauty Parlour. She would say. "You can keep them as long as you want."

Elijah wasn't kidding when he said there were a lot of files that needed to be organized and cross-referenced in his law office. She remembered gasping when he opened the door to a room heaped with boxes full of documents. "Don't forget, Waseya, my father began collecting this stuff fifty years ago, and I took over after he died." To date she had waded through a quarter of them, but already her work had resulted in two settlements.

Her shining moment, however, came when Elijah took her up to Minneapolis and introduced her to the other lawyers in the case and their star client, Dennis Banks. Behind his eyes Cathleen could see his cause burned like wildfire and he had no concern for his own fate apart from what he could do for his people.

"You guys just get me off soon, so I can fight another day," he had said before introducing them to another AIM leader. "This is Leonard Peltier. Most of you know already that he took care of security at Wounded Knee. Now he's on his way back to Pine Ridge to help The People protect themselves from the Goons and the BIA."

"I thought they had eased off after the siege." Elijah shook the man's hand.

"So long as Dickie Wilson's in charge, no one's safe." Leonard Peltier scoffed in answer to Elijah's question.

It had been a magic year, a full year, the first year of peace in a long time, she mused as the canoe forged ahead. These days, when she laid her head down at night she felt exhausted from work that meant something, satisfied that her efforts counted, that they resulted in some kind of progress. Better still, she thought, there had been no alcohol or cigarettes between she and Douglas since that time before Nana's funeral. Burying the past and forgetting the present was no longer important, no longer necessary.

Although they were still a ways out from shore, she could see people standing on the shore of the island now, children waving their arms wildly in the air. The canoe passed by a magnificent pillar of pink-gray granite before Elijah yawed ninety degrees to the stern. Directly to port, she noticed the black tips of rock rising intermittently in the waves.

"Manitou fingernails," she whispered.

The children and several women waded out to their hips to help guide the canoe to a rocky shore. As the water grew shallow, the three of them jumped out and helped pull it the rest of the way onto the beach.

"Aanen, Myeengen," Elijah called to the old man seated on a blanket in the shade and proceeded up the hill to take his place beside him.

"Aanen Makwa," the old man replied. It was No'dinens, smoking his pipe, his stooped shoulders wrapped in an old blanket. Cathleen had learned enough Anishinaabeg to know that Elijah had referred to his mentor by his clan name of Wolf and that No'dinens had responded by calling him Bear. She and Douglas made their way over to the blanket as well and took their place at his feet.

"So, this Wa'abizheshi boy has come to Sundance." No'dinens spoke quietly, but with a strength that contradicted the deep wrinkles in his face and the wispy bits of snow-white hair that danced in the breeze. "There are few Marten clan Elders around here now, so Bear and Wolf will have to do until you're old enough to be an elder yourself."

He squinted at Douglas for a moment and then at Cathleen. "We haven't built a Midewagon in a long time. I hope we can remember how to do it." His eyes sparkled with the challenge.

"Mina Wolf-Healer and the rest of the Midewiwin will arrive in a couple of days, uncle. I'm sure with all of you working on it, the ceremony will be true to the ancestors," Elijah replied.

"Oh, no, not Mina. She'll take away my humbug candies again and make me drink that awful tea. I keep telling her there is more to life than a bad taste in the mouth." He shook his head and then smiled impishly. "She listens to you, Waseya. Tell her to let an old man die in peace."

"Not me, uncle. You're on your own."

"Humph," he snorted. "Some healer you turned out to be."

No'dinens pushed himself slowly to his feet with Elijah's help and headed off toward a shack that stood on the bluff. He stopped as if he had forgotten something and came back to where Douglas and Cathleen stood watching him. "We set up a tipi for you, over there." He pointed in the direction of a stand of tall Jack Pine. "It is close to where your relations are buried, Waseya. Elijah, will stay in the cabin with me tonight so we can talk about preparing the boy for his vision. One more thing, Douglas. When your vision comes, maybe you can ask the ancestors where I put my eyeglasses." No'dinens touched Douglas' arm and pointed to his eyes. "Can't see a damn thing without them."

For a moment Cathleen thought that it was the same tipi Nana had described in her notebook, but this one was made of tough bleached canvas, not buffalo hide and there were no drawings on it. She and Douglas stowed their packs at the back wall and marveled at how bright it was inside, how perfectly centered the fire pit was over the top opening. Outside, someone had dug a larger fire pit for them and had placed flat stones around it so they wouldn't have to sit on the damp earth.

