



Whisper Upon the Water

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Hard Shell Word Factory

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All characters in this book have no existence outside the imagination of the author, and have no relation whatever to anyone bearing the same name or names. These characters are not even distantly inspired by any individual known or unknown to the author, and all incidents are pure invention.

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Prologue

1868

THE GOVERNOR of New Mexico decreed that all Indian children over six be educated in the ways of the white man.

Indian Commissioner Thomas Morgan said: It was cheaper to educate the Indians than to kill them.

1880, Apacheria, Season of Ripened Berries

ISOLATED BANDS of colored clay on white limestone remained where the sagebrush was stripped from Mother Earth by sudden storms and surface waters. Desolate. Bleak. A land made of barren rocks and twisted paths that reached out into the silence.

A world of hunger and hardship. This is my world. I am Tanayia. I was born thirteen winters ago. My people and I call ourselves “Nde” this means “The People”. The white men call us Apache.

Chapter 1

ONLY A soft light from the east lit the dirt path when I rose from my blanket and dressed in my favorite buckskin outfit and moccasins. After combing my hair I stepped from my lodge and walked to the center of camp. Women from neighboring Apache bands, dressed in their best clothing, squatted around their campfires, patting tortillas and frybread. My relations traveled great distances to share in my coming of age ceremony. I was proud. I smiled and called out greetings.

“Many blessings, my child,” they replied, as I passed.

The sharp scent of crisp dough and the bitter scent of acorn stew floated on the cool air. My stomach grumbled in hunger. Large feasts, such as the one my people prepared today, were no longer common. Grandmother, however, remembered the long ago days when her band feasted at each change of season. She’d told me stories of times when food was plentiful. It was not so today.

I had not tasted beef or deer since my friend Yellow-Bird’s ceremony. My stomach rumbled again and I quickened my steps. Hours would pass before the next meal and I tried not to think of the tender meat roasting on the open fire, or the sweet cakes baking under the ash covered pit.

Suddenly, Yellow-Bird called out, “Tanayia.” As she ran, her long red dress flapped against her

leggings. “Wait! I will walk with you.”

“Thank you,” I replied. “I welcome your company.”

We remained quiet as we walked past the camp site. Yellow-Bird clutched a leather pouch to her chest as she walked. I kept my gaze focused on the dirt path that led up the steep hill.

My heart grew heavy for I knew the times we shared were coming to an end. Yellow-Bird’s wedding would take place in two moons and, soon, I too would have a husband.

“Are you afraid?” Yellow-Bird asked, her dark eyes large and questioning. “I was afraid. When the Gahans came I almost screamed.”

“I am a little frightened,” I admitted and shivered at the thought of the hooded face of the Gahans staring at me. But I did not tell Yellow-Bird this. I was frightened. Very frightened—frightened they would take my spirit from my body. I wasn’t a woman, a voice inside me whispered—I was still a child. I wanted nothing more than to run back to my lodge and bury myself in the soft comfort of my grandmother’s arms, to rest beside the warm fire and listen to my grandfather’s stories.

But I stood tall, my gaze raised toward the east and I held my tongue. I was Apache. I would not bring dishonor to my family by speaking of my fear. Instead I continued to walk and said, “The river was low this year, Yellow-Bird. But near its banks, see the small tree shimmer in the hard, thin glaze of the rising sun?”

Yellow-Bird sighed, and fell into step beside me. “Yes, I have seen the tree.”

“Grandfather says we are like those trees. We will grow strong and certain in our womanhood.”

“You always have an answer, Tanayia. I wish I could be sure.”

I paused upon the pathway and glanced at my friend. “No, I do not have all the answers. But I know you are no tender sapling who will break at the first snow of winter. You will grow strong and bear many children. Strong-Heart will be a good husband to you.”

Yellow-Bird smiled at the mention on her future husband’s name. “You are right. I am speaking foolishness. Ever since—”

“Do not speak of it,” I warned, glancing around to make sure no one heard. “Do not ever speak of it!”

I watched Yellow-Bird blink away her tears. She knew that seeing an owl was a bad omen for an Apache. Both the owl and the bear were forms that ghosts took to hurt people. Several weeks ago an owl’s feather fell from the sky and touched her shoulder.

“I’m sorry,” she whispered. “You are right. I have much to look forward to. Strong-Heart is brave and has much love for me.”

“And very good looking,” I added with a giggle.

Yellow-Bird blushed and handed me her package. “I made this shirt for you, Tanayia.”

My chest tightened and my eyes stung with hot tears. In the distance I heard the soft rattle of bean-

filled gourds and voices raised in singsong chants. I knew we must hurry. The medicine man had arrived for the Sunrise Ceremony.

“Thank you,” I replied.

“This is my blessing for strength and a long life,” she said.

After giving her a quick hug, I took the package she offered and headed toward the clearing. I knew we would see each other after the Four Day Ceremony but my heart felt empty. I worried the owl had marked my friend with its evil. A desperate sorrow filled my bones and I glanced back at Yellow-Bird to assure myself she was still well and unharmed.

I forced my thoughts back to the Ceremony. Now the Medicine Man, the Singers and the Drummers were gathered at the river. My hands trembled and my knees were uncertain as I neared the clearing. I stared at the beadwork on the shirt Yellow-Bird had given me. The glass beads winked yellow, blue and red in the soft camp light and hot tears stung my eyes. The sage-brush fires burned and their sweet fragrance filled the air.

It was time, I realized. It was this day I became a woman. As I looked around, my heart filled with joy.

Most of the camp had moved up the river for the ceremony. The older Apache sat upon their blankets. Little children peeped from rabbit-skin blankets, their soft laughter ringing through the air.

The fringe on my buckskin dress brushed against the top of my moccasins. I felt soft earth under my feet and the heavy sound of drumming reached my ears.

My aunt came to stand beside me, her heavily lined face a map of her many years. "Place the top Yellow Bird made for you over your dress," my aunt urged. "The Medicine Man is near. Hurry."

I felt the motion of the music flow over me, as she fitted the top over my head and brushed the soft skin over my dress. Three rows of bright beadwork were stitched along the yolk of the top under which narrow fringes were tied along the yolk. These fringes reached almost to my waist. At the bottom of each piece of fringe was fastened a small, thin cone shaped piece of tin. These pieces of tin brushed against one another as I moved, making a soft sound like a gentle spring breeze. My people know this will help ward off misfortune in times to come.

"The Sunrise Ceremony is of great importance," my aunt reminded me. She fastened an eagle feather on my head, its dark tip toward Mother Earth. "The dance promises that you will be strong and live to an old age. The feather of the eagle will help you live until your hair turns gray."

She fastened an abalone shell pendant upon my forehead, the sign of Changing Woman, mother of the Nde people.

I knew the most important thing my grandmother would do during the ceremony would be to massage my body. During this time she would give me all her knowledge. My eyes burned with tears as I looked at

my aunt, for I knew her thoughts. My mother did not have this sacred ceremony and she'd died before her long black hair was woven with gray.

I felt sad, but I drew strength in the knowledge, my mother would have rejoiced in this day.

My aunt smiled, her mouth wide with pride. "Now you will dance. You will dance not as a child, but as a woman."

I swallowed. "Yes," I replied softly.

I flexed my knees and fitted my movement precisely to the beat of the drums. There were three hard beats, and I knew I must make a slight bow and take small, mincing steps to the center of the dance ground. I swayed from side to side in time to the singing and drumming and stared into the sun. This symbolized the impregnation of White Painted Woman by Sun Father. Currents of heat warmed my face from the orange sunrise. I heard the faint rustle of leaves and I smiled. Soon would come the true test. Now was the time I must run to greet the sun.

One of the elders moved to the rise of the hill where he jabbed the base of a wooden staff firmly into Mother Earth. The staff stood sure, its bright wood a contrast against the hillside's blue-gray sage and new green grass. This is my sacred cane. One that was carved and blessed before grandfather adorned the yellow wood with quail feathers and metal bells. This cane is one that I will keep with me my entire life. A strong staff used for walking while I'm in my youth, and a sturdy friend to support me in my old age.

“Now!” My aunt said rushing to my side. “Now run as fast as you can around the sacred cane. Run so fast that evil will never catch you. Run, my child. Run!”

I ran. My steps fast and sure as I ran toward the sun. My heart and my ears pounded to each drum beat. I climbed the hill and each breath I took burned my chest and my throat tasted of copper.

My aunt, in a yellow calico dress, joined the run as I reached the last rise of the hill. She fell into step behind me. Soon my grandmother also ran behind me.

Suddenly the rain began, soft, uncertain drops at first. Then harder, until I heard the sound of rain drops hitting the earth. And my dress, which weighed ten pounds, got heavier and heavier. I lifted my skirt, and was surprised I didn’t fall. Still I ran. My feet beating lightly against the soft ground, the leather fringe of my dress slapping against my arms, I ran. I did not tire.

When the run was complete, I noticed the rain stopped and the heat of sunlight was once again upon my face.

Painted hides were tossed on the ground and I laid down upon my stomach. My aunt sat down beside me.

A singer raised his shaker gourd high in the air and brought the song to an end with a sound that was like rushing water.

My aunt kneaded my skin. I felt the hardness of Mother Earth against my body. The sharp scent of

pinon and dust filled by nostrils. My aunt's hands rubbed my shoulders in firm strokes. The movements were repeated until she reached the bottom of my feet. In this way I was molded into perfect womanhood.

The music began again. The soft, even tempo of the gourds, the hard throb of the drum, and the sweet light whistle of my uncle's wood flute filled the air.

Grandmother sat down upon the hides. "Now is the time we mold your future life," she said, touching my head and repeating a soft prayer. Then she, too, molded my flesh.

To me it seemed as if only moments had passed. But the sun was high overhead and I knew the ceremony was over for today.

"It is time to rest and prepare for the afternoon feasting." My aunt told me, as she helped me stand. "Later you will help carry the food to the Medicine Man's camp for blessing."

I nodded and followed her back to camp.

"We have much to do before tomorrow," she said.

Tomorrow I would become as the first mother on earth, White Painted Woman. I was afraid to say the words out loud, fearful of offending the Mountain Spirits.

Instead I cleared my throat and said, "The medicine man arrived three days past and he is making the brush shelter." I kept my fear from my voice and my aunt glanced at me. She did not say a word. We both knew this was the most dangerous part of the ceremony of becoming a woman.

“Grandmother made my dress during the time of falling leaves,” I told my aunt. I was not permitted to see my dress but I knew it was made of the softest buckskin and dyed yellow, the color of pollen. Sacred symbols, symbols that the wise women knew would protect me during life, were painted on my dress. And it was now four days that Old Woman had sang over my dress, praying for my safe passage.

“It is a beautiful dress. For this is a sacred ceremony. Tomorrow you will have all the powers of White Painted woman. Remember our people will come to you for blessings and good luck. This will be the most important day of your life.”

I nodded. Grandmother had instructed me to be patient. I knew I would sit in the wickiup I had made. I must be wise and keep my own counsel. I bit my lower lip, suddenly uncertain of the task before me.

“You will do well, Tanayia,” she said, a twinkle in her dark eyes. “White-Eagle completed his fourth raid, did he not? Your Grandfather talks of past hunts with White-Eagle. This is a good sign.”

I nodded and glanced at the ground, a rush of heat moving up my neck to my face. My aunt knew I had eyes only for White-Eagle, but I had not seen him in two winters. I worried he would no longer want me for his bride.

“Do not worry so, child,” she said, guessing my thoughts.

I blinked my eyes open and looked at her heavily lined face. Her dark eyes were filled with pride and love. My throat tightened with emotion and I wished I could tell my aunt how much she and Grandmother

meant to me.

My aunt brushed her calloused fingertips along my cheek. “There are no dark thoughts today—today is only to be filled with joy. Now, we must hurry or we will miss the feast.”

I smiled back. Both my aunt and I knew no man would call me a beauty. But I was pleasant looking and my grandfather said my voice sounded like a gentle bird’s morning song. And for White-Eagle this was enough. But tomorrow, I realized as my heart thrummed in excitement. I would be honored as White Painted Woman. And I would claim my place among my people. The Gahn—Crown Dancers—would paint me with corn-and-water paste. This paste would dry in the sunlight and I would appeared to be covered with clay. The Gahns would bless me with sacred corn pollen.

I would be a woman.

My mind focused on the next day as I went into my lodge to prepare for the feast. The fire had died down to only white-hot embers. Reaching for some twigs I stirred the coals and added a small branch to the fire. I glanced around my home taking in the familiar objects, grandmother’s cooking pots and neatly tied bundles of cooking herbs hung from a wooden ladder. I inhaled the sweet-heavy fragrance of sage and sweet grass. It burned my eyes. I reached for grandfather’s bow and quiver. Running my finger tips over the worn wood handle of grandfather’s bow, I was filled with sadness. How many times had I sat before this fire and listened to grandfather’s stories as he oiled or retied his bow? Soon, I knew, my life would be

very different.

Tomorrow's daylight would bring the Gahns—I knew their powers would protect me from evil. But I still feared their presence.

The Gahns traveled between the place of the Mountain Spirits where the Life Giver lived to where the Nde lived. The Mountain Spirits are protectors of the game animals, the horned animals. The Gahns, I knew, were holy men dressed in long buckskin shirts, high moccasins and black hoods under their carved headdresses. Their mortal legs and arms were covered with a white mixture and painted with sacred symbols. Sometimes deer antlers, a bear, or lightning were painted by the medicine man. They would howl and coo as they approached me, tipping their tall headdresses as they jumped, sidestepped, and turned in time to the singers and drummer.

I thought I would rest a while. My body was tired from the long run and many hours in the hot sun made me sleepy.

I snuggled into my blanket and closed my eyes. I would think of the Gahns later. Soon grandmother would wake me and I'd join in the feast.

It was not my grandmother's voice that awakened me later that afternoon, but several loud, harsh sounds. It sounded like the cracking of tree limbs under the heavy weight of snow.

Woman were screaming. Babies crying.

I jumped from my lodge and ran outside.

People were running about. Women holding babies to their breasts, tried to protect them from harm. Warriors gathered what weapons they could. Suddenly the air was filled with dirt and dust and flying bullets. I clutched the side of my wickiup and stared, too shocked to move.

“Get down!” Grandfather shouted at me.

I dropped to my knees. What was happening? Where was my aunt? My grandmother?

I was terrified, more afraid than I’d ever been in my life. This is a time of celebration, my mind shouted, but I could not make a sound.

Albuquerque Register

At the close of battle 35 Indians lay on the ground with their bows and quivers still clutched in their hands.

The Revolutionaries left no survivors in camp.

Chapter 2

MEN IN LIGHT clothing—Uniforms, Grandfather called them, were inside our encampment. I watched as our camp was over run by men riding large horses. Grey Bear, our bravest warrior, grabbed a large branch from the ground and swung at one of the riders. His aim was true and he unseated the rider. The man fell to the ground and Grey Bear was upon him, his hunting knife at the man's throat. Soon three other warriors followed Grey Bear's lead.

I crept toward the center of our camp, where my grandfather gathered the young children together. I knew he intended to get the children to the water where they could hide under the cattails and breath through hollow reeds. We had done this once many winters ago, when I was small, during the time the white soldiers came. I knew Grandfather needed my help, he could not move so many children unaided.

Bending low I hurried along the edge of the camp. Hidden by a thick covering of brush I circled the area. Dry needles of cactus scratched my face and several needles lodged in my left leg, but I hardly noticed. I was within a stone's throw from my grandfather. At that moment I heard the heavy beat of horse's hooves, glancing over my shoulder I saw three riders race from the protection of a cluster of tall trees. Before I had time to run, they were upon me.

I shouted at them to let me go.

They yelled back, their voices filled with hate. They closed the circle around me. Their wild cries sent shivers down my spine.

Gathering my skirt to my legs, I readied myself. Gauging the point of weakness, a brief space between their horses, I made for my escape. Every time I tried to dodge away, a horse was there to nudge me back toward to the center of the circle.

Flashing hooves and leering faces filled my vision. My heart pounded in fear and the bitter taste of copper filled my throat.

I whirled and darted between the horses, bumping against their hot lathered sides. The harsh, labored breathing of the animal filled my ears, and the smell of animal sweat and my own terror filled the air.

Again and again I tried to escape and was blocked. I ran and tried to break through the circle until I could only stand and gasp for breath.

All at once stark stillness filled the air, and an icy weight of hopelessness slithered down my spine. Glancing toward camp, I watched Grey Bear fall to the ground, his head split open by a blow from a rifle butt. Then Rides-on-Thunder fell beside him.

“No!” I screamed as my gaze locked on the man who had killed Grey Bear. The man brought his rifle to his shoulder and took aim. I knew his bullet was meant for my Grandfather. Shoving my weight against

one of the horses, I broke free of the circle and raced toward camp.

“Take cover!” Grandfather shouted to the remaining warriors, ushering the children to safety.

A gun shot cracked through the air like a falling tree and I saw the *Uniform* smile. I turned back toward my grandfather and saw him grab his chest, as he fell to the ground.

“Grandfather!” I stumbled to his side and knelt beside him, turning him onto his back. He lay still, his eyes open, blood flowing from the large hole left in his body.

The grit of dust from racing horses blurred my vision and filled my mouth. As I tried to stem the flow of blood, it was warm and sticky against my hands. My stomach heaved and I swallowed the bitter bile that rose in my throat.

“Grandfather, Grandfather,” I pleaded, “Do not die.”

My gaze scanned the village and my eyes filled with disbelieving tears. Women and children were sprawled on the ground. Yellow-Bird lay unmoving upon the trail we had walked early this morning.

My vision blurred and I cried out to the Creator, “Why is this happening? Why are these men killing my people?”

A man from behind me grabbed my arm, yanking me to my feet. I pulled against the grip of his dirty hand and kicked at him. I heard him groan and I struggled harder. “Let me go!” I screamed. “Let me go. Murderer! Killer of women and children!”

I had to get free. My grandfather was dying and my grandmother and my aunt were injured.

Again, gun fire filled the air. The sick smell of blood and of the dying carried its stench to me on the soft breeze and, behind it, the sounds of desperate screams.

I aimed my mouth at the tall man's brown wrist and bit until I tasted blood. I had to make him stop killing people!

The man shouted to the *Uniforms* in Spanish.

I struggled more. He grabbed my shoulders and shook me until I could no longer stand. Then he bound my wrists behind my back with narrow strips of rawhide, cutting the circulation off to my hands. I parted my lips to scream and he shoved a dirty rag in my mouth.

"Silence," he ordered.

It tasted foul. Gagging from the odor of the cloth, I kicked and cursed at him as best I could. He responded with a grunt when my foot connected with his knee and he slapped my face with the back of his hand, nearly knocking me to the ground. A hot sensation of fire engulfed my cheek and a hollow ringing sounded loud in my ears.

Blackness came upon me from pain and terror until it threatened to overtake me. My legs collapsed. Bile began to rise in my throat with every breath. I swallowed again and again to keep the nausea down. I am Nde, I thought as the sound of horses hooves echoed around me. The blood of Cochise runs in my

veins. I will never give surrender to these killers.

Pushing aside another wave of pain, I staggered to my feet. The murderers would be punished for what they had done!

“El Capitán!” One of the men shouted.

My captor glanced toward the encampment and gave the man instructions, pointing at the lodges.

Before I could protest, he grabbed me and slung me atop a horse. My breath rushed from my lungs in a hard gasp and my ribs throbbed in unbearable pain, as I tried to seat myself. I ground my teeth and held back a moan. If I only had my knife....

