



DANCER NEAR THE FLAME

By
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Chapter One

Kaarina stood in the bow of the wheezing troller that was about a mile from Klatala on the southeastern coast of Alaska. Gaping in astonishment at what appeared to be an enormous purple snake coiled around a drifting tree trunk, she turned to Roy Quin, the retired sea captain she'd hired to get her over to the old fishing village. "That can't be an eel. It'd be over forty feet long once it was unwound."

Roy roared with laughter, his seamed leathery face revealing the cumulative wear of cold, sun, salt and time.

Kaarina stood rooted to the spot. "You mean you've seen something like that before?"

"It's one of the feeding tentacles of a giant squid. And its formed a ball around its prey like a python does. I've seen a couple of those bus-long monsters dead on the beach, but never alive." Roy reached for the throttle and the boat picked up speed as it made a half circle around the beast.

An iciness reached down into Kaarina's heart and her mind went numb. "You're kidding, right?"

Roy let out an excited hoot. "Fifty years at sea, and this is the first time I've got a glimpse of that creature's tentacle in action. So I'll have to charge you extra for this trip, Kaari. Giant Squid's appearance wasn't included in the tour. Wait'll the guys at the Bilge and Barnacle Pub hear about this." As he spoke the unseen behemoth ratcheted its limb, and with a dreadful sucking sound, it slipped into the depths.

By the time they reached Klatala, Roy had filled Kaarina in on what little was known about the nightmarish, near-mythical *Architeuthis dux* they'd just encountered. Given the persistent rumors of its predilection, when riled, for capsizing not only hapless fishing boats, but full-sized sailing ships, they were fortunate to arrive without mishap.

Kaarina let out a strangled gasp and she grabbed Roy's arm as he steered the vessel into the harbor. "My God, Roy. Look at the beach."

"Unbelievable. I had no idea the tsunami reached this far south."

An involuntary shiver rippled through Kaarina's body when she got a good look at the shoreline. The tide was out and mixed in with mounds of waterlogged driftwood and rubble on the beach were the rotting body parts of a dozen or so bizarre-looking sea creatures that were stretched into garish proportions. "Look at those humungous fish with huge eyes, oversized teeth and jaws. Have you ever seen anything like them before?"

"When I worked on a large trawler, we sometimes scooped up a few of those buggers in our nets. They're to be found under tremendous pressure, in the pitch black depths at sub-zero temperatures."

"That shrimp is a yard long and that urchin is the size of soccer ball. Even those two small fish have frightening features." Kaarina's imagination unraveled as she burned the sight into her memory. The scene was as an example of the eternal mystery of nature. There was to be no more waffling now; she had to reconnect with her shamanic path. There had been several recent events in her life that had transpired to embolden her

spiritual imperative, and seeing sea life so tragically uprooted was just another one of them. As she stepped down the boat's wire ladder to the quay, she knew she must move forward instead of remaining stuck in the past. She had to get involved with the plight of others and by doing so, ensure her own destiny.

Roy handed her two suitcases. "Hope to see you over at Millport sometime."

Kaarina nodded. "Thanks Roy. Sure glad you're an early riser." Glancing at her watch, and finding out that it was not yet seven, she knew why her friends weren't there to greet her. She was an hour early. Leaving her suitcases to be picked up later, she walked down the pier and onto the dock.

At this high latitude, even during the three or four hours of semi-darkness, the Kagona Mountains were backlit by a wan and ghostly radiance. Now it was the early morning fog that added a sense of ethereal wonder to the village.

Kaarina reveled in the beauty of the place. On taking in a deep breath, she didn't allow the stench of the rotting sea life to override the refreshing odor of the salt spray that mingled in with the familiar smells of kelp and seaweed. This village, shrouded as it was in the tremendous depth and mystery of its native lore, had been her playground for eighteen years. Normally, it would be experiencing a seasonal rebirth this July. But, instead of fish boats tied up three and four deep, three motorboats had the harbor all to themselves. Even the scheduled ferry stops had been discontinued due to a reign of horror initiated by a person or persons unknown. To date, nearly two hundred inhabitants had been driven out, and the authorities had investigated various theories during the past two months.

From the information Kaarina had been given, she believed that a guy with supernatural powers--most likely a shaman--was responsible for the nefarious activities. But the investigators would think she was nuts if she told them that. When it came to why Klatala was being targeted, however, she didn't have a clue.

Stunned, outraged and shattered in spirit since she'd heard about her brother Clay's death two days ago, she'd quickly decided to take over his place as manager of the village's activities. Shoving back the tears that welled up and threatened to send her emotions spiraling into a black abyss, she tried to stay focused.

The sad irony that Clay was an archaeologist--a scientist--who'd been chasing a killer, whose occult powers were capable of reaching beyond and beneath surface reality, was not lost on her. She shivered as she allowed herself to sense the malignant presence that now desecrated the haunting ambience of the village. Not smart. She gingerly retracted her psychic antennae. This was no time to alert that shadowy soul practitioner of her appearance on the scene.

There was much to be accomplished on the mundane plane before she could mount a campaign to exorcise that menacing entity. A successful outcome was entirely dependent on whether her latent powers were up to it. Not a certainty by a long shot.