"Hey, Kate. Take a look at this," Douglas called.

Behind the door flap there was a medicine wheel so old that the colours painted into the skins were hardly visible. Cathleen reached out to feel the brittle tendrils that extended from the horizontal arms of the cross. They crackled underneath her fingertips and then flapped raggedly when she released them to the breeze.

"I think that's a wolf's head," Douglas noted, pointing at the drawing in the eastern quadrant of the hoop.

Shortly after they settled in, Elijah appeared at the door flap. "I'll take you to the graveyard now."

The graves were situated just over a hill at the back of the tipi, "They face west," Elijah said tracing his hand along the apex of his father's grave hut, "like all our ancestors." The people had erected miniature wooden shacks over each grave, and then placed a pole in front with an upside-down graphic rendering of the person's name and their clan symbol. Nana, the proud-standing stick woman, was buried between the two men who had given her purpose: the spotted deer and the crucifix.

"The grave-huts are called djibe'gumig in our language," Elijah offered. "The markers are djibe'nak."

Bowls of rice, sheaves of corn and half-burnt sweet grass braids littered the openings of each structure. Rosary beads were nailed to the lintel of Cyril Brennan's grave-hut.

"Someday I will lie at my mother's feet, and then we'll all be together again like the night I was born." Elijah said and placed his own offering of wild rice before the graves.

"There'll be a feast on the beach tonight, to celebrate our coming. I'll see you there." They watched as he made his way quietly back down the path.

No'dinens' face glowed brightly in the fire. Behind him the black shadows of primordial Douglas fir, oak and maple bent close in ever-changing patterns cast by a gentle breeze. All the people were gathered round chatting and laughing. The smell of burnt sugar clung to the air as the children set fire to marshmallows and coated their mouths and fingers in sticky white froth. One of the littler ones lay slack in Cathleen's lap trying hard to fight sleep and too much sugar. Douglas was close by. She could hear his laughter as he horsed around with some of the young men behind her.

"This island calls all its children back." No'dinens spoke as he struggled to his feet. "And so these children

of White Earth come to our fire to seek family, to seek visions and to seek their way on the Red Road. Grandfather, these are the children of the Seventh Fire, the ones you told us about many years ago when the people cried out to you in despair. They refuse to hide from the lies, the pain and the anger. They will not be stopped from finding out the truth, from finding who they are and where they came from. In their journey they have found the things we left behind for them: the ceremonies, the medicines, the drums, the dances, the language and the stories. They have come to us, the old teachers and Elders and those who did not fall asleep these long years, to reclaim their own spirits and their own lives."

Cathleen watched as Elijah helped No'dinens approach the fire. For a second she thought he might teeter into it, but instead he stirred the live embers into flames with his gnarled walking stick. "These children are shaman, healers. Just as these embers leap into flames when I stir them, it will be up to them to stir the embers of the old ways into a fire of healing so that others can come close and reclaim their sacred paths. We all need to say Miigwech for what is happening around us."

It was late when Douglas slipped into the tipi to join her in the sleeping bags they had zipped together. He stripped off his clothes and nestled in beside her. His hair still smelled of the smoke of the fire and the wildness of the place even though it was soaking wet.

"You're freezing cold, Douglas." She wrapped her warm arms around his clammy chest.

"There's a cliff about a half a mile away from here. It must be a fifty-foot drop into the water. These guys just hauled off and jumped headfirst into the dark. Bloody hell."

"So you jumped too," she kissed his shoulder.

"Yeah, I jumped too." His body was beginning to lose the water's blush, but she could feel his skin tingling with excitement underneath her fingers.

"How's the little one tonight?" He rolled over and caressed her emerging belly with a cool hand.

"She is wondering how you will ever keep a straight face when you come out with that parent-line: "If all your friends jump off a cliff, does that mean you should jump too?"

Although she had known almost from the beginning, Cathleen still found it hard to believe that a life grew within her. She was only six weeks along, hadn't told anyone outside of Douglas. But of course Nookomis Mina had seen through her secret. "The way you two have been goin' at it it's no wonder." But she kept the news to herself without being asked as Cathleen knew she would.

"You didn't mind me going off with the guys like that, did you?"

"I'm glad you went off with them. You needed to blow off some steam before heading out tomorrow."