El Capitán tied my wrists to the saddle horn and mounted his horse. I twisted around and watched in horror as two men grabbed the very branches our warriors had used as weapons. They fastened them into torches and touched them to the dying embers of our camp fire.

The torches caught and a harsh flame engulfed each tip. One by one the Uniforms waved the torches at the base of our lodges. Within seconds my village was a world of smoke and white-hot flames.

My home! My People! The roaring flames echoed in my ears as it covered the last lodge. The waves of heat seared into the breeze. A numbing cold fell upon my body. I looked around as if seeing through someone else’s eyes.

The Uniforms watched and laughed, before turning their horses toward the south.

My mount moved along behind the riders. Helpless, I swayed and bobbed with each muscle the animal used. I waited for the moment, I too, would die—but it never came. The Uniforms kept me tied to my mount and led me away, until my village was no more than a memory in the distance.

During the first day, the horses made the difficult climb along an uneven pathway into the wilderness. Here El Capitán skirted the many box canyons that would confuse an unfamiliar traveler. My captor seemed to know the canyons possessed only dry springs, rattlesnakes, and was the home of demons.

My dry lips cracked into a bitter smile. Perhaps this was my captor's home. For whenever I looked into his dark eyes, I knew I'd gazed into the soulless heart of a demon!

Miles and miles of chaparral blocked the way. Catclaw and cacti tore at my buckskins and scratched my unprotected legs and arms until they bled.

Before darkness fell my captors looked for a place to camp for the night. They found a section of the rocky hill where the ground was even and free from boulders.

El Capitán dragged me from my horse and ordered me to sit upon the rocky ground. He forced me to draw my knees to my chest, I watched him bind my ankles together so I could not escape.

His foul smelling breath fanned against my neck, and I repressed a shudder. I would kill him if I had the chance. What, I wondered, were his plans for me?

El Capitán seemed to sense my thoughts, he looked at me, his narrow lips curling into a sneer, while

his hand encircled my wrist.

I felt his hot flesh against mine and jerked away from his touch. “Filthy murderer,” I spat.

“Infidel,” he responded, pulling my arms so that he could tie the bindings of my wrists to my ankles. Satisfied, he gave the rawhide a vicious yank.

I gave a sharp gasp of pain.

“Buenos noches,” he said, then stood and returned to his men.

It was upon the second day when shock no longer dimmed my senses, I realized these murderers considered me a captive.

El Capitán’s captive! Never. No enemy took the Nde as a slave, or turned them against their own people.

The horse sensed my fear and became skittish. I watched the animal’s sharp hooves bite into the sandy soil and I knew if I fell I would be trampled to death. But the moment I saw the hazy shadow of Cochise’s stronghold, against the distant mountains, I knew I must make my final bid for freedom.

I sucked in a deep breath and patiently worked at my bindings. Back and forth I moved the leather, trying to push the narrow strips up over the saddle horn. My wrists were still raw, but they’d ceased to hurt me. Hope filled my heart with each mile, this was the land of my ancestors. If I was to be free I must act soon.

El Capitán had not re-tied my bindings since mid-day when the sun was high and the air dry and hot. It was evening now. The air was cooler and filled with the rich heady fragrance of almonds, and the dampness of coming rain.

I glanced at my captors. Their concentration was set on the uneven pathway that led to the bouldery ridgebone of the mountains, not upon me.

I pulled at my wrists and felt the leather give. My heart pounded hard in my chest and I felt light headed. Quickly, I slid the leather over the saddle horn and freed my hands.

I bit back a hiss of pain when the returning circulation sent stinging needles into my blood starved hands.

Grabbing the saddle horn with trembling fingers, I steadied myself. I leaned forward to make certain the long sleeves of my dress hid my wrists from the view of El Capitán and his men.

We reached the point where the trail crests. The light was fading, and the harsh wind howled along distant ridges. This was the perfect moment to make my move.

Soundlessly, I slid from my horse. The animal broke stride for only the length of a crow's cry. I watched the line of horses continue along the pathway toward the plateau.

I crouched beside a covering of brush, low to the ground and unmoving. I listened to the sounds of the wind, and the cry of a hawk circling the mountain peak.

Slowly I crept along the brush, away from the setting sun. Sharp stones bit into my palms and my legs burned with effort. I knew if I got far enough away El Capitán would not find me in the shadows.

The stronghold. For as long as the rivers flowed, the stronghold had been a place of safety for my people. Three days would be the distance on foot. I was tired and weak, but I knew I could make it.

I squinted against the fading light, and crept along the rocky ground, careful not to disturb the gravel or signal my escape from El Capitán.

A rock spur jutting over the face of the peak, made the perfect hiding place, and I quickened my steps. My hands pushed aside the heavy brush obscuring my path and I felt my heartbeat pound against my ears.

When I reached my hiding place, my lungs were burning with effort and white spots danced before my eyes. The slanty little perch had enough room for me to hide under. My heart began to pound with hope and I felt renewed strength enter my tired legs as I pushed myself between the ground and the smooth underside of rock.

Soon I would be free!

The wind whipped against the brush and grainy pellets of hail began to pepper the ground. I heard the startled cry of several horses and the shout of the Uniforms as their mounts shied and refused to continue along the path.

El Capitán shouted, and I knew I was no longer safe. This time if I was found, he would kill me!

Wedging myself under the rock perch, I tucked my dress beneath me, suddenly fearful that the beadwork would catch a glimmer of fading light.

I prayed to the Creator, as I listened to the hoof beats pounding against the ground.

The wind howled louder and louder. The sky filled with dark clouds and rain began to fall. Cold rain, white against the darkness of the sky.

My heart pounded and my mind became numb with both cold and fear. If he caught me, he would kill me.

I did not want to die!

I peeped through the narrow slit between my perch and the ground. El Capitán rode his horse, surely along the mountain. Slowly. Patiently. He guided his mount in circles, scanning the ground for signs of my passage.

Several of his men dismounted and walked in different directions covering the ground on both sides of the pathway.

I knew they were gauging the land.

One of the men gave a shout of triumph.

I was certain they'd found the spot where I'd jumped from my horse.

Suddenly, I heard the sound of slate and gravel rushing down the mountainside. It was as if the

Creator answered my prayers. The anguished cry of a rider and his horse filled the air.

One of the men had gone over the ridge.

I watched El Capitán move toward the rise.

I crawled from my hiding place and pulled my beaded top over by head and tossed it to the ground. My throat ached and my eyes burned with unshed tears, I knew Yellow-Bird's gift must be left behind. The top's shiny beadwork could reflect the starlight and El Capitán would find me. Still, my heart felt like it was breaking when I turned away.

With one quick, burst of speed I snaked along the stands of sagebrush toward the dim blue silhouettes of the stronghold.

I remember the passage of days and of nights. I could not find the stronghold nor any other bands of Nde. I was alone and afraid.

Then I heard the distance sound of cattle and the shouting of men. It was many days before I recalled anything else.

"SHE'S JUST a child, poor thing," a woman's voice said.

I knew nothing of her words. But I understood her kindness as she leaned close to my face; looking by candlelight at my wound. A cool hand touched my forehead as someone lifted me from the wagon bed and

carried me into the fortress.

During the weeks that followed my body healed and I regained my strength.

I learned I was the only one who survived the massacre at Frozen River Camp. The only living member of my band! I had watched my family and friends die.

In time I came to understand the white woman's words. It was then that I was told I was to live at the white people's school.

School. Such a strange word, I thought, as I climbed into the wooden wagon. It seemed a word of great importance to the woman who'd bathed my wounds and fed me. She'd made me repeat the word over and over. And even now as she bid me good-bye, she smiled when she repeated the word. I carried that smile with me until I reached the school.

Annual Report of the Department of Interior

Gathered from the cabin, wickiup and tipi, partly by threats, partly by bribery, partly by force, they are induced to leave their families, to enter these schools and take upon themselves the outward appearance of civilized life.

Chapter 3

CLIMBING OUT of the wagon, I was herded, along with ten other girls, to stand in a line outside of the White man's lodge. One of the first girls in the line was very young, and clutched the hand of her older sister. Judging from the long deerskin dresses with flared skirts and wide, long sleeves, trimmed with fringe that they wore, I knew the two were Comanche. I eyed the bits of metal and beads sewn on the front of the older girl's dress and glanced down at her buckskin moccasins and wondered whose camp they had raided to gain these adornments.

Comanche. The hatred between our two tribes ran as deep as the gullies that cut through my people's lands.

Thieves and raiders, grandfather called them. Grandfather spoke of the old days when the Comanche had driven the Nde from the southern plains. The Comanche knew the value of our old lands; the winters mild and the summers abundant in game and harvests. Their men wore their hair very long, rubbed bear grease into it, then parted it down the center from the forehead to the neck. Afterwards they braided their hair; sometimes the men even painted their scalp with yellow, red, or white clay—like their women, grandfather sneered.

I smiled at the memory and a lightness, for the first time in many sleeps, lifted my heart. Grandfather had loved telling the old stories. And I had always begged to hear more.

“Nde,” Grandfather had often said, “wear their hair like true warriors.”

Our men sliced their hair to shoulder length, securing it with a cloth strip around their forehead. Warriors did not spend hours beautifying their hair as if they were old women looking for husbands.

If grandfather was alive he would caution me against these two girls, and many of the others I saw around me. Ute. Cheyenne. Crow. I recognized their dress, but several others were unfamiliar to me.

I narrowed my gaze at each one of them, but it would be the Comanche I would watch more than the others. I would make certain I never turned my back to them, for they could not be trusted.

As I watched, the older girl leaned over and spoke to the younger one. This angered one of the white women and she struck the older girl upon the cheek. I stared at the action, not understanding. What type of place is this school? I wondered. Even though the Comanche were the sworn enemy of my people, my heart felt sadness at this act.

The Nde never hit their children. If a child did something wrong he was guided with love. If he disobeyed again one of the elders spoke to him. In this way he realized his actions brought shame not only upon himself, but his relations. And even the Comanche with all their fierceness, never harmed their own children and seldom those of their captives.

The sun beat down upon my head and my legs and my back ached from standing. I longed to return to my people's camp. Even the sounds of this place hurt my ears. Children were crying. A loud clang-clang came from a tall building in the distance. It was late morning but I didn't detect the aroma of game roasting on a fire, or stew bubbling from a pot. I was confused. The woman at the fort had offered kindness. I had thought this school would offer the same.

My stomach grumbled, and my throat was dry. After traveling such a distance, the Nde always offered water and food. Was it not the custom of these people to do the same?

I pushed back an onrush of fear, what if I could never return home? What if I must stay in this place all my days? No. My mind would not allow such thoughts to take root. I would rest. I would find out what this school was and then I would find a way home.

After a time, the line I stood in moved forward and I heard the small ones begin to cry. As I entered the wooden lodge, I realized why.

Upon the floor lay twenty sets of braids. One of the older white teachers grabbed a girl and sliced off her long hair. The girl struggled and the women, both dressed in long, dark dresses, called the girl a heathen. I did not know what the word meant, but I understood the tone, it was one of captor to captive. I felt a small shiver of worry crawl across my shoulders and I fingered my long hair. Soon, I too, would lose my hair and follow the others into the foul smelling tub.

After what remained of the girl's black hair was tied at the base of her neck, she was stripped naked and placed in a large metal tub. One woman held her, while the other dumped a strong smelling water on her body and scrubbed her with a brush. Later I learned this water was called alcohol and the teachers used it upon the Indians because of the germs.

I looked around the lodge and spied a girl about my own age. She was Indian, but her manner of dress confused me. The girl wore a mud brown colored fabric dress and black shoes that appeared to weigh heavy upon her feet.

This girl moved beside the tallest woman, handing her a large piece of cloth as she said, "Teacher would you like me to help you?"

Her voice was soft and musical like the Navajo, but her language was that of the White teacher's.

Before the teacher could reply, the child in the tub let out a scream of outrage and doused the front of the woman's dress with foul smelling water. "Mary Billy take this one. Dress her and give her to Sister Enid. Tell her she is to be disciplined."

Mary Billy hesitated, "Sister Enid?" she questioned, a thread of fear in her voice. Glancing at the frightened child, she asked, "Today?"

The woman glared down at her, and her spine locked in outrage. "Do you question my orders, girl?"

Mary Billy reached for the child, lifted her out of the tub and wrapped her in the cloth. "No, Ma'am.

I will take her to Sister Enid.” The child seemed to sense a kinship between herself and the strangely dressed Indian girl. Immediately she quieted.

The child resembled a small, frightened creature as she clung to Mary Billy’s neck. I watched as Mary Billy walked the length of the lodge toward the doorway. As she came nearer I saw her dark eyes appeared empty, as if her soul had shriveled up and simply died.

I looked away, not wishing to see into her soul. I suddenly feared for myself. The Gahns had visited my camp but my ceremony was not complete. There was no medicine man to pray for my safe return. Would I too, shrivel up and die?

The line moved forward and soon, it was my turn.

I stepped before the tall woman, and gave not a cry of protest when I felt the cold blade of the scissors at my neck, or the cruel yanking of my long thick hair at the scalp. I watched my hair fall to the wooden floor until it formed a mountain of raven’s wings. I uttered not a sound from my lips, nor did a tear form in my eye, only my heart beat, like a righteous drum of anger, and my soul mourned for all that I had lost.

My gaze locked with the blue eyes of the teacher as I shed my clothing and stepped into the cold metal tub. Hers were the eyes that lowered first. And I knew as surely as the stinging water bled into my skin and the burning anger of the brush clawed against my arm—I had made my first enemy.

My people want to be friends with your people, but I ask you this one question, Why cannot Apaches have some country of their own? This country where we have hunted for all time does not belong to the Mexicans. They cannot sell it to the United States. It belongs to the Apaches.

—Mangas Coloradas, Apache Chief

Chapter 4

I REMEMBER dressing in the dark scratchy clothing the teacher handed me, and sliding the heavy shoes upon my feet. Afterwards I was taken from that room and I was placed in a second room. I do not know for how long in clock time I waited, but I was very cold and hungry. Outside there were clouds and sunshine, but I felt I was all alone in this strange world. I felt that my spirit was like a fledgling eagle, perched on a tall craggy cliff, alone and frightened. I could only trust that the creator would give me wings so that I, too, could fly to safety.

But soon, four moons passed and during this time I came to learn many things. Most importantly was, speaking my language near a teacher earned me a swift slap across my face. I was expected to learn the white teacher's words. I was not to make mistakes nor disobey the teacher's commands.

"The punishment," Mary Billy whispered in halting Apache while she stood in the shadows, "is to be put in the attic. It is a dark place filled with small rooms. Like caves in the mountains."

I shivered and glanced over my shoulder to make certain no one overheard us. Our mountain caves were alive with ghosts—dark holes filled with evil. I could not imagine what this attic held, nor did I wish to find out.

I discovered everything in this school was done by the ringing of bells atop a tall white building. This was very difficult for me. I did not understand the reason for the bells, or why the white teachers read the face of the large clock. I learned of White man's time and days of the week.

The Nde lived by the seasons, by the passage of moons and of sleeps. We ate when we were hungry and we rested when our bodies told us it was time.

The Nde are resourceful and my grandparents taught me well. They told me the only way to defeat the enemy is to learn his way and discover his weakness. And so I learned by observation.

1880, The Season of Swimming Ducks

EACH OF us were assigned duties that we were to do everyday after the class bell rang. My task was the washing of clothes.

First I must fill the large metal tub with hot water from atop a wood burning stove. The metal buckets were very heavy as I carried them the length of the room. I took great care not to burn myself or catch the long sleeves of my dress in the fire. To this water I added a foul smelling powder and six arms full of dirty clothing.

“Use this,” Nellie Poor Bear said, handing me a small stool. “Stand on top so your back will not hurt. Go ahead, take it.”

Nellie was one of the older students, she spoke in a soft voice and her words were lisped. Though I did not understand many of her English words, I understood the kindness in her voice.

I placed the stool next to the tub.

“Stand on top.”

“Stand?”

She patted the top of the stool and lifted up one foot and then the other.

“Like this. Right foot. Left foot. Up.”

I frowned and she repeated her actions.

Suddenly I understood what she wanted. Carefully I balanced myself upon the stool and tossed the final armful of laundry into the tub.

“Good. Now use the paddle to stir the clothes.” Removing a long wooden stick from the hook on the wall, she shoved the wide end of the paddle into the tub.

“Paddle?”

“Yes. Stir like this. Sister Enid says the clothes must be clean.”

I watched her slosh the water inside the tub. Over, under and then around the small mountain of

laundry, Nellie Poor Bear moved the narrow paddle. Steam rose from the water.

“Be careful. The water is very hot.” She said, rolling up my sleeves before pushing the paddle into my hands.

“Stir the clothes. Harder. Push. Lift the shirts up like this so the water runs underneath.”

I pushed the end of the paddle under a white shirt. The paddle rose to the top of the water. I was very strong for my size, still I could keep the paddle under the water for only a short time. Soon I discovered, resting the handle on edge of the tub and leaning against the paddle, made the task easier to perform.

Nellie Poor Bear watched and nodded her approval.

“Do you understand?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“You must be quick. Sister Louisa is coming.”

“Teacher?”

“Yes.”

“Sister Louisa will not care that this is your first day...”

Glancing over my shoulder I saw the teacher called Sister Louisa. She walked slowly around the room, her skinny back straight, her bony fingers poking at each student. Her shrill voice, echoed in the large room.

“You, Nellie Poor Bear, stop dawdling. Get back to your station. I won’t have you doing anyone else’s work!”

“I only meant—”

“Don’t argue with me girl. Everyone pulls their weight in this school.”

“Yes, Sister.”

Nellie Poor Bear gave me a worried look before scurrying back to her ironing board.

My throat went dry and my heart pounded against my chest as Sister Louisa glared at me. Why did Sister Louisa look at me with such hate-filled eyes?

I pushed the paddled hard into the scalding water and concentrated upon my task. I did not wish to anger this teacher.

“You, girl,” Sister Louisa said, coming to stand beside me. “Stay on task. I want the clothes clean. Clean. Do you understand me, girl?”

“Yes, Sister.”

“Hurry up. The others are behind in their work because of your laziness.”

“Yes, Sister.”

I tried to move the paddle as Nellie Poor Bear had shown me. The water swirled and the shirts thumbed against the tub.

“Stupid girl!”

My hands trembled as I gripped the paddle. Sister Louisa poked at my shoulder then pointed at the water.

“Watch what you’re doing, girl.”

“Yes, Sister.”

“Heathens. You come to this school knowing nothing of cleanliness. I’m expected to train you.”

Sister Louisa thumped the end of the paddle with her open palm. I felt the wood shake under my hands and the soapy water sloshed up the side of the tub. I dared not move. If the tub tipped over the hot water would burn us all.

Sister Louisa gave a snarl of disgust.

“Don’t stare at the water, girl. Get to work!”

“No.”

“Girl, what did you say?”

“No, Sister.” I blinked back the tears. I spoke few English words, but I needed for her to understand. Frustration caused me to bite the inside of my lip to stay silent, I dared not speak my language.

Again, the metal tub rocked in protest as Sister Louisa pushed the paddle into the water. I heard a stream of water sizzle a path to the floor.

Sister Louisa must stop!

“No touch,” I shouted, my hand gripping her wrist.

Sister Louisa gave a snarl of disgust and flung my hand away.

There was silence, almost absolute except for the scuffle of boots and a cough. No student dared to move. Or to speak.

I watched Sister Louisa’s face turn red and she shook with anger. She gripped my wrists. Her fingers were like a bundle of broom straws, thin and dry, but the strength of them was unnatural.

“You dare to defy me?”

I did not reply. I could only stare at her.

Sister Louisa’s skin was deadly pale. Her eye sockets, two deep lashless hollows in her skull. I watched her brown lips move, but heard only a jumble of words.

Grandfather had warned me of the *Pindah*—the white eyes. But he had never told me they hated children.

Suddenly the teacher released me with such force, I stumbled to the floor. My stomach pitched and hot tears burned in my eyes. She looked at me sharply, and her grin turned strange.

“Sister Enid will hear of this, girl. Do not cross me again.” she said, shoving the paddle back into my hands. “Now get back to work!”

I did not blink, I did not speak as I watched the teacher walk away. Still, something howled in my mind. Loss and darkness. I knew I must stay strong. Somehow I would find a way back to Apacheria.

All day my thoughts strayed to Apacheria as I washed the clothes and I tried to understand the ways of this school.

The White teachers had strange thoughts about this cleanliness. My people bathed in a free flowing river and we used herbs and flowers to scent our body and hair. Our trade cloth clothing were washed in the same manner and laid upon the shrubs to dry.

If our buckskin dresses and leggings became dirty, we placed the clothing next to a hill of large ants. Ants cleaned the leather of all dirt and oils. Afterwards the leather was brushed and ready to wear once more.

I gazed at the swirling water beneath my paddle and blinked as the smell of foul wash powder stung my eyes. Sweat trickled down my spine and along my forehead and I gave a bitter laugh. Soon I would be as foul smelling as the water I stirred.

Grabbing a forked stick I removed the dripping shirts into a second tub for another girl to rinse, before I emptied the large tub in the same manner I had filled it. Then once again I repeated my earlier actions.

Within two sleeps I learned to hate this task.

1880, The Season of Gathering Corn

IN APACHERIA, my world, there are many colors on the mountains, and the earth is bright with clay and with sand. Red and blue. Sage and sky. Spotted horses that graze in a dark wildness in the hills beyond. The land is strong. It is filled with beauty and quietness of spirit. It is home.

Here, dawn is the ringing of the school bell and I see only darkness all around me. I feel only an emptiness within my heart and fear that I will never return to my Apacheria world. The world I dream about. My soul once soared with the freedom of an eagle and the wildness of a deer; but now my soul is like the dry, broken lumps of soil and rock that circles the white man's school. Each morning, as I climb from my bed, my bare feet upon the hard, ice-cold floor, I shiver from both the cold and the fear peace will never again be mine.

I finish dressing and follow the other girls outside the building. We move one by one. The small ones are the last to tumble out of their beds and dress. Careful not to be discovered speaking their own language, the older Comanche girl, Anna Thunder, speaks soft words of encouragement to her young sister, Fawn.

Mary Billy and Nellie Poor Bear are in the other dormitory. They are the only students I have spoken

to since coming to this place.

Linda White Lance takes hold of Vida Graycloud's hand and helps the young girl find her lost shoe. Though the Kiowa girl and I arrived upon the same day, I feel none of her ease at being here. Nor do I know how to make friends in this place.

Vida sits upon the floor next to a girl her own age. Each giving the other a toothless grin they race to finish dressing before the second bell sounds.

Soon, the young ones are finished and rush out the door and find their place in one of the six lines of waiting Indian students.

I gaze all around me and see sixty-five girls and young women dressed as one great tribe of starched black dresses. Faded white cotton underwear cover our red skin beneath our clothing and heavy black shoes are tied upon our feet. A tribe of White man's Indians, I think with a bitter smile.

Sister Enid, the head mistress, leads this school by both her rules and her example. Two of the younger teachers try to show kindness, but Sister Enid refuses to allow it.

"Take the Indian out of the child," Sister Sarah says each morning before we march. What I wonder, will be left of us if they do this thing?

Straight like trees, unmoving like a fat rabbit testing the air for the scent of a hungry hunter, in the silence of the dawn all of us stand, awaiting Sister Sarah's orders.

“Students ready...Forward march. Left...Right...Left...” Sister Sarah calls out in her shrill, loud voice.

We obey, as we have obeyed for many months. Each of us have learned that Sister Sarah and Sister Enid deal out punishment with a generous hand.

I listen to the crunch of shoes upon the ground and the sound of my own breaths, harsh in the cool air. I obey Sister’s Sarah’s words. I remain in line as we march across the school yard. Again and again, we march, until my ankles ache from the heavy weight of my shoes.

I have learned many English words while sitting in the classroom each day, but in my heart I hear only Apache.

With each step, my soul begs me to return home. I miss my grandparents. I miss the comfort of my warm fire, the softness of my fur robes. I miss my people. My aunt’s corn soup. Grandfather’s stories. My eyes search the morning sky for the flash of sunlight and its harsh yellow glare that is sunrise at my home. I even long for the shine and glitter of ice against a gray cloudy sky and horses drinking at the crooked line of the river that circle my village. The joyous sound of Yellow-Bird’s laughter as we run to greet the warriors. And White Eagle. I miss his smile of welcome and the touch of his strong hand against mine when we stand beside my grandfather’s lodge.

I know these times are gone forever and I swallow against the coldness that lances down my spine. I

close my eyes to push the burning tears from my eyes. And fight back a sob of pain at the heavy aching sorrow crushing my chest.

Always. Always, the memories of home are with me.

The heavy clapping of walking boots, wakes me from my memories, and I know that Sister Sarah walks beside me. I scrub the tears from my face and bite my lip to still the quiver. It is all I can do to keep the tears from raining down my face. Why? I ask the Creator, am I a held captive in this terrible place? Is it not enough that all my people have died?

“You, girl,” Sister Sarah said, as she walks beside me. “Eyes straight ahead,” she orders. “March!”

I step more quickly, but my vision is blurred from my tears and my steps are not sure. Left. Right. Left. I try to keep the pace.

Still she is dissatisfied.

“No. Stupid girl,” she shouts. “Lift your legs higher. Keep your shoulders back,” Sister Sarah says, shoving me forward. “Do not fall behind. Faster. Faster, girl.”

I nearly stumble, but I keep my eyes straight ahead, grinding my back teeth together to hold back a scream of rage. No one brings a hand against a Nde. No one. Still, I have learned to hold my tongue. To raise my voice against Sister Sarah will only bring her punishment upon me.

I shake with anger, but I remain silent. It is my fear of the attic, not the woman, which holds me

silent.

Soon Sister Sarah grows tired of ordering me and steps to the middle of the school yard where she can watch us.

After two more circles around the yard, Sister Sarah tells us to wash up and go into the dining room.

I fall back allowing the others to rush before me. I do not want to show weakness.

“Why do you wait?” Mary Billy asks, walking beside me.

“I have seen the others,” I whispered in Apache. “The way they lick their plates like puppies, trying to blunt the edges of their hunger. Sister Sarah and Sister Enid watch too. They watch the bullies steal the weak girls food. The small ones go hungry, Mary Billy, and this brings a smile to Sister Enid’s lips. If Sister Sarah knows that my stomach twists with hunger she will use this against me. She will tell Sister Enid. No Nde gives their enemy a weapon to use against them.”

“You are right, Tay. But I must leave you, for Sister Enid expects me to oversee the others,” she said before running toward the kitchen doorway where Sister Sarah stood, waiting.

I find my place in line. It reaches from the kitchen to the house of worship. I know if any food remains it will be hard and cold.

Sunrise is soft against the morning sky, and the oil lamps in the kitchen cast a harsh light in the doorway. Dampness is in the air and cool dew from the grass brushes against my long skirt and I feel it on

the skin of my calves as I slowly move toward the kitchen. In the months that I've lived here I have grown familiar with the manner in which the school is run.

The dining room is run by Sister Louisa and Sister Kathleen. They pretend not to listen to our talking and laughter, and as long as Sister Enid is not nearby we can eat our meal without the threat of beatings.

On Monday breakfast was cornmeal mush. Tuesday I ate rice and raisins. Wednesday was the breakfast of oatmeal. Thursday cornbread and milk. Friday was fish. Saturday was left over from the week mixed together. Sunday was oatmeal with raisins or sometimes nuts. In this manner I learned the days of the week.

One of the young Ute girls moves beside me. Her brown eyes are hollow from lack of sleep and hunger. I think of the children of my village and take her soft hand in mine. I notice she is trying not to cry, but as we near the kitchen a large Navajo girl pushes her aside.

I glare at the Navajo girl and she takes a step back. The child moves closer to me. I feel the warmth of her small body through my cotton skirts.

Reaching for two tin bowls and metal spoons I guide the child so that she clutches my skirt. Slowly we walk along one wall where the large pots of oatmeal are placed.

When I arrive at the front of the line, a girl with crooked, brown teeth, ladles a thick lump of the cereal into my bowl. I hand her a second bowl and she frowns before glancing over her shoulder at Sister

Kathleen.

“One, girl. One.”

I glanced down at the Ute girl and say, “For her.”

Quickly the serving girl fills the second bowl and shoves it into my hand. The Ute girl grabs two tin cups from a table and holds them still as Mary Billy takes a pitcher of water and fill each cup to the top.

There are sixteen long tables of a faded green color flanked by benches of the uncertain shade of gray.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

The breakfast bell rings.

Then with all the swiftness I can gather, I look for a narrow space on the crowded benches. I squeeze in the middle of the third table. I learned weeks ago not to sit upon the end of the bench where you can be shoved to the floor. The young one watches me and silently seats herself beside me.

The child stares at me with wise eyes.

“Thanks-you,” she whispers.

Clutching her spoon in her tight little fist, she shovels lump after lump of cereal into her mouth.

I take a bite of the cold cereal and tell my insides it is food. I wash the thick lump down with a sip of water. It is better than yesterday’s breakfast I tell myself as I stare into the gray mound. The rice had something the teachers called wheebles and the raisins also had small pieces of dirt. This meal is only cold

and without taste.

I glance down at the young one and choke down another bite. I take pleasure in knowing the child will not go hungry today.

Great Spirit—I want no blood upon my land to stain the grass. I want it all clean and pure, and I wish it so, that all who go through among my people may find it peaceful when they come, and leave peacefully when they go.

—Ten Bears, Yamparika Comanche

Chapter 5

“ANNA THUNDER, you will pay dearly for your disobedience!” Sister Enid slapped the flat of her palm against the desk top. “When I tell a student to recite, everyone is to participate.”

I stiffened against the wooden back of my chair and held my breath. Sullen silence from the Comanche girl was a daily ritual. Never before had she challenged the teacher in front of so many students. Hatred twisted Sister Enid’s prune face in fury. “I demand an apology.”

Anna Thunder remained silent.

With her back arched and her scrawny neck stretched its full length, Sister Enid marched to the back of the room. Her heavy shoes sounding like horse’s hooves on the brightly polished wooden floor. Grabbing Anna Thunder by the arm, the teacher yanked the girl from the chair. Dragging her toward the hallway, she said, “Two days in the attic for you. No food. Only water. Afterwards, I’ll wager, you’ll remember your manners.”

During the days which followed, all the students spoke in whispers about Anna Thunder. All wondered what had happened to her. None dared to ask Sister Enid. Some said she was being starved and beaten. Others said she had died and the Sisters had buried her beneath the church floor.

On the morning of the third day, while the other girls were marching in the exercise yard, Sister Sarah ordered me to remain inside.

“You, girl.” Sister Sarah said. “Move to the bed next to the wall. Take your belongings with you.”

I kept my gaze lowered though I felt the harsh voice scrape along my nerves. Hate, strong and hot, surged in the teacher’s blood. She was looking for a reason to punish me. I held my tongue. Sister Sarah’s hate for me, and my own hate for her and Sister Enid, made it difficult to remain silent.

I had learned over my many months at the school not to show my hatred for the Whites. Hatred got me nowhere. Hatred got Anna Thunder two days in the attic. I saw no reason to join her.

I, like all Nde, fought many battles to survive. When I stood my ground in this White world, it would be of my time and my choosing.

“Yes, ma’am,” I said, forcing the words through the ball of emotion in my throat. Each bed had a small trunk for storage strapped underneath. Pulling out my belongings, I carried them to the other bed. This bed was against the wall, below a window. I could feel a draft from the thin glass and shivered. It would be cold here. I glanced up at Sister Sarah and saw her smile.

“Be quick about it,” she said, tapping her foot. “I have more important matters to attend to.”

I looked upon my belongings and felt anger wash over me. Among my own people I would be shamed by such lack of property. When I was in my grandfather’s lodge I had fine buckskin clothing and

grandmother sewed bright dresses for me from our trade cloth. In this school I had a black skirt and white blouse. My undergarments were gray with age and many washings, and I had one pair of cotton stockings for winter. These things I placed inside the trunk, then added one comb, one brush, one sewing needle and a hank of black thread.

I had nothing else, nothing that really belonged to me. I was without my home, my family, my band. Not even the bed I slept in all these long months was mine. What else did these White people plan to take from me?

“Anna Thunder will sleep in your old bed, girl.”

My spine stiffened. Hot rage loosened my tongue. I stood tall and glared at Sister Sarah.

“No. Anna Thunder, Comanche. I will not sleep beside my enemy!”

“Oh, yes, girl, you will sleep beside Anna Thunder. You will eat beside her. You will work beside her. You will do what I say, without complaint. If you do not, I will take you to Sister Enid and have you beaten. Do you understand me, girl?”

Fury such as I had not known since the day the Uniforms attacked my camp, pounded through my veins. I stood still and silent. Anna Thunder was my enemy.

Sister Sarah moved beside me and grabbed a handful of my hair. Yanking it, she pulled my head back until my gaze locked with hers. Tears stung my eyes from the pain and my back ached from the pressure.

Still I refused to speak.

“You defy me?” Her grip tightened and she jerked my head back another inch. Suddenly it was hard for me to breathe and my vision blurred.

I saw the hatred in her face and knew she would not stop until she brought me to my knees.

I would die before I would let Sister Sarah make a slave of me.

She seemed to sense this and loosened her grip. “Do you understand me, now?”

“Yes,” I replied bitterly. “I understand.”

“Good. Finish your task and then report to the kitchen. Sister Enid wishes to speak with you.”

Releasing her hold on me, Sister Sarah turned on her heel and left the dormitory. I stumbled over to the bed and sat down.

The cold crept down my spine spread its icy fingers around my throat. I needed all my strength and courage when I faced Sister Enid. For now, I would fight my enemies alone.

Grandfather once told me: “We Nde, are not like dogs who can be trained. Dogs can be beaten and keep on wagging their tails, licking the hand that whipped them. The Nde are like cats. Little cats, big cats, wildcats, bobcats, mountain lions. It does not matter what kind, but cats who are not tamed, who scratch if you step on their tails.”

I tried to gain courage from the memory of his words, but it was so hard.

“But I am only a kitten, Grandfather,” I whispered, my voice thick with tears. “My claws are still very small.”

With renewed spirit I went to face the head mistress.

AN UNEASINESS filled my mind when Sister Kathleen greeted me later that morning.

“Sister Enid has been called away on business,” she said. “She will be gone for several days.”

I glanced at her. Sister Kathleen was different from the other teachers. Her sky-colored eyes were gentle and her hair the color of winter fire. Her voice was always soft, respectful, and a smile often curved her lips. In many ways she reminded me of my friend Yellow-Bird. I wished my friend was with me now.

Sister Kathleen tried to understand the students. She did not call us dirty savages or heathens.

Still, I wondered why I was given this new job. Others worked in the laundry room for many school terms.

“Why? Why this kitchen?” I asked.

Sister Kathleen frowned, “I don’t know. Usually Sister Enid has the older, more experienced girls work here.”

“Like Mary Billy.”

“Yes, like Mary. Mary has lived here for six years. She speaks and understands English and...she

understands Sister Enid.”

“I only moons...months. Little English.”

“Yes, Tay, I know.”

Sister Kathleen called me Tay instead of girl. She used the White name the school had given to me. I did not like this new name. Sister Kathleen tried to be a friend to all the students, so I did not mind her calling me Tay. I found myself watchful around her, but I did not fear her, not like I feared Sister Enid.

“How many days will I stay here?”

“If Sister Enid is happy with your work you’ll remain here like Mary Billy. If you displease her—”

“I go back.”

“Yes. Sister Enid expects the staff meals to be perfect. Remember she makes no allowances for mistakes.”

I held my hands at my sides and did not allow her to see my discomfort. I was not certain I wished to work in this kitchen. It was hot. The smells from one of the pots made my stomach sick.

I hated working in the laundry also. I did not wish to go back there.

I learned fast. I would watch the others and listen. If I was careful, Sister Enid would not say I made mistakes. She would not send me back to the laundry room.

“You will help prepare the meals. Mary Billy will teach you.”

I glanced around the room. Mary Billy cooked beef over an open flame in the fireplace at the far back corner of the room. Two Cheyenne girls, Amy Strongbull and Wilma Owen, sat on the back porch cleaning greens and slicing potatoes into large bowls.

Sister Kathleen smiled. "Do not worry so, Tay. Things have a way of working out for the best."

I watched her grab a cloth and pull open the oven door. She pulled out a metal pan filled with small breads and set it on the table.

The aroma filled the room and my stomach rumbled. It reminded me of the tortillas my aunt cooked under the ash of the campfire. Sadness whispered across my heart and I wished I was back home in Apacheria. Blinking back tears, I glanced at Sister Kathleen.

She seemed to read my thoughts.

"Poor, Tay," she said, touching my cheek. "I know this is difficult for you. Try to understand. This is your home, now."

I did not expect her touch and I stepped back. In this school a slap was the only touch I knew.

"School not my home, Sister. Someday I go home."

"Perhaps you shall, Tay. Here, take this apron and tie it over your dress."

I did this task quickly. The teacher motioned me to follow her.

"Tay, you will assist Mary Billy in serving lunch from now on. Anna Thunder will help in the

preparations and the cleaning up afterwards.”

A heavy clumping of footsteps claimed Sister Kathleen’s attention.

“Anna, I’m glad you decided to come and help.”

Anna Thunder stood, her thin arms folded in front of her chest. Her dark gaze snapped on Sister Kathleen.

I stiffened and narrowed my gaze. When Anna Thunder turned, my eyes were steady upon hers. I would not look away first.

“Tay. This is Anna. The two of you will be spending a lot of time together. It will be in the best interest of all concerned that you two become friends.”

“Friends,” Anna spat. “I no friend to Apache!”

I glared at Anna Thunder. I would not answer to Apache. Apache was a name our enemies called us. I refused to honor her by speaking.

“Tay,” Sister Kathleen said, nudging my shoulder. “Tell Anna Thunder she is welcome here.”

I shot an angry look at Sister Kathleen. The Nde and the Comanche were enemies. I would not welcome Anna Thunder.

“No. She not welcome here.”

“Ladies, the two of you will work together. If not, you will answer to Sister Enid.”

"I am Comanche. I not scared of White woman."

"Perhaps not, Anna. However, Sister Enid will send you back to the attic if you cause trouble."

"I no cause trouble. Apache cause trouble."

"Liar!"

"Apache liar, Apache thief."

"I no thief." I retorted. "The Nde do not steal from Comanche. Comanche steal our land, kill my people."

"Apache steal our women, steal our horses!"

"You take our land."

"Apache, liar."

"You take our dogs."

"Liar."

"Sister Kathleen must watch Anna Thunder," I said, turning to the teacher. "First she steal your knives. Then she take your dogs. Take your pots."

"Dogs? Pots? Tay, what on earth are you talking about?"