A lake-borne breeze caught the lodgepoles where they rested against each other above the canvas. The tipi swayed slightly to the rhythm of the creaking wood but remained solidly fixed to the earth. The two lay together listening to the sharp song of the wind and the rising chorus of shimmering leaves all around them, knowing that tomorrow would bring the beginning of the final step in their journey home.

"What do you think your ancestors will call you, Douglas?"

"No idea, Kate. I just hope my grandfather doesn't have anything to say about it. He used to call me 'Corn Dog' because that was my favourite thing to eat."

"Well, there's always Hard Dick. Maybe it sounds better in Ojibway," she teased.

"Let's hope the ancestors will name all of me, not just that part." His hands moved to her breasts now and he began gently stroking them. "Now that you've called his name, you'll have to put him back to sleep."

The breeze in the lodgepoles mixed with their passion as they made love. Tomorrow with its uncertainties, it fears laid bare and its wisdom hidden, was far away.

"It's time to go, Douglas." It was barely dawn when Elijah poked his head through the tent flap.

"Okay, I'm coming," he responded sleepily.

Cathleen stirred and sat up as he crawled out of the sleeping bag. "Got everything you need?"

"Won't need much. Go back to sleep."

She lay back down and listened to him through closed eyes as he slipped into his jeans and tee shirt behind her.

"Where's my toothbrush?" He whispered.

"In the green kit," she mumbled back.

"Okay I'm off." His hair fell to her cheek as he leaned over to kiss her. "See you later." She listened to their steps recede into the distance, the sleep quickly disappeared now chased by the hint of nausea that had become the child's greeting to her every morning. Cathleen reached over for the box of Saltines that she had placed at her head the night before.

The day after Douglas and Elijah left, Nookomis Mina's canoe came to shore. No'dinens sat under his tree in his usual manner, waiting to greet the newcomers. Two elder men accompanied Mina to his side while the bigger children of the island hoisted the tarp-covered contents out of the canoe and onto shore.

Cathleen watched them exchange laughter and happy words from where she had joined a group of women repairing a hole in one of the fishnets.

"It's been a long time since I saw a sugwa'sub being made." Mina remarked after hugging each of the net-makers long and hard. "It's a dying skill in White Earth, you know. Don't need a net in the freezer department of the Safeway."

She saved her last and longest embrace for her cousin-grandchild. "Brought you some more Saltines, Waseya. Thought you might run out," she whispered as they separated themselves from the others.

Cathleen nodded her thanks. "Why don't you stay with me while Douglas is gone? Uncle No'dinens pitched a tipi for us over the bluff."

"Seems you and No'dinens are of the same mind. I think he wants me far away from his stash of candy. He knows me well. If I find them, I'll throw them in the lake." Nookomis Mina gathered up her bedroll while Cathleen took her duffel bag. They made their way down the beach to the white tipi peeking out from behind the trees.

Mina could hardly eat what Cathleen had prepared for her. She was anxious to find a poplar tree for Douglas' Sundance and to gather herbs for her Midi bag. It would take awhile to find the right tree, she warned, and there wasn't much time before the clans gathered and the Midewagon would be erected.

She took Cathleen by the hand into the lush canopy of the forest. "Brother poplar, guide me to where you stand, young and strong in this place. Let me hear your voice. We have come to ask you to make a

great sacrifice. There is a boy who wishes to become a warrior. You can hear his prayers even now as we look for you. We ask you to lay down your life for this boy, just as he will promise to lay down his life for all the earth people when he dances with the sun."

Mina's prayer reached into Cathleen's spirit and mixed with the prayers she could hear Douglas sending to his ancestors. In her mind's eye she could see him sitting on a bluff on the other side of the island, naked, his body covered in ash, holding an eagle feather in each hand and watching the warm summer sun slip to the blue horizon.

She searched for Elijah's spirit and found it at the foot of the bluff. From his eyes she could see the sweatlodge taking form. With his hands, she could feel the warmth of the ironwood bough as he bent it in an arch to meet another. He would build it small, she thought his thoughts, to fit just the two of them. He would build it with an opening in the east for he and Douglas, and an opening in the west for the ancestors to join them.

"Your inner sight has grown strong, Waseya." Mina trundled up to her side knocking the dirt from some roots. "Do you see the thoughts of your child yet?"