"Comanche like many dogs. Comanche say dog meat good to eat."

White man's pictures all fade, but the Indian's memories last forever.

—An Indian Guide to Tom Wilson, historian,
1882

Chapter 6

“STOP THIS instant!” Sister Kathleen shouted, stepping between us.

Anna Thunder was swift, reaching past the teacher to grab my sleeve. The sound of tearing fabric filled the kitchen.

I glanced at the large hole in the cotton fabric which zig-zagged from my elbow to my wrist. A howl of outrage left my throat and I lunged at the Comanche. I would not permit such an insult.

Sister Kathleen was very strong. Yanking on the waistband of my skirt, she held me fast.

“Anna Thunder sit at the counter and start peeling the potatoes. Tay you *will* help Mary Billy, now! There will not be a repeat of this behavior. Do you both understand? If I have to reprimand either of you again, today. I will personally escort you both to the attic.”

My pride sang out for retaliation. My gaze locked with Sister Kathleen’s, her eyes, now the color of dark storm clouds, demanded I obey her.

I nodded and moved toward Mary Billy. Remaining in this kitchen was going to be more difficult than I had realized. I felt a frown of concentration crease my forehead. I followed Mary Billy to the fire place.

“Tay, the beef must be turned every few minutes,” Mary Billy told me.

Wrapping a heavy cloth around the metal rod which ran from one side of the fireplace to the other, she grasped the end and slowly turned the roast.

“Sister Enid wants the beef evenly browned, Tay. Remember to baste the roast so it will not dry out.”

I nodded and watched her ladle a cup of liquid from a bowl and drizzle it over the meat. Fat dripped into the fire. My empty stomach growled in hunger and pains shot through me.

“You will get used to it, the hunger,” she said, moving to lean against the wall. “Now you try.”

I was used to being hungry, I wanted to tell her. What I wasn’t used to was preparing food and then not being able to eat any.

As I started to speak I noticed Mary Billy’s eyes were overly bright and her cheeks too red.

“Mary Billy sick?” I asked, taking the ladle from her. The Navajo girl looked very ill. Dark circles ringed her eyes and her breathing was shallow, like a sparrow who had flown a long distance.

“I am only tired, Tay. Do not worry so. Now turn the meat again. Good...Place the ladle back in the bowl. It’s time to make the apple pie filling.”

All morning long, while I worked, I felt the Comanche’s gaze upon me. Like a predatory hawk, Anna Thunder watched and waited for me to make a mistake. Although I did not let her see my uncertainty, I knew there would be no second chance for me.

I followed Sister Kathleen’s instructions and learned well.

Eventually the morning became calm. It was not wise to anger a teacher twice in one day. I had no desire to see the inside of the attic.

I helped roast the beef and learned to carve using the large knife. Anna Thunder did not speak to me again. She stayed upon her task, under the sharply watchful eye of Sister Kathleen. After we cleaned the kitchen and dining room we were each given a bowl of rice with beef gravy and one slice of bread.

Sister Kathleen said it was a reward for our hard work. I had missed breakfast and ate quickly. Afterwards I felt sick from the unaccustomed richness of the food.

Anna Thunder ate slowly, watching us, daring me to try and take her food away. When Sister Kathleen's back was turned, the Comanche slid her bread into the pocket of her skirt, her gaze narrowed upon me.

Later that afternoon, when classes were over for the day, Sister Louisa allowed us to go outside for free time. This was only allowed for one hour, one afternoon each week, and we were strictly supervised.

The boys and girls were each lodged in separate buildings but the common yard area was divided by a wood fence.

It was from this yard that I first heard the shouting. I thought the boys were fighting and moved closer to peek between the narrow slates.

I remembered the stories about Susan One Star, a Pawnee girl, how she broke the rules. She would

talk to the boys on the sly. One night she was caught climbing out of her dormitory window. The next day she had runaway with Paul Looking Horse.

The teachers were filled with fury. Side-by-side-privileges which was the school's approved way of student courting, was stopped. The following week the wooden fence was constructed.

"This was three years ago," Mary Billy had said. "Never talk to the boys. Sister Enid beat a girl for talking to her own brother! She accused the girl of having *evil thoughts*."

Evil. Evil. It was all Sister Enid and Sister Louisa ever spoke of. I did not understand their fear, or their constant anger at the Indians. I only knew I did not wish to be punished. Sister Enid's punishment was always swift, but seldom just.

With that thought in mind, I began to move away but the shouting from the boy's yard increased.

I could not resist the urge to step nearer to the fence. Only a quick look, I promised myself. I would be back at the school before anyone noticed I was missing.

I glanced around the school yard. The vegetable garden was a green barrier of corn stalks and leafy beans on poles. The teachers standing on the back porch could not see me.

My hands moved against the splintered wood until I located a space between the slates. I hunkered down and pressed my face to the peep hole.

I counted fifteen boys standing around a wide area of ground behind a second vegetable garden. The

youngest looked to be five years old and the oldest ones, several years older than myself.

Soon I realized the boys were playing a game. This game was strange to me. It was not like the games boys played in Apacheria. Our games taught future warriors how to hunt and protect our camp. This game involved running and much noise.

As the boys ran, dust was brought up from the ground. White warriors would never survive in Apacheria if this was how they trained their boys—future warriors. Did they not know the noise would scare away the game? Dust could be seen from the far horizon. Dirt, without the markings brushed away, would leave a trail of footprints for an enemy to follow.

Did the White men also train in this manner? Dressed in black pants, white shirts with stiff collars, the Indian boys did not look like Indians. Their movements were slow and clumsy, their heavy shoes catching on every stone and every root.

Fascinated, I shifted against the fence to get a better look.

One boy hit the ball into the air with a long wooden stick. Three other boys yelled and hurried to catch the ball. As I watched, two of the boys ran into each other. The youngest fell to the ground, holding his head, crying, while the third boy dropped the ball. After a moment everyone changed places and the game began again.

My heart slammed hard against my chest. And a hot rush of fear rang in my ears. I had been

watching the boys for too long. By now someone would know that I was missing. What if Sister Louisa saw me?

I stepped away from the fence and stumbled in my haste to get away. Regaining my footing I glanced across the yard.

Three of the teachers were huddled together against the side of the building. I could not see Sister Sarah or Sister Louisa.

I exhaled an unsteady breath and moved toward the garden.

It was then I heard a loud shout.

“Watch out!”

The ball came over the fence with a thud and landed near my feet. Uncertain as to what had happened, I glanced around looking for a teacher.

Sister Louisa, I was glad to see, was beside Sister Bernadette talking to two Ute girls. Moving out of view, I picked up the ball. It was heavy, like a fist-sized stone and covered with stitched leather.

“Hey, you girl. Throw the ball. Over here.”

I turned and saw a boy jump and catch himself at the top of the fence. The sunlight glinted off the blue black of his hair and brightened his friendly smile.

I held my breath as a dizziness swept over me. I blinked my eyes. “White Eagle,” I whispered,

forgetting my future husband was lost to me. Tears filled my eyes, my throat choked with emotion.

“No, I am not called White Eagle,” the boy answered. “My name is Jacob Five-Wounds.”

I blinked my eyes. This boy was handsome but he was not my beloved White Eagle. The pain that came upon me was like a sharp lance through my heart.

“Could you throw me the ball? The team’s waiting,” Jacob Five-Wounds said.

“Throw the ball?”

“Yes...no. Just hand it to me. Could you do that?”

“Yes.”

“Are you sick? You look like you need to sit by the porch in the shade.”

“No, Jacob Five-Wounds, I am well.”

“Thanks,” he said as I handed him the ball.

I watched him jump from the fence and heard his footsteps fade into the distance.

“Stupid Apache.”

I heard the words and turned. Anna Thunder crawled from behind a row of beanpoles and glared at me. The heavy leaves of the plants had kept her from my vision.

How long had she been waiting for me? How much had she heard?

I knew she would tell Sister Louisa what I had done.

A hateful sneer curled Anna's thin lips. "Sister Enid punish Apache," she hissed. "Anna Thunder glad. Anna Thunder wish Apache much sorrow."

The Comanche turned and ran toward the school house.

Leaning against one of the splinted rails, I slid to the ground and brought my knees up to my chin and wondered what I should do now. I breathed in the dusty air, the sounds around me growing dimmer and dimmer, until I heard only the voice in my mind.

Nothing mattered. Not Sister Louisa, Sister Enid. Not the threat of the attic.

Suddenly I knew why nothing mattered. Until this moment only my mind had told me of White Eagle's death. But now it was my heart which cried out his death song. And it was my heart which was breaking.

Now that I had accepted his death, the harsh reality engulfed me.

My people were dead. All that was known to me, everything which had made up my life was gone. This was why I was sent to this school. And why I could not return home!

White Eagle would never bring horses to my grandfather as an offering for me. I would never be his wife. Never would I walk with him beside the river, or laugh with him when he brought home his kill from a long hunt. Our children would never play outside our lodge. We would not grow old together.

A sob caught in my throat.

I was alone.

White Eagle was dead. I had no home to return to.

I had no one.

No one to love, or who loved me.

I buried my face against my skirt and grabbed a fistful of the starched fabric in each hand.

I cried.

I cried until my throat was raw, my eyes swollen.

I had nothing in my life. Nothing but this hated place.

Suddenly I wished I possessed the courage of Susan One Star. Susan One Star had dared to run away. But I had no one, no place to run to.

Happiness was lost to me.

YOU MUST speak straight so that your words may go as sunlight into our hearts. These were the words of our great Nde leader, Cochise, Chief of the Chiricahua band.

Grandfather spoke those words to our warriors and to me whenever there were times of indecision. Or when we doubted the Great Spirit was with us, in our every thought, every action.

I remembered these words as I sat on my bed that night and prayed the memory would bring strength to me.

The moon cast a soft light into the dormitory. I rested against the coolness of the wall, my torn white blouse in my lap, watching Anna Thunder sleep in what was once my bed.

Pushing the needle through the sleeve, I made tiny, even stitches in the cotton fabric, repairing the damage the Comanche had caused that morning. My anger had left me for the moment. The emotion I brought out in Anna Thunder was worth the torn sleeve. A small smile curved my lips as I remembered the rage on her face. Anna Thunder did not wish for Sister Kathleen to know that the Comanche ate their dogs.

I was surprised when my words angered Sister Kathleen.

“Tay, you are not to speak of the old ways,” she said, taking down a tin container from a shelf. “Sister Enid doesn’t wish for any of us to discuss our life before coming to this school.”

Sister Kathleen dumped the coffee beans into a skillet on the stove. I watched her roast the beans and then prepare them for grinding. Suddenly, she looked very sad.

“Teacher have people?” I asked.

“Yes,” she whispered then lifted a large pot of water to the stove. “I was about your age when I watched my sister-in-law, Colleen, make coffee...how I would beg for a sip of coffee each morning...”

I watched Sister Kathleen touch the stem of the grinder and look out the window. My heart grew

heavy with sorrow. She was alone. She missed her people and her family.

“Teacher can go home.”

“No, Tay. I can never return home. My life is here now.”

“Why?”

“Tay, we will speak of the past this one time. Afterwards you will never ask these questions again. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Sister.”

“I have people Tay. My family is in Ireland, parents and eight brothers and sisters.”

“Ireland?”

“Yes, it’s across the sea. Far away.”

“Far?”

“Yes. Farther than you have ever traveled. I came over on a ship ten years ago.”

“Alone?”

“No my older brother was with me...he and his wife.”

“Where now?”

“Dead,” she replied in a choked voice. “They were both killed in a factory fire when I was fourteen. I was placed in a convent.”

“School?”

“Like a school. The nuns were all like Sister Enid and Sister Louisa.”

A shudder ran down my spine and my gaze locked on Sister Kathleen’s. I saw her sky-colored eyes were filled with kindness and I smiled. She understood what it was like to be alone. What it was like to be punished.

It wasn’t until much later that I learned this boarding school was a catch all place for nuns who didn’t get along anywhere else. Sisters who complained too much or who had simply lost their mind. I’ll always wonder now, after hearing this, where they found Sister Kathleen.

“Unjust things happen in this world, Tay. We must do what we can and go on.”

“Soldiers kill my people! Grandfather dead,” I replied. “Tay go home. Sister Kathleen help.”

“Don’t you understand? You have no home to return to. I’m sorry. It was in the newspaper before you came to live here. All of your band—your people—are dead. You have no other place to return to. This school is your home.”

There was no home for me to return to.

Her words still echoed in my mind that night, as I stitched the tear in my shirt sleeve.

I snapped the thread off with my teeth and tied a knot. I stared out of the window and hopelessness filled by heart.

I had no choice but to remain in this school. In this white world. For now there was no other path for me.

I would learn, I promised myself. The Nde always survived.

When Sister Enid returned I would be strong, determined. She would never threaten me again. In my strength I would honor my grandfather and my people.

I gazed down at Anna Thunder and a frown creased my forehead. She knew I had spoken to Jacob Five-Wounds, she would tell Sister Enid.

I would be made to pay.

I wondered how I could buy the Comanche's silence.

I see no longer the curling smoke rising from our lodge poles.
I hear no longer the songs of the women as they prepare the meal.
The antelope have gone; the buffalo wallows are empty.
Only the wail of the coyote is heard.
We are like birds with a broken wing.

—Chief Plenty Coups
Crow

Chapter 7

THE DECEMBER wind had a bite to it. The cold stung my hands and froze my breath when I spoke.

“Anna Thunder not tell Sister Enid I spoke to Jacob Five-Wounds.”

The Comanche gave me a haughty look before pulling a fourth turnip from the ground. “Apache do what Anna Thunder say?”

“No!”

“Then Anna Thunder tell Sister Enid. Apache talk to Jacob Five-Wounds. Send Tay to attic.”

“I say Comanche lie.”

“Anna Thunder not care. Boys saw Jacob Five-Wounds talk to Apache.”

“Then I say to Sister Enid it was Comanche who spoke to Jacob Five-Wounds.”

“Anna Thunder and Apache be sent to attic,” she sneered.

I swallowed hard and stuffed my shaking hands into the pockets of my skirt. My hate for Anna Thunder was strong, but not stronger than my fear of the attic. The Comanche knew this and smiled before she spoke.

“Attic dark. Cold. No blanket. No window. Only crack in wall. Small light. Anna Thunder see rat.

Anna Thunder hungry. Rat now have one eye.”

I glared at the Comanche, my back stiff with pride. “Apache no care about rat...cold. Comanche afraid of dark, not Nde.”

“Bird of darkness live in attic,” she said. “Bird of the night song come for mice.”

I felt my blood turn to ice. Bird of darkness—the owl. Bringer of evil. Death. My people were not to look upon the bird, nor speak its name.

“Bird of darkness come for Apache.” Anna Thunder glanced up at the attic. Her body still while she listened. “Hear the cry? Tay hear song of white man’s owl?”

I shivered. She was trying to bring fear into my heart. Grandfather told me never to listen when someone speaks of evil. If I did not listen, evil could not touch me.

I thought of home...Apacheria. My heart pounded and panic rode down my spine. I looked at the early morning sky and my vision blurred. Yellow-Bird had seen the owl, was touched by its feather. Now Yellow-Bird was dead. Death had fallen upon Apacheria after the owl came.

I thought of Anna Thunder’s one-eyed rat. But in my mind the rat became my grandfather. I remembered Grandfather as he lay on the ground, his black eyes open, unseeing.

I tried to fight the image, but it would not go away.

The Comanche had won.

To buy her silence I would do as she asked.

Anna Thunder tossed the turnips on the porch. I watched the soil cling to the white roots as one turnip rolled along the wooden step.

“No more talk,” she said, her breaths coming hard against the cold air. “Anna Thunder find Sister Enid.”

My shoulders slumped. Defeat, did not come easy to me. “What Anna Thunder want from Tay?” I ground out.

She turned toward me. “Give Anna Thunder bread.”

“Bread?”

“Bread from kitchen. Hide in pocket. Give to Anna Thunder.”

My gaze narrowed. Each day I watched Anna Thunder hide her slice of bread in her skirt pocket. I did not know why. Each night I watched. She did not bring the food from her pockets, nor were there crumbs leaving a trail among her belongings.

“Why? Why do you ask this?”

The Comanche was thin. Her arms like the bare branches of a sapling trees. Anna Thunder did not eat the bread she hoarded.

“Will Apache bring bread?” she hissed.

My stomach growled. Sister Enid had returned last evening and supervised the breakfast meal today. The oatmeal had been thin. There was little nourishment for my growing body. The bread Sister Kathleen gave me kept the pains of hunger from my stomach. I did not want to give my food to my enemy.

“Tay no trust Anna Thunder.”

The Comanche stared at me with hard, black eyes.

“Anna Thunder keep word.”

“Tay think Anna Thunder keep bread. Tell Sister Enid of Jacob Five-Wounds.”

“No! Anna Thunder keep bread. No tell Sister Enid.”

“Why? Why I trust you?”

The Comanche lifted her chin a notch and glared at me. “Anna Thunder keep word.”

“Why Comanche want bread?”

“Sickness. Anna Thunder need for sickness.”

“There no sickness here. Comanche lie.”

“Sister have coughing sickness. Keep her in house of doctor. Nurse say food make little sister well.”

I had heard of this coughing sickness. Some of the Nde had died of it after trading with the white man. I saw the sadness in Anna Thunder’s eyes and knew she spoke the truth.

“I will give bread for Anna Thunder’s sister. When sister well all is ended.”

The Comanche nodded her head. "When sister well Anna Thunder no tell of Jacob Five-Wounds."

During the week which followed, I hid my bread in my pocket when Sister Kathleen's back was turned. Then, so not to listen to the painful rumble of my stomach, I quickly finished my assigned tasks. When Anna Thunder walked past me carrying the slop bucket, I shoved the slice of bread into her eager hand.

Today, as I swept the floor I was filled with an uneasiness. Sister Kathleen was more watchful over us, her gaze often scanning the doorway, as if waiting for someone's arrival. Mary Billy, I noticed, was not well. A feverish glaze covered her eyes and sweat beaded her forehead.

I glanced down at my skirt. Even with the covering of my apron I was fearful the folds of fabric would not hide the sharp outline the slice of bread made. Stealing from the kitchen was forbidden. Sister Enid would not care if the food was mine. In the teacher's eyes, the food belonged to the school. Students were not given extra portions of food. If I was caught. No explanations or excuses would be heard. I would be punished.

Stealing, lying, and running away all carried the harshest punishment. The price for these transgressions: a beating and ten days in the attic.

Jenny Blackhawk, Mary Billy said, carried the scars of Sister Enid's beating. Large and strong, the Cheyenne girl had fought back when the teacher struck her. This had enraged Sister Enid. She had called

Sister Louisa and Sister Bernadette to her office and ordered them to strap Jenny into a chair.

Sister Kathleen had heard the shouting and followed Sister Bernadette into the room.

Arguing with Sister Enid, Sister Kathleen had told the head mistress that it was Jenny's first offence. The student didn't understand what stealing was. Having Jenny sent to the attic was punishment enough.

My rules are to be obeyed! Sister Enid had shouted.

Sister Enid had used a riding crop on Jenny's legs. Ten lashes, Mary Billy said. Not once had the Cheyenne girl cried out. It was not until the final lash had creased Jenny Blackhawks' face, that Jenny had even whimpered.

That day, Mary Billy said, was the only time she had ever seen Sister Kathleen cry. Sister Enid and Sister Louisa dragged Jenny Blackhawk to the attic. Even Sister Bernadette had protested the harsh treatment. The young sister had gone to her room and stayed there for the following two days.

Six months had passed since then, but Jenny's legs still bore the angry, red, welts of Sister Enid's riding crop. Her pretty face was marred by a raised ridge running from her left cheekbone to her rounded chin.

Sister Enid's shrill voice interrupted my thoughts, and I jerked, feeling guilty. I swallowed hard before I glanced toward the dining room. The teachers sat and talked after finishing their mid-day meal. In a few more minutes they would return to the classrooms.

I wondered if Sister Enid had cut out Jenny Blackhawks' tongue after she took the girl to the attic. Never, since I had come to this school, had Jenny Blackhawk spoken.

"Sister Kathleen," Sister Enid called. "I wish to have a word with you."

The teacher frowned at the headmistress's summons.

"I'll be there in a moment, Sister," she replied. Turning to Mary Billy she said, "Make sure all is in order. Tay, sweep the floor and make certain every speck of dirt is placed in the pail. Cover the container with the lid when you are finished. When Anna Thunder returns tell her to leave the slop bucket on the back porch."

Turning on her heel, Sister Kathleen walked to the dining room.

My heart pounded. Glancing toward the back porch, I searched for Anna Thunder. Why was she late? Soon Sister Enid and Sister Louisa would come to the kitchen for inspection. Afterwards I would be sent to the classroom. I could not dispose of the bread without getting caught.

I swept the dirt from the floor into a small mound and knelt down to brush it into a metal container.

Sister Enid's angry voice carried into the kitchen and I cringed.

"Up to now, Sister Kathleen, I have given you the benefit of the doubt. I even let your defiance regarding Jenny Blackhawk pass. This, however, is a mistake I cannot over look. Sister Louisa said this was hidden beneath the hutch."

“Hidden? Or simply placed there by Sister Louisa?”

“How dare you make such a statement,” Sister Louisa sputtered. “You have no right to question me.”

“I have every right. Sister Enid has assigned me to overseeing the kitchen and dining room, not you. It is to me the students are answerable. I am held accountable to Sister Enid for their actions. At every turn, Sister Louisa, you snoop into matters which do not concern you—”

“How dare you!”

“Sisters, this is not the time nor place for such a discussion. Need I remind you, Sister Kathleen, you are held accountable to me, as is Sister Louisa. And every student at this school.”

“I’m certain the items were misplaced or dropped. My students have no use for a place setting of silverware!”

“No? This knife would make a adequate weapon, don’t you think, Sister Louisa?”

“Weapon? When the kitchen is filled with carving knives. They would—”

“Steal those first?” Sister Louisa interrupted.

“I did not say that!”

“Each kitchen knife is counted by Sister Louisa and myself during inspection, is it not?”

“Yes.”

“Then what better way for one of the girls to make a trade?”

“I don’t understand.”

“Isn’t that what Jenny Blackhawk intended to do after she ran away?” Sister Enid asked.

“No. Jenny didn’t understand that the items were to be used...that they weren’t hers to keep.”

“Jenny Blackhawk understood, all right.” Sister Louisa said. “All those Indian girls understand.”

“Understand what, Sister Louisa?” Sister Kathleen said, her voice shaking with anger.

“They understand what they steal they can trade.”

“Trade for what? The students in this school own nothing of value.”

“Jenny Blackhawk knew all about the trading post. It’s only a two day walk from the school. Anything of value may be traded there, no questions asked. The girl planned to trade for provisions and passage back to her home.”

“That isn’t true!”

“Let me tell you a thing or two about your *precious heathens*, Sister Kathleen. They have no sense of honor. They will lie to you and steal from you every chance they get. Every Indian in this place will do the same. Even your pet, Mary Billy. Not one of them will amount to anything but trouble.”

At the mention of her name, Mary Billy let out as sharp gasp.

I turned and watched her face become the color of ash. “Sister Enid is angry. Very angry,” she whispered.

I watched her hands shake as she dried the china plate.

“Mary Billy!” Sister Enid shouted.

The plate slid from Mary Billy’s hands. The fragile dish hit the floor and shattered, tiny slivers of china dancing all over the polished floor.

“Oh, Tay, what have I done?”

I believe much trouble and blood would be saved if we opened our hearts more.

I will tell you in my own way how the Indians sees things.

The white man has more words to tell you how things look to him, but it does not require many words to speak the truth.

— Chief Joseph
Nez Perce

Chapter 8

ACTING QUICKLY, I grabbed the broom and began sweeping. “Go. Hurry or Sister Louisa will come.”

Mary Billy ran into the dining room.

For a moment I could only hear the throbbing of my heart, and the rasping pulsations in my ears. Uncertain of what to say or do next, my hands trembled. Tears blurred my vision as I desperately tried to capture each sliver of china.

Inspection

The word screamed across my mind like the eerie cry of the bird of darkness. I knew Sister Enid would search me and find the bread! She would fall upon me, vengeful, her hatred sharp like the talons of the owl.

She would send me to the attic!

Glancing around the kitchen I looked for a place to hide the bread. The cupboards, oven, glass jars, all were inspected by Sister Louisa. No place was safe from her sharp eyes.

I pulled the bread from my pocket and broke off a large chunk, cramming it into my mouth. I gagged and my stomach heaved. I was scared. My mouth now stone dry caused my throat to clench, fighting back

every swallow. I knew I was going to choke.

My breaths came in shallows gasps.

I coughed and coughed. Suddenly, I could not catch my breath!

Panic over came me. Grabbing my apron I leaned forward and spat the bread from my mouth.

I heard the floor boards creak.

Sister Enid was coming.

Desperately I glanced around the kitchen looking for a way to dispose of the bread.

Footsteps, heavy and certain were almost to the kitchen.

There was no more time.

I stumbled in my effort to get away, my toe hitting the edge of the dust pail.

The dust pail. Surely, Sister Enid would not look inside.

Seizing the cover, I dumped the bread from my apron. Then pulled the remainder from my pocket. Breaking it into pieces I dropped them into the pail. I swept the remains of the shattered plate on top and quickly closed the lid.

Now I had a chance.

Wiping my chin with my sleeve, I brushed the crumbs from my shirt. I turned and stood straight and tall, my back against the wall.

Keeping all expression from my face, I watched Sister Enid enter the kitchen.

“You, girl,” she said, “stand over near the hearth.”

I turned to obey, my knees wobbly as I rushed across the room.

Sister Louisa brushed past me. She smelled of moth balls and lye soap. Her silver hair, fashioned in a tight knot, resembled an old pin cushion kept in the sewing room. Whenever Sister Enid was near, Sister Louisa twittered like a small caged bird. Her blue veined fingers continuously adjusted the hairpins in that tight little knot.

Rage and fear boiled from inside me. I had an urgent need to yank all those little silver hair pins from Sister Louisa’s hair. I wanted to scream in Sister Enid’s face and tell her that the Nde would kill her for such cruelty.

I knew the anger would do me no good. Even though I hated this school and hated Sister Enid, I had no other place to go.

For now I must obey Sister Enid’s rules. I would learn the white man’s rules and beat them at their own game.

I took a steadying breath to calm myself. I would not let the teachers know what I was feeling. Grandfather would have been proud of me. One, two, three, calming breaths. I might obey their rules, but they would never rule over me.

I watched Sister Enid move around the kitchen, her white gloved fingertips running over every wooden surface of the kitchen.

Four, five, six, more breaths. My shoulders relaxed. I could do this, I told myself. Soon Sister Enid would be finished and I would be sent back to the classroom.

Sister Louisa opened the oven door and counted the tins. Sister Enid counted the china plates.

“Two plates are missing, girl,” she said, her blue eyes the color of steel.

“No, Sister. One plate was broken.”

“Two are missing, girl.”

“Mary Billy broke one plate.”

“Only one?”

“Yes, teacher.”

Sister Enid fell silent then continued to inspect the kitchen. Her gaze scanning the floor for signs of the accident.

I held my breath as she neared the dust pail. I watched Sister Enid glance at the cupboard and then at the pail.

“Did you sweep the floor, girl?”

“Yes, teacher.”

Her finger tips touched the lid of the pail.

I felt my spine go rigid, and a small gasp left my lips.

“Girl, I’ll have no lying—”

“No, Sister.”

“Have you been stealing, girl? Tell me now.”

The back door creaked. I looked over my shoulder.

Anna Thunder.

“You, girl!” Sister Louisa, said, slapping my shoulder. “Pay attention when Sister Enid is speaking to you. Turn around.”

“Yes, Sister.”

“Answer the question, girl. Did you steal anything from the kitchen?”

“No, teacher. I take nothing.”

Though my gaze was fastened on Sister Enid, I knew the Comanche was heading my direction. Her gait uneven, I guessed she was carrying the slop bucket. She would expect me to give her my slice of bread.

“You, Anna Thunder,” Sister Louisa screeched. “Take that filthy slop bucket outside.”

“Sister Kathleen said—”

“I don’t care what Sister Kathleen told you. You will do as I say! Now take that bucket outside.”

Anna Thunder did as she was told, then returned to the kitchen.

The Comanche stood beside me, her thin hands clenched into tight fists.

“Where bread?” she whispered.

I kept my gaze on Sister Enid, shaking my head. Anna Thunder was foolhardy to risk being caught by the teacher.

The teachers were talking and for several moments paid no attention to us.

“Little sister more sick. Where bread?”

“Gone.”

“Give to me.”

I risked a quick glance at the Comanche. “No!” I hissed.

“Silence!” Sister Enid said.

“Sister Louisa, let Sister Kathleen know I want the two Cheyenne girls brought here. Everyone will be questioned.”

Pulling the silverware from her apron pocket, Sister Enid slammed it on the wooden counter. “I will have my explanation for this, girls.”

Anna Thunder’s hands clawed at her apron. “Anna Thunder no take silver.”

Sister Enid gave her a cruel smile. “Perhaps not. You know who did take the silverware, don’t you Anna? Both you and Mary Billy seem to know everything that happens in this school. You watch everyone with those raven eyes, don’t you? Waiting for your chance to escape. But you can’t run away right now, can you Anna? Not when your little sister is so sick.”

Anna Thunder shook with rage. I almost felt sorry for the Comanche. I knew that if her sister were well, Anna Thunder would have struck Sister Enid.

My gaze locked with Sister Enid’s and my blood turned to ice. I could not keep the fear from my face.

Sister Enid nodded at me, her thin face looking more like a death mask than a human. Suddenly I knew what she was doing—she was trying to make Anna Thunder name me as the thief.

“Many students have the sickness—diphtheria. Mary Billy is ill now. Just like your sister. I telegraphed for the doctor when I went to town...but now...”

“Anna Thunder hate Sister Enid. Anna Thunder wish her dead!”

“Yes, I know. I see you watching me. Hating me. But you need me, don’t you Anna? You need me to protect your sister. To make sure she gets well. Your little sister is very weak, isn’t she, Anna? She isn’t getting any better.”

“No! Little Fawn stronger. Fever gone.”

“No, Anna, her fever has returned. She isn’t going to get well without the doctor. Little Fawn needs

medicine.”

Anna Thunder shook her head.

“The doctor will arrive tomorrow. I am the only one who can send for him. If I do not send a wagon to town he will not come to the school. The doctor will remain in town for the night and return to Pine Ridge on the next stage.”

“No!”

“Yes, Anna. The doctor will return to his home and Little Fawn will not have the medicine. Little Fawn will die.”

“No! Little Fawn, not die!”

I watched the tears stream down Anna Thunder’s face.

“No. Little Fawn, not die!” she shouted.

Sister Enid, walked toward the Comanche, grabbing her by the shoulders.

The teacher shook, Anna Thunder. Again and again. Until Anna Thunder could hardly stand.

“Tell me who stole the silverware?”

I took a deep breath and wiped my damp hands down the side of my skirt.

How smooth must be the language of the whites, when they can make right look like wrong, and wrong look like right.

— Black Hawk
Sauk

Chapter 9

“LITTLE FAWN not die,” Anna Thunder sobbed.

“Who stole the silverware?”

“Little Fawn get well.”

“Without my help your sister will die. Now answer me, Anna!”

“No...no.”

Sister Enid continued to shake the Comanche. The teacher seemed to lose all self-control, gritting her teeth and breathing heavily. Anna Thunder turned blue, and couldn’t catch her breath. Several moments later, I watched the Comanche’s eyes roll back and her lids closed. Her thin body went limp and she slumped to the floor.

Though my hatred for Anna Thunder ran strong and deep, it was a horrible sight. The vengeful way Sister Enid fell upon the Comanche filled my heart with anger—an anger that was impossible for me to conquer. Sister Enid’s actions and her words sickened me.

With a Nde war cry I hurled myself at the teacher!

I didn’t blink when she brought her fist against my temple. My skull was tough. Nor did I flinch

when she screeched in my ear.

There was something unnatural in the way Sister Enid looked at me. Her eyes were a washed-out blue-green, like that of a dead owl. Unfocused. Unseeing. Yet fixed upon me.

I heard the sound of running footsteps.

Someone grabbed me by the collar and dragged me, feet flying, to the corner of the room. Once there she threw me against the wall. I saw that it was Sister Sarah when she grabbed a handful of my hair and pounded my head against the wall.

Slapping my face again, and again, Sister Sarah's hand covered my cheek, until I thought I would pass out.

I asked the Creator to stop my tears, for they were pushing behind my eyes. I refused to let my enemy see a weakness in me.

I tried to stand, my weight supported only by the wall behind me as I edged myself to the corner. I breathed the smell of moth balls, of chalk clinging to Sister Sarah's dress as she stood over me. Her teeth bared, the veins on her forehead bulging.

What was that sound?

It filled the room, filled every corner and spilled over into my mind, the high pitched animal wail of despair, hopelessness. I didn't know the voice was mine until Sister Sarah hoisted me to her camphor

smelling lips.

“Shut-up, you little heathen. You’ll pay for this, girl. I promise you that.”

My head throbbed hard against my temples and white flashes, like summer lightening, danced in front of my eyes.

“Sister Louisa! Sister Bernadette!” The headmistress bellowed. “Come here!”

Sister Bernadette grabbed me by the shoulders and pushed me into the pantry. Her large cumbersome body held the door fast against any attempt I might make to escape.

“Take the Comanche upstairs.” Sister Enid ordered.

“I’ll deal with the Apache girl, later.”

Soon the noise and memory of Sister Enid and Sister Sarah seemed to fade away, leaving me in a dark world filled with quiet numbness.

I must have fainted, because the next thing I remember was standing at the top of a long stairway, supported by Sister Louisa and Sister Bernadette, while Sister Enid looked on.

“You think you’re smart, like all your thieving, murdering Apache kind. But you’re not smart,” Sister Enid said. “You’ll never amount to anything. You’ll end up in jail or on a reservation bearing some no-good Indian’s brats, or die like a dog. There’ll never be a place for you in the White world. Remember that girl!”

Hatred and unspeakable evil twisted Sister Enid's thin face. Even Sister Louisa seemed taken aback by the cruelty of her superior's words.

"The girl's trainable, Sister. She'll be able to earn her keep," Sister Louisa said.

Sister Enid didn't seem to hear the teacher. Instead she looked at Sister Bernadette and said, "Did Sister Sarah take care of the Comanche?"

"Yes, Ma'am," the young teacher stammered. "She told me hold her down...She hit the girl...That's not right...Just like hitting Jenny Blackhawk wasn't right."

"You stupid, hulking woman. Who are you to tell me what's right."

"They're only children...girls...it's...wrong, Sister Enid. Wrong."

"Wrong? It seems I was wrong to accept you here, Sister Bernadette. To give you a home. Have you forgotten it was I who let you come here. I who accepted you when no other school would have you. Have you forgotten this, Sister?"

"No, Ma'am."

"Not only do you question my wisdom, my authority."

"No, Ma'am. I do not...understand..."

Sister Enid sneered, "You are incapable of understanding anything, Sister Bernadette, that is why you are here. Now take the girl into the attic and leave."

“Sister Enid, do you think this is wise? The doctor is coming,” Sister Louisa said, taking a step toward the wall.

“Are you, too, questioning me? Defying me?”

“No, Ma’am. But if we are discovered, our actions may not be understood by the others.”

“Understood? Do you think that I care what an *Indian* doctor thinks, what he reports? *They* all have to be punished, don’t you understand? *They* have to be punished for what they did!”

“Punished? Why?”

“For the murders. Every last one of them must be made to pay.”

“Sister Enid, perhaps we should take this girl back downstairs. The Comanche is the one you really want to punish, isn’t she?”

Sister Enid was no longer listening. Her grip tightened on my arm. I could no longer feel my hand or my finger tips. I wanted to scream. I wanted to laugh. This could not be real, my mind cried out. This could not be happening to me again!

If I closed my eyes, I could make it all go away. I would be back home. Grandfather would tell me a story. There would be fresh game roasting over a camp fire. If I tried very hard my mind could force it to all go away.

Still, even when I closed my eyes, I heard only Sister Enid’s voice, dripping with hatred.

“I watched. I saw it all,” she said. “Mother told me to hide under the wagon where I would be safe. When it was over she would come back for me. Only she never came back...the Indians rode down the hill, their war lances heavy with human scalps. First I watched the Comanche kill my father...then my mother. The leader, he wiped my mother’s blood on his face and laughed. Then he reached down and tore out her heart.”

“Saints help us all,” Sister Louisa whispered, releasing her hold on me.

“I still see it. Every night. And every day. Each time I look into one of *their* faces. All of them must pay. *They* will all pay.”

“Sister Enid, the Indian Wars are over. The killing was done on both sides. But it’s over now—”

Sister Enid laughed. It was a cruel, demented wave of sound. Sister Bernadette turned and ran down the stairway leaving me alone with Sister Enid and Sister Louisa. Suddenly I was more frightened than I had ever been in my life.

Sister Enid turned to the door and took a key from her belt. It was a giant key, gleaming silver.

I stared at the large wooden door. An hot wind roared from beneath it. The hinges creaked as the door was yanked open.

“Bring the girl here,” Sister Enid ordered.

“I—”

“Do as I say!”

“No,” she replied.

My spine stiffened in surprise and my gaze flew to Sister Louisa’s face. I saw her hard gray eyes clouded with compassion.

Sister Enid grabbed my wrist and jerked me to her side, then shoved me inside the dark room. Rooted to the floor, I watched the door slam behind her. Heard the key turn in the lock.

I knew with absolute certainty that Sister Enid was leaving me here to die!

I would die, alone, in the attic.

Friendship is held to be the severest test of character...

It is easy we think, to be loyal to family and clan, whose blood is in our own veins.

But to have a friend, and to be true under all trials is the mark of a person!

—Ohiyesa

(Dr. Charles Eastman)

Santee Sioux

Chapter 10

THE WIND began to blow, hot and restless. It drowned out the sound of my fists pounding against the door. It drowned out my cries for help. I felt clammy, yet the heat of the day was trapped inside the attic. The heat clawed at me like the talons of an vulture—cruel and without mercy.

Sweat poured down my body. My legs now heavy with fatigue, I allowed myself to rest upon the floor. White spots danced before my eyes like white moths. My head pounded with a wild, throbbing pain.

Sister Enid reminded me of Old Woman from my band. She appeared to be like everyone else. She ate, moved about, spoke. Only she really wasn't like other people. She was a woman in an empty body. Old Woman's soul had been taken from her.

Old Woman's son had died during a raid. It is said she knew the moment he had fallen for she dropped her basket of acorns and cried out his name in a mournful wail. Day after day she cried for him, shouting his name.