"It's hard to tell, Nookomis. Sometimes I get a flash of joy, from deep inside. It starts here," she placed her hand on her pelvis. "and moves up through the centre of me."

Mina nodded approvingly before continuing her search for the right leaf shape in the dense forest floor.

"How did you know I had this gift?" Cathleen asked her as she followed behind.

"The first time you came to White Earth, I could see it shining like an acorn in your middle. Of course your grandmother had already told me about it, so I wasn't surprised."

"Do all Midis have this?" she continued.

"Not all Midis, but most clan shaman have it. It is passed down, as your grandmother and I have already told you." She stopped and pointed triumphantly to a tree just in front of them. "There it is, Douglas' Sundance tree."

She scuttled over to it and tied a strip of red cloth around its straight thin trunk. "Now we can go home and tell No'dinens where to send the men to find this tree."

On the night of Douglas' vision, Cathleen woke from a sound sleep, covered in sweat, shivering in the warmth, her mind racing among the clouds. Mina was already awake fanning the embers of the fire into flames.

"What's happening?" She whispered as the old woman threw the old Siwash sweater over her.

"Come here by the fire." she replied, her face glowed eerily in the shadowy flames.

"You feel it too, don't you Nookomis. What is it?"

"Douglas' time is close. It will be a powerful dream, more than I expected. If you close your eyes and travel to where he is, you will see what he sees, and dream what he dreams," she answered as she wrapped herself in a sleeping bag .

"Is he all right, Nookomis?" But she didn't need an answer. Already she could see the inside of the sweatlodge and feel the heavy air Douglas and Elijah took into their lungs.

She felt Douglas throughout her body, light-headed and weak from his four days without food. The steam from the rocks stung her eyes and her lungs as it stung Douglas. She coughed his cough, shook his sweat from his soaking hair. She braced herself as he fell to his side shivering, her mind churning as his churned.

A crow flew at her face, his face, talons extended, wings beating against cheeks. It latched itself to their naked shoulder, sinking its claws deep into the flesh until the blood ran. "Take me to the edge of the world," it said in the voice of an old man and an old woman at the same time. She stood up, legs shaking and left the sweatlodge with Douglas, as part of his consciousness, part of him. Together they strode over the island, each step covering a great distance. She could see the crow's shiny beak move, its tongue flick this way and that as it whispered directions into their ear. "Follow the north star, fifty paces, then bear east until you come to the shining sea."

They stopped on the edge of a cliff and together watched the silver water flow away toward the east. The crow flew from their shoulder to the outer-most limb of a tree that twisted from the living rock.

It pointed to a rope that coiled at their feet. "Hook the rope to this tree and to yourself then lower yourself over the edge."

Cathleen felt the rope burn their palms as they slipped down the sheer rock face toward the water. The crow flew once again to their shoulder and pointed to a hole stuffed with roots and bark. "You are the one who marks this place in red," the crow said. "You are the Miskwagikino."

As they perched over the spot indicated by the crow, Douglas extended his hand and placed it on the wall beside the hollow stuffed with roots and bark. When he took his hand away, there remained an imprint of it in brilliant red.

The crow spread its black wings around their head and began humming a prayer in a familiar quiet voice. Its wings dissolved into the black tarp of the sweatlodge and the crow's body retreated into a human form behind them. She breathed deeply with Douglas' lungs and realized with him that the vision was over. She listened to her words, Douglas' words, as he lay staring up at the black tarp ceiling of the tiny structure. "Our name is Miskwagikino," they said as one to Elijah as he hummed the ancestor song behind them. "It means marking in red dye."

Elijah propped Douglas' slack body up against his bare chest. He reached over to a bowl filled with a mixture of wild rice mush and berries. "Eat some manomin, Miskwagikino," he whispered. "We start back for the village tomorrow."

Cathleen found No'dinens supervising the finishing touches to the outside walls of the Midewagon. The men of the island had stretched stiff green tarp tightly over arches of fresh ironwood boughs to form an oblong domed structure large enough for fifty people. She stopped for a minute to watch them work, lashing the ropes to support-boughs and to stakes pounded deeply into the ground.

No'dinens turned as if he knew exactly where she was standing and motioned her over. "What do you think of it, Waseya?"

"It's beautiful, uncle. But then I've never seen anything like this before. I guess the Elders remembered how to do it after all."

"The last time we had a Sundance it was for your uncle, Weza'wange. And we had Gidegaakoons' as well as my memory to help us. This time we had to consult some old photos taken by a Wayaabishkiiwed woman. I think she wrote a book about us."

"C'mon, I'll show you the inside." He looped his arm in hers and began walking toward the entrance of

the Midewagon. "Here we had to improvise, because The People wouldn't let the white woman take photos of our sacred things."

Cathleen was struck first by the pungent scent of sage and sweetgrass inside the Midewagon. As her eyes adjusted to the low light she noticed great swatches of dried and fresh herbs hanging from the inner beams. Medicine wheels decorated with painted animal skulls, shells and feathers hung from the tarp walls. Just in front of them were shields and coup sticks with clan symbols painted in ochre. In the centre stood the poplar tree that Mina had found in the forest. Its branches were festooned with strips of bright coloured cloth, and little pouches. Up high, where the trunk split, there were four long strips of rawhide lanyard secured to each branch. She shuddered knowing these things would be attached to the awls that would pierce Douglas' chest.

The only light in the Midewagon streamed in from a hole directly above the tree. It illuminated the ground in a tight circle and then fell off quickly, leaving the outer circle almost in complete darkness. The light, the smell of herbs and the silence of the place made it holy, familiar to her in a fundamental sense, as if the strands of DNA inherited from her grandmother had saved the memory of this place for her.

"You are shaman, a dreamwalker, as your grandmother was. So I know you shared the vision of Douglas Fairchild, Waseya." No'dinens broke the silence. "Tell me what he saw and what name the ancestors gave him."

"I did dream his dream, uncle. But I don't understand its meaning," she shrugged apologetically. "The ancestors sent a crow to guide him. It took him to a cliff by a place called the shining sea and told him to hang over the edge by a rope. A little way down the cliff was a hole hollowed into the rock, stuffed with weeds and wood. Douglas put his hand out and where he touched the cliff face beside the hole, he left a print of his hand in red. The crow called Douglas, called us, Miskwagikino"

She felt No'dinens excitement rising as she spoke. He motioned her to help him sit down. So she supported one arm while he lowered himself to the ground.

"This is a very important dream, Waseya. Do you know what Miskwagikino means?"

"The crow said it meant marking in red dye," she answered.

"Marking in red dye," he repeated slowly, with a reverence that belied his feelings. "Many years ago, before my time, maybe even before my father's time, the elders of the Sixth Fire realized that the Wayaabishkiwed would steal everything from us that they could lay their hands on. So they gathered up all the sacred bundles, all the Midi drums and sacred objects, all the birchbark scrolls that contained an account of the history and ways of the Anishina'abeg and placed them in a hollowed-out log. They took them to a cliff somewhere along the shore of Lake Mishigameeng, the shining sea, and buried them over the edge, in the living rock. In the dreams of many people, they told us that when the time of the Seventh Fire came, they would show us where these things lay hidden so that we could bring them back and restore our ways."

He smiled and looked around the Midewagon studying each element, contemplating its importance. Finally he turned his gaze to Cathleen and studied her as he had the other things.

"You are with child. It shows in your face. If I hadn't been so busy with this Sundance, I would have noticed it before."

"Yes, uncle." She looked down at the ground, feeling awkward that her condition was so obvious. "Can I still be White Buffalo Calf-Pipe Woman?"

No'dinens laughed quietly, touched her arm. "Of course you can, so long as the dancing doesn't wear you out. The ancestors planned this, probably more than you and Douglas Fairchild did. It forms part of the message they have sent to us." He shifted onto one knee and then offered her his arm. "Help me up, Waseya. We need to tell the people that our warriors are coming home."

Douglas and Elijah broke through the forest canopy the next morning and strode into camp to the cheers and whooping of the gathered relatives. Men working on the Midewagon, women preparing food stopped what they were doing to circle around the two of them. Many of them were seeing Elijah for the first time in a long time. White Earth people who had come to know Douglas as customers, students and friends gathered round him laughing, slapping him on the back.

Cathleen stood at the edge of the crowd waiting for the initial rush to die down, but several women pulled her forward, making way for her with their hands until she stood in front of the two men. For a moment they just stared at each other, laughed like children. Then Douglas whooped loudly, picked her up and twirled her around. "I could feel you with me, Kate."

"Welcome home, Miskwagikino." She answered taking in the musky smell of the sweatlodge and four days in the sun.