Grandmother said the warrior's ghost had come for Old Woman. Since the ghost could not take the woman to the other world, he had taken only her soul. He'd left behind an empty shell—we knew that soulless person as Old Woman.

Old Woman never harmed anyone. Sister Enid may have lost her soul but her eyes were not empty. Her eyes were filled with hatred and with evil.

Her hatred was like a physical thing. It seared into my flesh and dug a path through my mind.

Sister Enid wished me dead.

How was I to survive in the attic for five days? Sister Enid would deny me food and water. No one would ever know. Sister Bernadette would be too frightened to tell. And Sister Louisa would never side with an Indian against Sister Enid.

Sister Kathleen was my only hope.

I tried to focus my thoughts on the kind teacher, but I was tired and thirsty. My mind strayed to Sister Enid and her rage. I wondered if she was a spell maker, a witch who used her power to bring harm to others.

Spell makers could call animals and ghosts to visit the living. This is why the Nde burned the homes and possessions of the dead. This is why we never spoke a dead one's name.

Sister Enid could not know this. She could not know of the owl, or the bear. She could not call these things to harm me.

Still, my mind warned me, the Gahns, the greatest of the mountain spirits, had never given me their blessing. White Painted Woman had not come to me and I had no medicine bundle to protect me from

Sister Enid.

Hours of silence passed, and then suddenly I heard it. A sound. A soft cry like the breathy rasp of an injured deer.

Fear clutched my throat and my gaze searched the room. I was not alone in the attic!

Something in the corner of the room caught my eye. It was a large mound of straw.

The straw moved.

A ghost!

Grandmother had warned me of such ghosts. Evil ones who stole Nde souls.

I watched something rise from the straw. Large and looming, the ghost stood. My heart pounded with such force my chest hurt, and the copper taste of fear filled my mouth.

Hidden from me by the shadows I could not make out the shape of the ghost's body, nor its face.

It moved.

I screamed.

The ghost answered with a low, steady, groan. Its arms reaching wildly around in the empty air.

Misshapen shadows danced upon the walls.

Suddenly I knew the bird-of-darkness had been summoned to come for me!

I prayed to the Creator, and the white man's God, that the bird-of-darkness would not harm me. It

would not punish me for not having the Gahn's blessing.

I knew my prayers were for nothing when I saw the ghost move slowly toward me.

I slid backward until I pressed against the hard, splintered wood of the attic door.

I had no place to run. No place to hide.

Still the ghost came toward me.

"Nea-nim tag-win Apache a-me-up," It said. "My people say Apache fool. *Tay yaa-ga bo-sha-whick-up.* Tay cry crazy. Apache fears shadows."

Then the ghost laughed.

I knew the voice. "Anna Thunder!" I cried.

The Comanche moved closer, her body damp with heat and shock. Her eyes were black, with dark circles beneath them. Her skin ash-pale. "Stupid, Apache. Sister Sarah lock Anna Thunder in attic. I not ghost."

She laughed again, a bitter, choking sound. "Sister Enid hate Anna Thunder. Sister Enid hate Little Fawn. Hate all Comanche. Now Sister Enid hate Apache."

"Yes, Sister Enid hate Tay. She say five days in attic."

"Sister Enid think we kill each other," Anna Thunder said.

"Sister Louisa run from Sister Enid," I told her. "Then Sister Enid lock Tay in attic. No food. No

water. Say I alone. Only I not alone.”

Anna Thunder grinned. “Tay make much noise. Pound on door. Look for bird-of-darkness. Scream.”

“Yes,” I agreed, uncomfortable with her laughter.

“Instead, Tay find only Anna Thunder, not bird-of-darkness.”

“Yes.”

“Tay scream loud,” Anna Thunder said, giving me a wide, toothy smile. “Apache have much fear.”

“Comanche hide in straw. Make noise,” I said, lifting my chin. “Make Tay think bird-of-darkness near. Comanche trick.”

Anna Thunder gave a snort of laughter. “Comanche tired, sleep. Make no trick. Tay screams wake Anna Thunder.”

“Comanche hide like snake, under straw. Wait for Apache. Tay have no fear of Anna Thunder,” I said, trying to save face.

“Tay have fear. Tay scream loud. Comanche not scream. Comanche not scream when scared. Not even babies scream. Tay screams hurt Anna Thunder’s head.”

She looked at me, her black eyes filled with triumph. Anna Thunder knew she had won this battle.

Trying to keep some of my pride, I gave her a haughty look. “Tay no want to talk to Comanche.”

The Comanche gave a grunt of agreement. “No more talk.”

Anna staggered over to the mound of straw and sat down. Drawing her knees to her chest she wrapped her thin arms around her knees.

Her soft laugh drifted across the small room. I felt my spine stiffen with stubborn pride.

“Tay think Anna Thunder, bird-of-darkness. Stupid Apache.”

I looked at Anna Thunder, dry straw sticking wildly from her matted hair and clinging to her clothing. Her shadow, a large, dark, image upon the wall of the attic, filled my vision.

This was my bird-of-darkness.

An unwilling smile curved my mouth and I forgot about Sister Enid. No wonder Anna Thunder thought me stupid.

With an understood truce between us for the night, we divided the straw. I carried my bundle to the corner nearest the door, while Anna Thunder remained near the boarded up window.

In the distance, I heard the howl of a dog. I watched the dim light of the moon finger its way along the boards covering the window while the hours passed.

Did Anna Thunder know I saved her life? Or did she blame me for causing us to be locked in the attic. The Comanche was smart, cunning. Was she only waiting until daybreak to punish me for keeping the bread I promised to her sister?

The Comanche, like the Apache, punished those who harmed their loved ones. In Anna Thunder's eyes I had broken my word.

Little Fawn was very ill, she could die. Had Sister Enid gone to town for the doctor as she had promised?

I lay down upon the dry straw and closed my eyes. The Nde never begged their enemy for mercy. We lived and died with honor. Others might say, "tell Anna Thunder you saved her life." But I knew these words could never be said. For though I called the Comanche, Anna Thunder, my enemy. I knew, now, she was also my equal and I would never underestimate her abilities again.

Sleep was slow to come. My mouth was dry and my throat ached. I felt the darkness swirling in my mind. It was a darkness that reached up and gripped my body, holding tightly in its painful grasp. Soon I found I could not sit up. I could only lay upon the straw with my face pressed against the cool, dry wood of the attic floor.

"I did not wish for Sister Enid to hurt Little Fawn," I whispered.

As the night continued my mind became confused. I remembered the bread. Sister Enid's anger. But I grew uncertain of what place I was in. Or what day it now was.

I could not tell the Comanche of these things. I could only close my eyes and I pray. I knew I was very sick. My chest felt heavy. My throat was sore and I burned with a hot fever. Chills shook my body.

If the doctor came to the school he would visit the students in the infirmary. He would not know to search the attic. Anna Thunder and I would remain in this place until the doctor left. My eyes filled with hot tears and I blinked them away. There would be no White man's medicine for me.

That night I dreamed of Apacheria.

I dreamed of a whirlwind tracing a slanted red line across the distant horizon. The low thunder of my Grandfather's drum rolling along in the air. I watched but it is Jacob Five Wounds, not White Eagle, who leads a horse into a circle. The horse pounds its blue painted hooves on the hard earth, while it rolls its eyes. There are eagle feathers fixed in the horse's dark mane, a bright red blanket on the back of the pinto horse.

But before Jacob can make my marriage offering of this horse to Grandfather the holy circle is destroyed.

Flames surround the circle and I am trapped inside. I see the old ones faces in the yellow and orange flames. Deep-eyed men in their hats, others with long dark braids. Round-faced women reaching for me with their thin limbs. Their long fringed sleeves brushing fearlessly against the angry flames.

I no longer know who I am. I only know that I am lost. Lost inside the flames. I fight against the arms reaching for me.

Suddenly I feel icy cold water upon my face. I shiver and my body is racked with pain.

Shoving aside the icy cold hands, I shouted. “No! Leave me alone!”

I put my hands out. But in my mind I thought I felt the cool wind and that the night stars were all around me. Faster and faster until the stars spun and they were everywhere. Shooting stars white against the darkness. I reached for them and thought I felt the heat of their white light upon my finger tips. I wanted to move and run and spread out the stars upon the sky. I wanted rub my hands across the darkness. I wanted to bring the stillness of the heavens into my soul.

I cried out against the darkness.

Moments later I felt a gentle touch upon my face. As if from a great distance I hear a woman’s voice.

“*We-ye-quin-nah-shan-ti*. Rest this day. *Im-te-us-mah-rick-how*. Eat. Drink.”

I do not understand many of the woman’s words. I only know the words are filled with kindness.

I sipped the cool water. And I tried to swallow the thin mush she fed me.

It was as if I was trapped in a world between awake and asleep. Soon I was uncertain whether I had slept for only moments or for many days.

Still the woman’s voice was all around me.

Always with me.

I became one with the low, calming chant. I rise and fall on a wave of sound. Soon the words become louder. Harsher. As if the words themselves battle against the sickness which attacked my body.

Louder and louder. Until the words are just explosions of sound in my mind.
The words held the strength of a warrior, but I sensed the woman was a healer.
I felt her touch.
Her kindness.
I felt my body fight against the sickness.
I knew this woman would not allow me to die.
Then suddenly, there was only silence.
I sleep once again.

When I opened my eyes, I knew I was not in Apacheria. My heart filled with sorrow and I nearly wept from the pain. I struggled to get up, but my body would not move. Looking to the far corner of the room, I saw Anna Thunder, sitting upon her mound of straw watching me.

Watching and waiting.

Was she watching over me, or only waiting for her chance to punish me?

I know I must escape from the attic or I would die.

Crawling over to the door, I somehow managed to grip the door knob and stand.

“Sister Kathleen!” I shouted. Over and over, until my voice was hoarse and I fell to my knees.

“Tay sick. Sleep now,” Anna Thunder said, coming over to my side. “No one come again until

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tomorrow. Sleep.”

A people without history is like the wind on the buffalo grass.

—Crazy Horse
Oglala Sioux

Chapter 11

“DOES IT pain?” Jenny Blackhawk asked, placing a torn cloth dampened from a cup of water, upon my forehead.

I did not answer, I felt sick with the hurt. My thoughts, a hazy, distorted sound.

Was this another dream? Jenny Blackhawk did not speak. What was this place?

For several moments I thought I was dead, but as the English words continued to echo in my ears, I prayed I was dreaming. I prayed I would wake up and find myself still locked in the attic with the Comanche. For if I was dead, all was lost to me. I was not in Apacheria, nor standing at the mountains of the stronghold with my ancestors. I was here in the heaven of the white man.

I did not wish to spend all eternity marching beside Sister Enid in a White man's school!

Panic nearly overcame me. My heart raced and blood rushed to my heart, making it pound and throb.

The strong, harsh smell of alcohol and ammonia made my eyes water. White walls glared back at me through the angry brightness of early morning sunlight. The whimper of small children filled the room. Sickness and the sounds of approaching death were all around me. I was in a different place, now. I knew I was not in the attic nor the dormitory.

The dormitory was also filled with sounds, of crying children, and sharp squeals of laughter and of silence. Sometimes the silence was calm and reassuring, other times filled with tension, still it was familiar to me. I was able to read the mood of the day as easily as I had once gauged the depth of a winter river in Apacheria.

I knew the scents of the dormitory where I lived were of wax, lemon oil and sweat and dust. I was not in a familiar place.

The feelings of death and sickness seemed to press all around me.

The mournful wail of a sobbing child reached my ears. Fear tightened its grip around my throat. I wanted to jump up and run from the room. To clamp my hands over my ears and never listen to the sound of death again. I'd had enough of death and of the dying.

Anywhere I escaped to would be better than this place.

Surely, even the white man's heaven would be free of suffering, I thought.

I must have made a sound, for I felt the woman beside me startle.

"Doctor, she is awake," I recognized the voice being that of Mary Billy.

I tried to move my head to follow the sound of distance voices, but it hurt too much.

"Tay...Tay," I heard May Billy's words, but my body was heavy with fatigue. I closed my eyes and slept.

Later I awakened to find a young man leaning over me. His dark face was filled with seriousness, his brow ceased in a thoughtful frown.

“Mary Billy tells me you are called Tay. You are Nde,” he said, his voice a deep, pleasant rumble.

“Yes,” I managed to whisper. I was uncomfortable with a total stranger assessing me with such a penetrating gaze. It reminded me of the hawks which flew over head at my home. Again and again, they would circle examining every blade of grass, every leaf on a tree branch, until the hawk found what he had searched for. And then, only then, would he come to rest.

“My name is Simon Joseph, I’m a doctor. My people are Osage from the Oklahoma Territory.”

I looked up at features of his face. His lips that were large and full, his nose beaked. His eyes are sand colored, not black, and his eyebrows lift one at a time, like the wings of a bird. Not an attractive face, but a face filled with kindness.

My head no longer throbbed so I tried to sit up. The doctor placed a cushion behind me and I offered him a smile.

“You are a doctor in the white man’s school?” I asked, amazed that an Indian would be permitted such a liberty.

“No. I work for the United States Government. Part of my job is to travel to the boarding schools and to check the living conditions. At other times I work with the army. My council is asked in setting up new

reservations outside of the Indian Territory,” he told me, placing his finger tips against my right wrist.

His touch was reassuring and I found myself confused at the rush of emotion I felt. I noticed that his fingers were short and thick. I could see the bulges in the knuckles. His hands remind me of my Uncle’s hands, immediately I sensed he was trained by his own people, as well as the white man, to be a healer. I realized how very much I wished to trust this stranger. I felt my fear fade away.

“Tay be well?” I ask.

“You have been very ill. The medicine is working which in a good sign.”

“Many days in attic.”

His face filled with anger and he glanced toward the door of the infirmary. “I know. Tay, I promise you changes will be made. You must not worry about the attic or Sister Enid. I want you to rest and get well.”

“Yes. Tay get well.”

“If you rest, I’ll arrange for you to have a visitor tomorrow.”

“Sister Kathleen?” I asked, surprised the kind teacher isn’t already here to see me.

“No. Sister Kathleen...can’t come to see you just yet. A young man named Jacob Five-Wounds has been asking about you. And I thought you’d like to thank your friend.”

“Friend?” I asked. I watched Mary Billy place a pitcher of water on the table beside my bed. My

thoughts confused about what Simon Joseph was telling me. Mary Billy was beside me, yet she did not speak.

“Yes. I thought you’d like to talk to Anna Thunder,” he said, releasing my wrist. “I thought you’d like to thank her for saving your life.”

“Anna Thunder, saved my life?” I asked. I could hear the amazement I felt in my voice. The doctor’s gaze narrowed and he frowned down at me.

“Don’t you remember?”

“I...”

“Anna Thunder took care of you,” Mary Billy said, crowding beside the doctor to offer me a cup of water. “When Sister Louisa brought water and broth, Anna gave you both portions. She kept you alive, Tay. If it hadn’t been for her you would have been dead before Dr. Joseph arrived.”

I did not answer, instead, I greedily drank the offered water. The coolness of the water felt good against my parched throat.

I would have died had it not been for Anna Thunder.

The knowledge slid over me like a soft and blinding light. I didn’t know how to reply, yet I knew the words would never leave me.

“That’s enough water, Tay.” Doctor Joseph said, motioning for Mary Billy to take the cup away.

Mary Billy removed the cup and placed it on the table. I closed my eyes and tried to compose myself.

Anna Thunder had saved my life. I thought as fatigue dropped its silent cloak over me. *Anna Thunder hated me, but she saved my life.* I felt shame for my thoughts about her while we were locked inside the attic. I had thought she wished to harm me, when in fact, she had gone hungry in order to save my life.

Though I had spared Anna Thunder Sister Enid's wrath, I doubted very much if I would have nursed the Comanche through an illness.

Hot tears burned against the back of my eye lids. And I swallowed back the tightness in my throat.

I knew Anna Thunder had paid a greater price than I while we were locked up in the attic.

"Little Fawn?" I whispered, glancing up at Doctor Joseph.

"I'm sorry, Tay," the doctor said. "Little Fawn died last night."

"Little Fawn, died." I repeated, unable to understand why the Creator took the life of the young girl. Suddenly a question fell upon my troubled heart. "Anna Thunder, was with sister? Here?"

"No. I'm sorry, Tay. Anna Thunder was still with you. Inside the attic."

"No!"

"I'm sorry, Tay," Doctor Joseph said. "So very sorry."

I felt the doctor pat my hand before he left my bedside. Mary Billy looked at me with sad, brown

eyes.

“Tay, you must not blame yourself,” she said. “Anna Thunder is filled with sorrow. But she doesn’t blame you for Little Fawn’s death. It was Sister Enid who refused to send for the doctor. Anna Thunder knows it is Sister Enid’s fault Little Fawn is dead.”

I nodded my head because my sorrow was such that I could not speak. *It may have been Sister Enid’s fault that Little Fawn was dead; but I was the one who kept Anna Thunder from Little Fawn’s side.*

It was my fault that Anna Thunder had not been with her sister when she died.

Mary Billy covered me with a gray, wool blanket. After a time I slept.

Though the doctor would not allow me to attend Little Fawn’s funeral, he did allow me to pay my last respects.

I was carried into the small chapel and set upon the first pew.

I looked at Anna Thunder sitting in a wooden chair, beside Little Fawn’s small casket. My own heart clenched in a fist. Anna Thunder looked at me. Her face looked tired, and older than her years. I looked into her eyes and saw only emptiness and deep sorrow.

“Sister Louisa say, Anna Thunder can not take Little Fawn home,” she told me. “Little Fawn bury here. On hill behind chapel.”

“I’m sorry,” I replied, knowing how difficult this was for the Comanche to learn.

“White people no understand. Little Fawn’s spirit not rest. Not go to the place of our ancestors. Little Fawn *must* go home.”

I nodded my head, but I did not speak. What could I say? The Nde believed the same, that the spirit of our dead would not rest in a land far from home.

I searched my soul for something good to tell Anna Thunder. To give her hope. I wanted her to believe that Little Fawn would be watched over. Taken care of. Little Fawn was so young. Too young to be without her sister to take care of her.

I felt my tears roll down my cheeks. *I did not wish for Little Fawn to be alone in the darkness.*

I listened to the stillness in my heart. I felt the love all around me. Suddenly, I knew the White man’s god would take care of Little Fawn. He would take her small hand in his and guide her to the place of her ancestors. Little Fawn would never be alone again.

I knew I could not explain this feeling to Anna Thunder. Our way was too different. But my heart was so heavy with suffering of the Comanche, I knew I must find a way.

Suddenly I recalled what Sister Kathleen had told me about her brother and his wife. Of their death. And of the White man’s heaven.

“Sister Kathleen say the Creator watches over all things. Over the animals. Over the White man and over the Indian. This Creator loves all people. His teaching say we are all brothers. This Creator loves all

little children. He will watch over Little Fawn,” I told her.

Anna Thunder glanced over at me, her eyes filled with tears. Her lips trembled when she spoke, “How will this Creator know, Little Fawn? She not have medicine pouch or our grandfather’s sacred blessing. How will this Creator of the White man know my sister?”

“Sister Kathleen’s brother is in this place. As is his wife. They were kind people, like Sister Kathleen. They will listen for Little Fawn’s gentle laughter. This is how they will find her. They will know her by her smile.”

Anna Thunder nodded her head. Placing her hand on the bleached wood of the casket, she said. “My sister, her heart filled with much love. For all. Even the White man’s god will know this.”