He and Elijah were both naked to the waist, sunburned on the shoulders, tanned deeply on their chests and faces. Douglas had an eagle feather tied into his long ragged hair and he had swathed handprints in red across both his cheeks. Painted on his sternum was a black crow, its wings extended across his chest to touch his shoulders. She recognized the cut-off jeans he wore from the auto shop, oil stains still apparent from where he had wiped his hands as he bent under the battered hood of some rez car. But the cut-offs were different now, a modern-day loincloth slung across the narrow hips of a modern-day warrior. She promised herself never to let him wear them to work again.

Elijah too had painted his face and tied the four eagle feathers of his father's headdress to his grizzled shoulder-length hair. Starting at his nose, two yellow lines the width of an index finger streaked almost to his ears. Downward rays from the main lines suggested wings or the Aurora Borealis to her. He was a far cry from the lawyer in pleated dress pants and white shirt whom she had seen in action in Minneapolis. But this vision of Elijah was the essential one, she realized. It was the one that she would carry with her from now on.

Looking at the two of them was like looking back in time, she thought, to a culture as old as the island as sacred as the land. She sensed the little one swimming in her body. From within, the child could sense her mother's pride and her excitement at the return of her father.

Neither Douglas nor the clan Elders attended the feasting and dancing on the beach that night. And as much as she wanted to mind-travel to the great sweatlodge that the men had erected behind No'dinens shack, Cathleen knew that to violate the privacy of the warrior vigil on the night before his Sundance would dishonor both Douglas and herself.

"Be with me when they cut my chest, Kate." She thought back to his words and his gentle caress the night before they left for Wolf Medicine Island. This would be more than enough, she smiled, more than she could ever hope for.

Over the last year they had sat together throughout the preparation ceremonies and the descriptions of what to expect. "There will be a good deal of blood, but not enough to pass out." the Elders had warned. "The worst pain is at the beginning. Bite down on that bone whistle and blow hard." Their words hadn't seemed ominous at the time, not like tonight.

Just two weeks ago, she had watched as he practiced in the baseball field, twine pinned to his tee shirt

the other ends wrapped around the flagpole in left field. For buffalo skulls, he had tied two old carburetors around his ankles. Gene Montour had come out to beat the drum, leaving his precious Seven-Eleven for a couple of hours in the care of his brother.

"Hey Kate, watch this, Mick Jagger does the Sundance." She had shaken with laughter as she watched him gyrate his hips and play air-guitar, laughed even more at Gene's disapproving frown.

"Stop horsin' around Douglas. Think all I have to do tonight is watch you make an ass of yourself in front of your woman?"

If only he could make her laugh now, she thought. She cast her eyes over to the singers circled around a large drum, as they beat out the rhythm of a haunting chant. Gene Montour sat with them now, his brow knit in concentration, his voice tremulous, blending with the others.

Cathleen left the bonfire and the celebration early, heavy with anxiety and emotion, and made her way back to the tipi. She cocked her head in the direction of No'dinens' shack, hoping at least to catch a whiff of cedar smoke that she knew came from the sweatlodge. Its acrid signature found her nose and gave her a moment's solace.

"I was just about to come and get you," Mina smiled as she entered. "You'll need all your energy and more to get you through tomorrow."

As Cathleen looked into Mina's shining eyes, she realized she could no longer hold back the tears that had been lurking just below the surface, ever since she had watched Douglas follow the men up the path to No'dinens house that afternoon. She sobbed long and hard into Mina's shoulder. It felt like a year's worth of emotion, joy mixed with sorrow, pride mixed with anxiety.

"I'm so scared. What the if Elders botch it tomorrow? He could bleed to death in front of us."

"What makes you think the Elders don't know what they're doing?" Mina asked.

"No'dinens said they were rusty." she sniffed back.

"No'dinens. That old crow. He's been pulling tricks like that all his life." She stroked her hair as she spoke, brushed her tears away with a gnarled finger. "Listen to me, Waseya-Cathleen. Douglas is in good hands. Joe Gagewin will cut him. He's a surgeon from Minneapolis, as well as an Elder, been doing Sundances for the Lakota and the Anishina'abeg for twenty-five years."

Mina pulled her up so she could look into her eyes. "As for Douglas, he is ready. When I went up to the sweatlodge to bring them a pot of stew, Elijah told me he even refused the peyote they offered him, said he wanted to speak to his ancestors from here." She tapped her heart.

"They offered him peyote?" Cathleen gasped.

"Sure, peyote has always been Manitou to us. It is said that the Lakota first gave it to us and Tunka Shila gave it to them. It is only used for the most sacred of ceremonies, like the Sundance and then only by the dancers."

Mina shifted over to Cathleen's sleeping bag and undid the zipper. "Crawl into bed now and try to get some sleep. The sun will rise early and we will need to be at the Midewagon before it comes up."

It was still pitch-dark when Mina touched her shoulder. The birds were only beginning to chirp and move about in the trees outside the tipi. Cathleen stretched her arms into the darkness above her so that Mina could pull Nana's doeskin shift over her head. The women of the island had taken it from her shortly after

she had arrived and returned it only last night. The rows upon rows of little cowry shells that they had sewn into it rustled as Mina pulled it down over her hips. The cowl was heavy with beadwork flowers. The rose patterns on the front and back were over a hundred years old, but the fringe was new, another gift from the island women. Nana's leggings had been destroyed in the car crash, so the ones she pulled on were new and only sparsely beaded. That was okay; the shift covered most of them anyway, and there would be many long winter nights ahead that she could spend learning how to adorn them. She could feel Mina's warm smile behind her as she drew a brush through her hair and wove little plaits around her head. She tied beaded goosefeathers into each braid before coming round to face her.

"Let's see how you look." Cathleen stood up unprepared for how heavy the doeskin outfit was against her shoulders and turned slowly for Mina's inspection. "Yes," she nodded with excitement. "It's time to go."

The Midewagon was already teeming with activity when Cathleen and Mina stepped through the eastern door. For the most part, the people stood along the outer circle, dressed in traditional clothes, some in full regalia whispering to each other or just waiting for the ceremony to begin. Mina led her through the circle to a spot close to the poplar tree.

"I will stay with you to keep you in your circle, Waseya," Mina whispered. "Just put your hand on my arm and think only of dancing and being with Miskwagikino."

Cathleen nodded, her attention drawn to a table at the base of the tree where an Elder was arranging what looked like a scalpel, some long-necked scissors and wire in a metal pan filled with liquid. He was wearing surgical gloves. But then he was also dressed in buckskin chaps and a loincloth and his bare chest and face were painted with sun symbols. Near the table two buffalo skulls, their eye sockets outlined in red and black, stared emptily at the gathering crowd.

The whispering stopped abruptly with a single drumbeat and everyone's attention was drawn to the eastern entrance. No'dinens led the way, holding an eagle feather in his right hand and his gnarled walking stick with his left. His bowed legs moved slowly, with pain, but also with energy and pride. In stark contrast, Douglas walked behind him, his face painted with symbols of the red hand, and a swath of black ash across his eyes and nose like the mask of a raccoon. His hair was tied back in a ponytail; a single eagle feather dangled from it by a rawhide tether. He was naked except for a white breech cloth and a silver belt keeping it up. Elijah followed, painted as he was yesterday, but resplendent in beaded buckskin and feathers. Around his neck he wore medals and amulets. He carried a feathered coup stick, the symbol of his authority in White Earth.

They stopped almost directly in front of her, close enough so that she could see the scars on Douglas' back where the priest had beaten him with his metal belt buckle. Strange, she thought, she had never noticed them before. Cathleen stepped to the right so she could see his face as Elijah tied the buffalo skulls around his ankles. Douglas turned slightly and searched the crowd for her. She felt a rush of energy as their eyes met. He smiled broadly and gave a thumbs-up sign. Elijah stood up, removed one of the amulets from his neck and put it around Douglas. It was a bone whistle with a single bit of down attached to its outer edge.

"Ready?" The Elder wearing the surgical gloves spoke quietly. Douglas nodded. He closed his eyes and took the whistle between his teeth as the elder clasped gauze in the long-necked hemostat. He swabbed his chest with iodine. Red streaks ran down to his waist, carving a path for the blood that would follow.

The drum began a slow heartbeat. Cathleen closed her eyes and waited for the shrill whistle of the eagle bone. Her thoughts ran forward toward Douglas, toward the rest of her life:

"I am with you, Miskwagikino. We will dance as one. Give me your pain and your joy. Give me your hopes and your seed. I will travel with you to the other side of the hollow. Together we will find ourselves within the soul of our people and then we will be home."

The End

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