“Yes,” I said, “He will know this. Sister Kathleen will say White man prayers. Her people will watch over Little Fawn.”

Anna Thunder glanced from the casket to the large wooden cross hung over the altar. For several moments she was quiet giving council to my words. Then she sang a soft, gentle chant.

The chant was filled with reverence. And with love.

I knew Anna Thunder was praying to the god of her people. Soon I recognized the song from my feverish dreams. She offered this same prayer up to the heavens for me. I felt shame for the way I had treated her in the past.

Her song rose and fell until only it's soft echo whispered around the room.

"Sister Kathleen kind to Little Fawn," she said in a brittle whisper. "Sister Kathleen good. A woman of much honor. She not lie to Tay. If she say White man's Creator watch over Indians, it is so."

I wiped the tears from my face and rose to my feet. I was weak, but I did not wish to leave the Comanche deal with her sorrow.

I moved to stand beside Anna Thunder. I took her hands in mine, as I had taken Yellow-Bird's so many moons ago.

An Indian Reservation:

A parcel of land set aside for Indians, surrounded by thieves.

—General William T. Sherman
1865

Chapter 12

AFTER MANY weeks had passed, I regained a measure of my former strength and was allowed to help with the care of the small children who remained in the infirmary.

During this time, Jacob Five-Wounds was assigned the task of bringing firewood and refilling the water buckets inside the infirmary. Doctor Joseph also asked him to remain so that I and Mary Billy would be relieved of the heavy lifting while we cared for the patients.

Doctor Joseph believed that sponging down the arms and legs of our young charges with a solution of water and alcohol would speed their recovery. Each morning, Mary Billy took care of this task, while I was assigned to afternoon duty. It was fatiguing, the constant sponging and lifting of the children. I was lucky to have Jacob Five-Wounds there to help me.

The air inside the infirmary was heavy and my short hair clung to the back of neck and my forehead in damp strands. Using the hem of my apron, I wiped the perspiration from my face.

Jacob refilled a large bowl with the doctor's healing water and placed it on the table. I glanced around the room and counted six more children to bath. Placing my hand against the small of my back, I tried to relieve the discomfort I felt from the repetitious movements.

“Tay, you have been on your feet since lunch,” Jacob said. “Sit down and rest, I will bath Emma. Doctor Joseph said you were not to tire yourself, otherwise your fever will come back.”

I glanced at Emma, a pretty Kiowa girl, her eyes closed in sleep and her round cheeks flushed from her fever. I knew Jacob Five-Wounds would take good care of Emma, still I hesitated. My mind was suddenly filled with thoughts of Little Fawn.

Smoothing my hand against the soft flesh of Emma’s face, I said. “I gave my word to the doctor.”

“I know,” he replied, moving nearer. “The Nde always keep their word. No matter the cost.”

I felt Jacob’s warm breath fan against my temple. My heart pounded with all the fury of a war drum. Glancing into his black eyes, I saw a wisdom far beyond his years. Jacob had seen much sorrow in his lifetime. He too had lost loved ones to both illness and to hatred. He understood my fears and my past. Jacob Five-Wounds did not judge me.

“You have taken good care of the children, Tay,” he said. His voice was low and intense. I clung to the kindness I heard in his words. “You have kept your word. Now it is time for you to rest.”

Jacob took the sponge from my hand. His rough finger tips brushed against my palm, but still I did not move away. A warm shiver like hot honey, slid along my spine and I wondered if my knees would support me.

I felt the water from the sponge dampen the sleeve of my dress. The wetness evaporated against

quickly when it fell upon the pulse point of my heated wrist.

Was Jacob going to take my hand in his? I wondered.

We were alone, expect for the sleeping children, inside the infirmary. The doctor would not return until evening.

Being alone with a man was forbidden at the school.

I watched Jacob's gaze fall to my lips.

Suddenly I did not care that we would be punished if one of the sister's found us.

Kissing, I knew, was the white man's way of courting. A wave of confusion fell upon me, it was not the way of our people. Still, I wondered what it would be like to kiss Jacob Five-Wounds.

Should I allow such a liberty?

Jacob brushed a strand of my hair away from my forehead.

"Are you promised to anyone?" Jacob asked.

I thought of Apacheria, of the night White Eagle played a wood flute in a sweet courting song, of the days we had walked along the stream's edge.

I thought of all the times I lie awake praying White Eagle would speak to my grandfather and arrange our marriage.

I swallowed against the tightness in my throat. "No, Jacob, I am not promised to anyone."

“Life is different for us now, Tay. There is no place for us to walk. No place for us to build a lodge. I can not speak to your family, nor bring a gift of ponies. The old ways are dying, Tay, just as our people are dying.”

I felt my eyes fill with tears. Never I had heard such sorrow in anyone’s voice. I found I could not speak, I could only listen to the painful whisper of his words.

“The White man’s way is not a path that I understand, but it is a path I must follow when I leave this school.”

As I listened to Jacob I realized how much older he seemed since I met him outside the garden. Much had changed for us during those many months. I listened and I knew what Jacob said was true. Our world was different. Our lands were vanishing, our homes were gone. There was no one to arrange my marriage. No clear path for me to follow.

“I had thought to live in the ways of my mother and my grandmother,” I said. “To build my wicki-up near the place of gentle winds, to watch my children play in the evening firelight and to grow old among my people. Everything I have ever known has been taken from me. I am confused, Jacob. I do not know if there is a path for me to follow.”

“Poor Tay,” he said, kindly. “You have lost even more than I.”

Looking at Jacob Five-Wounds, I felt my confusion grow. I had strong feelings for this man, stronger,

perhaps, than my feelings had been for White Eagle.

But I no longer knew who I was. Tayania was lost to me, I realized and someone called Tay had taken her place.

I stepped away from Jacob. I saw that my hands shook, and I clasped them tightly together. "I can not speak of the future now." I told him, my voice harsh in the room's silence. "Please Jacob, do not ask me to live the life of a White woman."

I remembered the hatred in Sister Enid's voice when she spoke about the Indians. "I do not think it is possible for us to live with the Whites, Jacob. I do not think the White men will welcome the Indian into their world."

Jacob turned, placing his hands on his narrow hips. "You are right, Tay, they do not welcome us now. However, they will learn to accept us in their world. What choices are left to us? The old ways are dying, even more quickly than our people are dying. I came to this place when I was five years old. My family was starving, Tay. Starving! My parents sent me away so I would have plenty to eat."

"I did not know this, Jacob. I am so sorry." My reason for coming to this school was painful. For I had no people to return to. But Jacob...Jacob had to leave his family and his home. Every night he must wonder if they are well. If they are still alive. If he even has a home to return to. This I thought, is much crueler than being left alone in the world. "Do you have news of your people?" I asked.

Jacob looked at me with troubled eyes. “My grandfather is very ill. My mother does not expect him to live through the summer.”

“Perhaps Doctor Joseph could arrange...”

“This why I wish to enlist in the Army, Tay. An Indian Scout can travel across the country. Visit his family. When an Indian wears a United States Army Uniform, he is not beaten and searched. He is not asked for a pass if he leaves the reservation. His family does not go hungry. He is still a warrior. He is treated like a man.”

I listened to the emotion in his voice. Of his conviction. I understood how difficult it would be for a warrior to be stripped of his possessions. To be unable to provide for his family. Jacob Five-Wounds’ decision made sense. Still, I was filled with uneasiness. This White man’s army fought in wars. In what war and against whose people, I wondered, would Jacob Five-Wounds, be ordered to fight?

“I cannot think of such things, Jacob,” I said. “I can only tell you that I cannot live among army wives. I am not a White woman and I will not live like one!”

Jacob accepted my words, a thoughtful expression coming to his handsome face. “You are correct, Tay, we are not White, or will we ever be. There are many things for us to consider when we think of our future. Go and rest. I will watch over the children.”

I knew that my comment had displeased Jacob, for his voice had an edge to it now. Sadness replaced

the fatigue I had felt. I valued Jacob Five-Wounds friendship and I hoped I had not offended him. But I did not wish to take back my words. Though I did not have a home or any people to return to, I was still Nde. Nothing the sisters did or Jacob said, could ever change that fact.

What caused me the greatest pain was that Jacob wished for me to change. I am Nde, how could he forget this? How could he think that we could live within the army's fortress? These people would never accept us, especially when it was the Indian people the army fought.

Turning on my heel I hurried out of the room, tears brimming and clouding my vision. I was angry with myself for caring what Jacob Five-Wounds said. I was even more upset because I was giving thought to his plans.

As I rounded the corner of the hallway I nearly charged into Mary Billy.

"Tay, what's wrong?"

I was so upset by Jacob's words that for several moments I could only stop and stare at Mary Billy as she carefully placed a stack of linens on a closet shelf. "Tay, are you ill?"

I saw the worried expression on my friend's face and found my voice. "No, I am only tired. Jacob Five-Wounds told me to rest."

"Ah, so now you are upset with Jacob. I understand. Ute men can be so bossy," Mary Billy said, her dark eyes filled with humor.

“No. It was not that,” I said, glancing down the hallway making certain no one overheard us. “Jacob...said something and it upset me...I don’t know what is wrong with me today. I am so confused. I don’t seem to belong anywhere. I have no place to go when I leave this school.”

“These are troubling times, Tay. Especially since Doctor Joseph has come.”

“Why do you say this? Doctor Joseph is good man. Life is better now.”

Mary Billy bit her lip and chose her words with great care. “Yes he is a good man, but Sister Enid and the Doctor do not get along.”

I handed her a stack of sheets from the wicker basket on the floor. “Why is this?” I asked, suddenly fearful that Sister Enid would sent the doctor away as she had sent away Sister Kathleen.

“The Doctor blames the headmistress for the illness in the school,” Mary Billy replied. “He says she did not see to the care of her charges. She allowed the conditions here to become too crowded, the food lacked nutrition.” Mary Billy’s voice lowered to a whisper. “Doctor Joseph said Sister Enid did not obey the government’s rules.”

I felt my heart jump to my throat. Sister Enid would not allow anyone to speak to her in that manner. “What did Sister Enid say?”

Mary Billy gave me a odd look. “She said nothing.”

“Nothing?”

“Doctor Joseph is a member of the United States Army. A surgeon. Tay, that means Sister Enid must answer to him. Did you not know this?”

My hands trembled and I placed the towels I held back in the basket. “No. I did not know...never thought.”

The realization that Sister Enid was answerable to someone, filled my soul with hope. Perhaps Sister Kathleen would return to the school. Before I could voice my thoughts however, Mary Billy spoke.

“Doctor Joseph oversees the running of Indian boarding schools. He is one of the first Indians to be educated at the University. He’s a surgeon, Tay. He holds a highly respected position with the United States Army.”

“This is a good thing?” I asked. “For an Indian to attend the University?”

“To many, yes. Doctor Joseph is well educated and accepted in the White world,” she said.

“All Jacob talks of is the White world,” I said, a hint of bitterness entering my voice. “I have seen the way the Whites live. I do not want to live in their world of wooden houses and many rules. I do not wish for my children to be taken from me and sent to schools. Jacob talks of the Army and Doctor Joseph speaks of the University. What of our future, Mary Billy? We are women, is there to be no place for us?”

Mary nodded her head. “I have many of the same thoughts, Tay. Soon we will leave this school. Sister Enid knows we can not make a life for ourselves in the city. Sister Louisa says we can work as wash

women in a laundry or clean rooms at a hotel. But you and I know this is not true. If we go out into the White world we will starve or worse.”

“Do you wish to live in the White world?” I asked, suddenly desperate for another choice. I did not wish for this school to be all the future held for me.

“No,” Mary Billy replied. “I wish to go back home. My grandmother has a hogan and she raises sheep. Grandfather makes silver necklaces and he sells them and my mother’s woven rugs to a trading post. This is what I wish. What I will do in two year’s time.”

“Why are you here?” I asked, not understand how she could leave her family.

“Grandfather was told by the government that I must come. At first he refused. Then the army came and killed many of our sheep. The Navajo were told if the children did not attend the school by summer’s end, the army would be back. Father was afraid that if the army returned more than sheep would be killed. So, father brought us here. He told me to study hard, it would be good, he said, for my brother and I to understand English. We would be better able to trade with the White men.”

I glanced at the infirmary door and signed. Perhaps I had been to quick to judge Jacob Five-Wounds. He, too, was looking to the future, his thoughts were of his family and a way to provide for the needs of a wife.

“Sometimes, Mary Billy, I am filled with such anger. Anger for what has happened to me and for

what has been taken from me. I am afraid I have hurt Jacob Five-Wounds.”

“Talk to him Tay. He will understand,” she told me. “Jacob Five-Wounds really cares for you.”

I looked at my friend through troubled eyes. How could I make Jacob understand my fears? Especially when I did not understand, myself?

If my warriors are to fight they are too few; if they are to die they are too many.

—Hendrick
Mohawk

Chapter 13

“JACOB FIVE-Wounds, would make a good husband,” Mary Billy teased me that evening at dinner.

I felt my face grow hot and I kept my gaze focused on my plate of mashed potatoes and baked chicken. Since Doctor Joseph had come to the school living conditions had greatly improved. We were able to talk during the evening meal without fear of a beating.

“Jacob Five-Wounds’ mind is only on joining the army,” I informed my friend. “He has no need for a wife.”

“We shall see, Tay. It was Jacob Five-Wounds who sat beside your bedside when you were ill, was it not? It was Jacob Five-Wounds who found out why you and Anna Thunder were taken to the attic.”

I dropped my fork and my gaze flew to Mary’s face. “How did he know of this?”

“He saw you were not in the garden gathering the vegetables for the evening meal. Then later, when he heard Sister Enid ordering Sister Kathleen from the school, he knew something was wrong. He went to Sister Louisa.”

“He went to Sister Louisa?” I asked, amazed, Jacob Five-Wounds would act with such boldness.

Mary Billy nodded. “Jacob demanded she tell him where you were. Two days had passed by then,

Tay. Two days that you and Anna Thunder were in the attic. I was still very ill at that time. It was Jenny Blackhawk who told me of this. She said Jacob would not give up. He just kept asking the students and the sisters. Then finally...”

“What happened?” I asked, my heart pounded so furiously I began to feel light headed.

“Sister Louisa finally told him where you and Anna Thunder were. Jacob Five-Wounds was furious. He knew Sister Enid would never listen to him, so he waited until Doctor Joseph pulled up in the wagon.”

“Doctor Joseph?” I whispered. “Jacob went to speak with Doctor Joseph?” I could not believe what I was hearing. Jacob Five-Wounds had risked Sister Enid’s wrath. He did not know the doctor, yet he had gone to him.

A warrior did not humble himself in such a manner, by pleading for the life of another. But Jacob had done this thing, he had done so for me.

I glanced at the girls who sat around me. I did not know what to say. Suddenly I felt very angry at myself. I had lost my temper with Jacob Five-Wounds. Jacob who had helped to save my life. I bit my lip to stem my cry of dismay.

Mary Billy’s eyes was large with wonder, her thoughts still focused upon the past. “Yes, Jacob climbed the fence and ran through the yard. When he reached the wagon, Sister Enid ordered him taken to the headmaster’s office. But Jacob stood firm. He told the doctor that Sister Enid mistreated the female

students, that she had them beaten and starved. He told Doctor Joseph to look inside the attic.”

“This is how I was found?” I asked, moved beyond measure by what Jacob had done to bring me to safety.

“Yes. Dr. Joseph had you brought to the infirmary. Sister Enid was confined to her quarters until a telegram could be sent. Doctor Joseph was very angry when he discovered Sister Kathleen was sent away.”

At that moment, Jenny Blackhawk set her plate on the table and wedged herself between Mary Billy, and Vida Graycloud.

“There was such a terrible fight,” Jenny said in her soft lisping voice. “Doctor Joseph told Sister Enid he would do everything in his power to make certain she was sent back east. She would never serve as headmistress in any school again.”

There was a collective gasp from the girls seated at my table.

Prodded by a burning curiosity, I asked, “What happened next?”

At my question the others leaned forward to listen to Jenny Blackhawk’s answer.

“Sister Enid called him an ignorant savage and slapped him across the face.”

“This can not be,” I breathed.

“Was the doctor angry?” Vida Graycloud asked, her small voice only a thread of sound.

“Yes,” Jenny Blackhawk replied. “He ordered two of his men to stand guard. One at Sister Enid’s

door and one at her window. Then he escorted the head mistress to her quarters. He never said a word when he came back to the court yard. But he was angry.”

“How do you know?” Vida Graycloud asked.

“In the old days I saw my father filled with such anger. Once he picked up his lance and split the center of a tree. In the doctor’s eyes, I saw such anger,” Jenny said.

All of the students, aside from Mary Billy and myself, turned to discuss this new bit of information.

As they whispered among themselves, Mary Billy leaned across the table and said, “Sister Louisa has changed, Tay.”

I did not believe her words and I know the look I gave her showed my skepticism.

“No, Tay. It is true. See for yourself.”

I turned around to look for Sister Louisa.

Soon I discovered Sister Louisa had stationed herself at the far corner of the dining room. She was helping Lettie Clay Basket refill her glass of water.

I felt my jaw go slack when I saw Sister Louisa smile at the little girl.

Sister Louisa smiled. She smiled at an Indian girl.

“What caused this?” I asked.

“After Sister Enid was locked in her quarters, Sister Louisa went to the doctor and told him what

Sister Enid did to you and Anna Thunder. She told the doctor it was wrong. She even told him that Sister Bernadette was not to be punished. Sister Louisa said that if anyone should be punished it was she and Sister Enid, not any of the others.”

“What about Sister Kathleen?” I asked. “Will Doctor Joseph bring her back to the school?”

At that moment our meal was interrupted by the clang of a large metal spoon against an empty stew pot.

“Students, your attention, please.” Sister Louisa called.

We watched Doctor Joseph step to the front of the dining room.

Immediately the room fell silent and the students twisted in their seats to get a view of the doctor.

“I am here to tell you that the medical emergency is now under control. I’d also like to assure you the conditions which brought about the illness have been eliminated.”

After the murmur of approval darted around the room, the doctor said. “I’m certain all of you are aware that some changes at the school are being made. I feel you have a right to know what these changes are and how they will affect you. Government officials have requested I remain here to see these changes implemented. But before we discuss those future plans, there is something I must do. I’d like to introduce your new headmistress...Sister Kathleen...please come and address the students.”

I watched the other teachers gather around the podium and softly applaud Sister Kathleen arrival.

My heart was filled with such joy at seeing my favorite teacher once again. I blinked back my sudden rush of tears and glanced around the dining room.

All of the students placed their utensils beside their plates and sat, silent, waiting for Sister Kathleen to speak. This time the silence was one of respect, not fear as it had always been for Sister Enid.

“It is good to be home,” Sister Kathleen said.

I listened to Sister Kathleen, but my gaze searched the room for Anna Thunder. She, too, should be here to share in this time of happiness. Soon, I found her sitting along the far wall, away from the other students.

Anna Thunder felt my gaze upon her and she turned. She nodded in my direction then turned her attention back to Sister Kathleen.

Even though the Comanche and I would never be friends, there was a shared bond of respect between us. My thoughts returned to her often since the death of Little Fawn. I wondered why Anna Thunder remained at the school. Even Sister Enid had known of the Comanche’s plans to runaway. Why did she stay?

In my heart I knew it was not safe for her to leave, the journey was long. There was no guarantee she would find her people. Doctor Joseph spoke of the reservations and the long walk the Indians made to the government lands.

In the darkness of the dormitory there were whispers of the Cherokee Trail of Tears. Many had died upon that walk, we were told. Children. Woman. Elders. What would Anna Thunder do if she returned home and found her people gone?

At that moment, there was a round of applause from the students. I jerked in my seat and my attention turned back to Sister Kathleen.

“I would like everyone to think about the chores she would like to do here at school. There will be some discussion on this matter and students will be consulted in the future. Also, there will be some extra classes available to the older students,” Sister Kathleen said, glancing at Doctor Joseph.

“The Doctor has been kind enough to offer his time to train six students as nurses. This is a career which will promise gainful employment after graduation and I think it is something everyone needs to consider. Teachers are also in great demand. Sister Louisa and myself will be training students for this career. Now, are there any questions?”

Father, I love your daughter, will you give her to me, that the small roots of her heart may entangle with mine, so that the strongest wind that blows shall never separate them.

It is true I love him only, whose heart is like the sweet juice that runs from the sugar-tree and is brother to the aspen leaf, that always lives and shivers.

—Anonymous
Canadian

Chapter 14

QUESTIONS? Yes, my mind was filled with many questions since Sister Kathleen's return to the school two months ago. But as I listened to the loud pounding of hammers over head, I knew I could not act as if nothing had changed. With Sister Enid gone, I was forced to think about my future.

"Did you hear what Sister Kathleen plans to do with the attic?" Mary Billy asked.

I dried the remaining china cups and placed them on the hooks inside the cupboard.

"No," I replied. "I spent the morning in Sister Louisa's class room, I did not see the workmen arrive."

"Tay, she plans to make it into a sitting room. Doctor Joseph ordered paned glass from St. Louis. The glass is to be set in the east wall. He called it a green house. He said the plants will grow quickly inside this new room. Sister Bernadette will care for the potted plants inside. Such a luxury for us, don't you think?"

I repressed a shiver of fear at her mention of the attic. Still, after all this time, I was haunted by my memories of the attic.

"It is good that Sister Kathleen has planned this...sitting room," I said, forcing happiness into my voice. "Perhaps Sister Kathleen will talk to Anna Thunder. I am certain the Comanche would like to see

this new room.”

“As would Jacob Five-Wounds,” Mary Billy teased.

I felt my cheeks grow hot and I fumbled at my task. “I do not think Jacob has time for such things. He is busy with Doctor Joseph.”

“Perhaps. He does work many hours in the infirmary,” Mary Billy said. “I think he would take part in the side by side privileges that Sister Kathleen and Doctor Joseph allow.”

“He wishes to join the army. This is what they talk of,” I said, uncomfortable discussing my feelings about Jacob Five-Wounds. Sister Kathleen and Doctor Joseph allowed the older boys and girls to sit together after mass on Sunday afternoon. This was called side-by-side privileges. These meetings were supervised by one of the teachers and only hand holding was permitted between the courting couple. Jacob had only approached me about the matter last week, and I had yet to give him my answer.

I tried to turn my friend’s thoughts to another matter. My feelings for Jacob and my plans for the future were now very confused. When I’d first come to the school I’d thought I could escape the White ways and return home. Over the two years I’d lived here, I had learned this was no longer possible.

“I do not want Jacob to join the army,” I said, voicing my fears.

Mary Billy frowned, “Sally Two Bulls told me Jacob’s grandfather is very ill.”

“Yes, I know. This is a great worry for Jacob,” I replied. “I worry that he will join the army...”

“And what, Tay?”

“That he will join the army and live far from his people. I worry that the army will not keep its promise and Jacob’s grandfather will die before he is able to see him.”

At that moment, Jenny Blackhawk walked into the kitchen, placing a bowl filled with snap beans on the counter.

“I do not wish to speak out of turn,” she said, glancing at me. “But I saw Jacob Five-Wounds talking to Anna Thunder yesterday afternoon.”

“Jacob only has eyes for Tay,” Mary Billy, said, twirling around to face Jenny.

I felt my heart pound against my rib cage at Jenny Blackhawk’s words. I swallowed my anger and remained silent.

“This may be so, Mary,” Jenny said. “Still he spoke soft words to the Comanche. I think Tay should know of this.”

“Jacob has not declared his intentions,” I said, no longer able to still my feelings. I felt their eyes upon me and the heat of embarrassment climbed up my face. “It is Anna Thunder’s right to talk to Jacob.”

Jenny Blackhawk started to speak, but Mary Billy shook her head to keep her silent.

“Tay is right, Jenny. Jacob Five-Wounds is not pledged to her. He may spend time with whatever girl he chooses to.”

Our conversation was interrupted by the arrival of Doctor Joseph.

The other girls, still in awe of the Doctor, quickly rose to their feet and said their good-byes.

Doctor Joseph smiled and wished them a good evening in his usual calm voice.

“I have brought some photographs for you to look at, Tay.” Dr. Joseph said.

Placing a heavily bound photo album upon the dining room table, he motioned for me to sit down.

I adjusted my skirt and sat upon the high backed chair. The wood was uncomfortable, but soon my thoughts were focused upon other matters. Doctor Joseph came and stood behind me and let his hand fall upon my shoulder.

“See, Tay. There is another world out there. A world in the making for our people. These are the photographs of the Cheyenne reservation.”

The comforting warmth of his palm burned against the thin fabric of my sleeve and the fragrance of sweet sage whirled around me. I felt emotions churn around inside me. Emotions I had long forgotten.

My feelings were not like the breathlessness I felt when Jacob Five Wounds came near. My feelings were of hope and joy and eagerness. These were things I had not felt since I was taken from my people two years ago.

Doctor Joseph made me believe there was a tomorrow. A tomorrow I would welcome. I thought of grandfather, of his hopes and dreams. I wondered if he would lead his people to this reservation the doctor

spoke of.

“What manner of tipis are these?” I asked and pointed to unadorned homes. The plains tribes fashioned their large lodges from buffalo hides, the outside of which were painted with symbols of protection.

“Canvas, Tay. The government supplies canvas and lodgepoles are gathered from the woods. This is how the tipis will be made until the new homes are built,” Doctor Joseph said, tapping his finger tip upon one of the pictures.

“The land looks very dry. How can land such as this feed so many people?” I listened to the reedy sound of my voice. The Cheyenne people in this picture did not look well fed nor happy. How could Doctor Joseph think this reservation was good?

“You are right, Tay. It is a hard time for the Cheyenne people,” he replied patting my shoulder before he sat down beside me. “The government’s supplies are brought in monthly and rationed to each family. It is not the best way, I agree. But right now we are able to keep families alive. Agents are assigned to each reservation. It is their job to look out for the interests of the tribe. But these agents cannot do their job alone, Tay. They need help.”

I frowned. I felt the doctor’s gaze upon me and I glanced at the photographs. The album was separated into sections, the name of each reservation carefully printed in black ink at the first page of each

section. Wind River, I read. Kiowa/Comanche at Ft. Sill. San Carlos—Apache.

A knot formed in my stomach as I traced my finger tip over the word. Apache.

“Do the Nde have a reservation?” I asked, looking at Doctor Joseph.

“Soon, Tay. The government is making arrangement and hopes to open San Carlos Reservation within six months. The reservation will need teachers and nurses.”

I nodded my head and looked at the blank pages with the scripted words *San Carlos*, not understanding the excitement that threaded Doctor Joseph’s voice.

“Teachers and nurses are needed Tay. The government is looking for *Indian* teachers.”

Suddenly I understood what he was saying to me. My hands became clammy and my head pounded. “You wish for me to go to this place?” I asked.

For so many years I had dreamed of returning home to my people. To walk free upon the land of my ancestors. Now when it was possible, I was filled with such foreboding I thought I might become physically ill.

“How could I do this thing? I am no teacher.” I looked into his light brown eyes and I saw such kindness and inner strength.

“If you do not help your people, Tay, who will? The government? The army? Who else will be the bridge between the Indian world and the White man’s?”

“I do not know...”

“You are young, Tay, and frightened. But you are smart and you are bold. You have proved to all here that your council is wise. You cannot be swayed by pretty words to do what is wrong. The others know this and they respect you for it.”

“I know nothing of the ways of governments.”

Doctor Joseph smiled. “You know more than many people twice your years, Tay. You know to listen to the words of your heart and to act upon them. You judge a person by their deeds and not by their words alone. I have watched you over these many months. You possess much wisdom, I see it in your eyes and in your manner of speaking. Others see it in you also. This is why Mary Billy and the others look to you for guidance and trust in your direction.”

I worried my lower lip between my teeth. What the doctor was asking of me filled my mind with fear. To leave this school, everything I now called familiar, and to go to a new place. A new world. He was asking me to be a teacher...like Sister Kathleen or Sister Louisa.

“I know nothing of Europe, or of the Mississippi River we read about,” I whispered. “How can I teach?”

The Great Spirit has given the White man much foresightedness; he sees everything at a distance, his mind invents and makes the most extraordinary things.

But the Red man has been made shortsighted. He sees only what is close around him and knows nothing except what his father knew....

—Crow Belly
Gros Ventre Chief

Chapter 15

“TAY, COME and help me with the new arrivals,” Sister Kathleen called.

Leaving the album upon the table, I glanced at the doctor. “I will give your words much thought, Doctor—”

“Please, call me Simon.”

“Simon.” His name seemed strange and unfamiliar to my lips. Still, a small shiver of excitement captured my heart when I said the Doctor’s name.

After turning on my heel, I give Simon a quick glance over my shoulder.

He smiled and I hurried out of the room.

“Yes, Sister Kathleen,” I said in a breathless voice as I joined her on the front porch.

The teacher gave me a searching glance. “Are you well, Tay?” she asked, her pale hand touching my forehead. “You aren’t feverish are you?”

“No, I am well,” I assured her, glancing at my feet. It would not do for me to let Sister Kathleen know of my uncertainty. I was filled with confusion and I was not ready to give words to my fears. I loved Jacob Five-Wounds, but when Doctor Simon Joseph spoke to me today my heart fluttered like a small

sparrow's wings. What was happening to me? Why did I feel as if a whirlwind held me firmly in its grasp?

"I need for you to help me calm the young ones. Can you do this?" Sister Kathleen asked. "I know this may bring back bad memories for you. If—"

"No. I can do this," I replied, and stiffened my spine. "The young children will be frightened. It is better that I am here to help you."

"I am proud of you. Have I told you that, Tay?" she asked, her hand clasping my chin.

I felt a lump rise in my throat and I swallowed hard as my gaze met hers. "Yes, many times Sister Kathleen." I had felt her eyes upon me and known of her approval.

She cleared her throat and I watched her clear blue eyes cloud with tears.

With a start I realized I felt love for this White woman. A love that was as strong and true as the love I'd felt for my grandmother and my aunts. Sister Kathleen had found a place in my heart.

As we walked to the incoming wagons I felt a knot form in my chest. Was Simon right, could I be a teacher and help these children? Or was it Jacob who spoke the truth—we could not live as Indians if we wished to survive.

My worries were soon forgotten as a cloud of dust and dirt covered us. A second team of horses pulled up beside the first. The sound of crying children filled my ears and the stench of sweat and horse

filled my nose.

Suddenly I understood why Sister Enid had insisted that all the children were bathed!

It was as if Sister Kathleen read my thoughts.

“Not everything about Sister Enid was evil,” she said. “When she first arrived at the school she raised the standards of cleanliness and made certain the children were fed. It was only during the past four years she became cruel.”

I did not reply. I could not imagine Sister Enid ever being different than the hateful woman I had know. Perhaps Sister Kathleen was right, even Sister Enid could not have been born evil.

“Have everyone line up here,” Mary Billy said, rushing from the bathing area. She held an apron in her hands as she rushed towards us, her boots kicking up dirt as she ran. “Sister Bernadette knocked over a tub of water and there is mud everywhere. No. No. Not over there, Tay. Over here. If the children get muddy Sister Louisa will throw a fit.”

I felt a smile curve my lips and I tried not to laugh. The image of Sister Louisa acting in such an undignified manner brought a bark of laughter from my lips.

Sister Kathleen also was struck by the humor and she started to laugh. Soon Sister Kathleen and I were leaning against each other for support. Our stomachs hurting from our continued laughter.

Mary Billy stood next to us stomping her foot.

“What type of example are you setting for the children?” she asked.

“A very poor one,” I managed to say.

Mary Billy cracked a smile then helped the children climb from the wagon.

When I turned my attention back to them I saw that their faces were covered with wide grins. The youngest of the Kiowa girls clutched my hand and stopped crying.

“Do not be afraid,” I told her. “I will take care of you.”

Sister Kathleen smiled as she greeted each girl. Most did not respond, they simply stood staring at her flame red hair.

Mary Billy herded her charges to the front of the line and prepared them for their bath.

It was quite different from the day I arrived, I thought looking all about me. The teachers were singing a Sunday school hymn as they bathed the girls. After they were given new clothes the children would be taken inside and fed. I knew that a hearty soup was simmering on the kitchen stove.

It wasn't home. Still, the children would not go hungry or be mistreated. Jacob was right, with time things had become better for us.

Later that evening as I walked under the star filled sky, I thought of the reservation. Of the hardships such a life would bring. It had been so many moons since my feet had felt the soft leather of moccasins, my skin the buttery warmth of a elk skin dress. I longed to listen to the music of the gourd dance. The heavy

beating of a drum, and soft sounds of a wooden flute.

I could almost smell the fragrance of acorn soup and deer roasting over a fire. I wanted to go home.

Where was home?

My home, my future, I suddenly discovered, was a choice I, alone, had to make.

I could speak to Sister Kathleen, but she could not tell me what to do. Doctor Simon Joseph thought my future was on the reservation. But my heart, my heart told me my life was with Jacob Five-Wounds.

“Jacob,” I whispered.

Suddenly he was there.

“Tay, why do you sit alone in the darkness?” he asked sitting beside me on the soft grass.

“I have many thoughts. I must sort through them. I need to make sense of...the future.”

Jacob pulled a blade of grass from the ground and feathered it across my wrist.

“Ah, Tay. I watch you thinking. I see how your dark eyes cloud with worry. I listen to your voice as you calm the cries of the sick children. What is it your heart cries for Tay? Does it cry for freedom? Or love?”

“I do not know, Jacob. Simon speaks of a reservation. Sister Kathleen tells me I will always have a home at this school.”

Jacob rose to his feet and reached for my hand. With one graceful motion, he brought me to my feet.

“Do you love him?” Jacob asked.

“Who?” I replied, though I knew he spoke of Simon.

“The doctor. Tay, are you in love with Doctor Joseph?” His voice was gruff and filled with emotion.

“No,” I said and I knew I spoke the truth. “I care for him, just as I care for Sister Kathleen. But I do not love Simon.”

Jacob relaxed and moved a step closer to me. I felt his warm breath feather across my cheek.

“Do you love me as much as I love you?”

“Yes, Jacob. I love you. I think I’ve loved you since the first time I saw you. Since you climbed on the fence and asked for your baseball.”

“I loved you before then, my strong-willed girl. I knew I would have you for my wife when I watched you stand up to Sister Louisa.”

“Your wife?” I said, bemused at how the word rolled from my lips.

“Yes. A warrior needs a wife, Tay. If I cannot have you, my life will be empty. I will choose no other woman as my wife.”

I looked into his eyes and knew his words were true.

“The army—”

“What path should we walk, Tay? Do you wish for our children to live among the whites? Or do you

wish to go to the reservation Doctor Joseph speaks of?”

In my mind I pictured Jacob wearing a buckskin shirt, leggings and moccasins. His thick, raven-black hair worn long with only a eagle feather for adornment. I could see him mounted atop a brown and white horse racing down from a hill top. His hair tangled by an angry wind. A broad smile parting his lips as he spied the wicki-up. He was coming home—coming home to me.

A nation is not conquered,
Until the hearts of its women are on the ground.
Then it is finished,
No matter how brave its warriors
Or how strong their weapons.

—Cheyenne proverb

Epilogue

Season of the Red Grass, 1892

I FELT MY daughter, Nizhoni's, small fingers grip my palm. Giving her hand a gentle squeeze I said, "Come up stairs and meet my friends. I'm certain they will have prepared tea and cookies for us."

"Cookies?" she asked in a quiet lisp.

Looking down at her chubby face, her brown eyes filled with excitement and her grin all the more endearing with its missing front teeth, I smiled.

"I told Sister Bernadette that sugar cookies are your favorite."

"You did? Is this place really where you and Papa went to school? It's so very big."

"Yes it is much larger than your school on the reservation, isn't it?"

"Will I go here, too, Momma? When I'm older?"

"Yes, dear one, when you are older."

I heard the attic door open and a woman wearing a black dress stepped into the hallway.

"Anna Thunder," I cried. I felt a joy fill my heart as I hurried to her side. "How have you been? I

have missed you so.”

The wariness was no longer present in the Comanche’s eyes. Anna Thunder greeted me with a friendly smile, clapping my hand in hers. “I am well, Tay. I’m so happy you could come for a visit.” Anna Thunder gave me a hug and then knelt down in front of my daughter. “So this is Nizhoni. Your mother’s letters are always filled with stories about you and your sister. I didn’t know you had such a lovely smile. You look like your father, has anyone ever told you that?”

“Yes, Ma’am.” Nizhoni’s head bobbed up and down. Her eyes widened as she spied a plate piled high with sugar cookies.

Anna Thunder chuckled. “Go on. Help yourself. Your mother and I have much to talk about.”

I watched my daughter scamper into the attic. She climbed into the wicker rocking chair, a cookie clutched in each chubby fist.

“Many things have changed over the years,” I said. “Even our friendship.”

Anna Thunder nodded. “During those times, neither one of us thought we would become life long friends. Or come back into the attic without being afraid.”

“The attic certainly isn’t the scary place of our childhood is it, Anna? Why, look at it. It’s such a lovely room. You have made many improvements. All of them good.”

“I have tried, Tay, to make a difference. Having served under Sister Kathleen for so many years, it

seems strange to be the headmistress of this school.”

I felt sorrow tug at my heart. Even though Sister Kathleen had been dead for three years, I still missed her.

“She came to visit the reservation school that first year I taught, did I ever tell you that? It meant so much to me that she came,” I said.

Anna Thunder’s eyes misted with tears. “Tay, she was so proud of you. We all were.”

“I know.”

“Are you still teaching, Tay?”

“Yes. It has become such a part of my life, I wouldn’t ever dream of giving it up. Remember how fearful I was after I graduated?”

“Marriage is a big step. Especially when you and Jacob immediately moved to the San Carlos Indian Reservation. You had a reason to be fearful. What you did was very brave and your letters to us were filled with your love for teaching.”

“Anna, the first five years on the reservation were very difficult for all of us. Often we went hungry, still Jacob and I were happy. Jacob’s parents and grandparents even moved to the reservation. They lived long enough to see our first two daughters born.”

“I know all of this was very important to you, Tay.”

I smiled at the memories. I hadn't thought of those early days in a long time. My life had been too busy, too filled with happiness.

"I taught at the one-room day school and Jacob took up silversmithing," I said. "We were happy and our people were looking forward to the days to come. Those were good days."

Anna Thunder reached for my hand. "They are all good days," she replied, before glancing out the window. "It is so good to have you here again, Tay. Lately my thoughts have also been with Mary Billy, have you heard from her?"

I felt a smile curve my lips. "She sent me a telegram last week. Mary will be here tomorrow morning. We will be together again."

The End

Background Information

THE FIRST government academy for boarders was opened in 1879. During the two decades which followed, more than 1,200 Indian students from 79 different tribes attended this school alone.