As Kaarina gobbled up the familiar sight of the village like a homesick child, she was caught up in a firestorm of memory. Thirteen years earlier, while training as a Saami shaman, she'd had her confidence shattered. Summoning up a total shamanic commitment and entrusting the control of her wandering spirit to the care and guidance of otherworldly beings proved impossible.

Warding off the enumerable otherworldly demonic spirits required the kind of fearlessness that she'd no longer possessed. Giving herself over to the required state of

unbending courage and total trusting submission had loomed as unattainable objectives.

But things had changed. Events had transpired that had led to the recovery of the sense of being called to a higher purpose. Hearing a splashing sound, she turned around. Walking out of the ocean was a scuba diver holding a camera. He removed his face mask and grinned at her. "Hey. I thought people were leaving, not arriving. This place has turned into a no-man's land. Everyone's staying in Millport until they catch that psycho who's raising hell around here."

"Are you here by choice or did the tsunami lift you up and dump you in this harbor?" Her brother's death was such an emotional downer, she was desperate for some light banter.

He laughed. "No," he said, giving a wiggle to one of his frog feet. "I was staying in my boat out at Takatal Bay when the tsunami hit. Fortunately, the Alaska Warning Center was able to give me fifteen minutes of lead time to get out of the way. I was able to stuff my diving gear, logbook and some charts into a couple of duffle bags before I headed for the hills. But damn it anyway. When that massive sea wave picked up my boat and plunked it down on the beach, the left side of the hull got smashed."

Kaarina nodded distractedly, silently admiring the imposing male confronting her. In his kelp-draped frog suit, hunchbacked with gleaming oxygen tanks, he might've been another fantastic creature displaced by the tsunami. The square-jawed diver was over six feet tall and somewhere in his mid thirties. All that muscle and brawn so clearly revealed by his wet suit came together in what she imagined was the quintessential sportsman.

Close up, his face was more charismatic than good looking. A number of interesting scars indicated that a few heavy objects had made a close and personal connection with soft flesh. That slash along his left jaw and the mouth that went off-center when he smiled had suffered some major damage. But his gentle and intelligent presence and mellow baritone indicated that there was a disconnect between those battered features and his true character.

He sat down at the edge of the dock, surveyed the fish and crustaceans that had been left high and dry and invited her to join him. After he removed his frog flippers, and gloves, he reached out to shake her hand. "Warren Kyinauk."

Kaarina shook his clammy appendage. "Kaarina Sajantila. I grew up here."

"I've spent my vacations out at the bay for the past three years, but I've never seen you before. Are you Clay's sister?" Warren considered the lovely female who'd appeared so mysteriously on the beach. With her velvety copper-colored skin, windblown black hair, a nose that was a little too long and a full mouth that was just right for her face, she could be a mermaid assuming human form.

"Yes...."

"God, I'm sorry. I just heard that the chopper he was in crashed into the ocean."

"I'm still in shock." About to choke up, she decided that that was all she could say about the tragedy. She didn't know this man, so he should understand that she didn't want to share her grief with him.

Warren gave her a sympathetic nod. "I wonder if you could help me?"

"Before I hear about your problem, I want to know if you're aware of a giant squid about a mile out. He's a cannibal and not to be trusted, so you could've been chopped liver by now."

"Wow! Thanks for the warning. When it comes to slimy scum suckers at the

bottom of the pond, the giant squid's the bottom feeder to beat."

"I know what you mean. The sooner he's back down where he belongs, the better."

Warren's arm made a sweep of the beach. "That tsunami was generated tens of thousands of feet down, and it had the force of the whole ocean behind it. Waves sped along the entire water column as they scoured the seabed.

"From high up on that cliff that sweeps down to Takatal Bay, I saw the main event. It was a stupendous thing to see. After an initial set of smaller wave fronts, the waters in the bay receded and exposed a wide expanse of seabed. And lying out there like some giant seafood banquet was an unbelievable array of sea life. Then a huge wave approached the shore at the speed of an express train. After it compressed like a giant accordion, it reached a height of a hundred feet or more before it crashed into the cliffs.

"You should see the shoreline out at the bay. Talk about bizarre sea life! You wouldn't believe the variety of shapes and sizes.

"According to the gang that's still hanging around here, there was a second weak tsunami surge about an hour later. About thirty feet high, it dumped some strange critters here in the surface waters of the harbor. I've been checking them out ... sure glad I didn't run into that squid."

"I can hardly wait to check out the damage out at the bay. Now ... you wondered if I could help you. My friends will be here in a few minutes."

"I thought you'd be able to suggest temporary living quarters while my boat's getting repaired."

Standing up, Kaarina flung out her arms. "Why not move into one of the empty bungalows around here? There are more than enough to choose from."

Warren leaned forward and placed his forearms on his knees. "I'd like to continue my diving out at the bay. So I was hoping to get hold of another boat. I'm eager to finish my video about those famous sunken wrecks a few miles out."

"Well, if you're so determined to remain afloat, I can rent you dad's '89 motor cruiser, the 'Black Hawk'. Clay had been using it on a regular basis so it should be in pretty good shape." Since he was kid, Clay kept his belongings, living quarters, techy stuff and vehicles in ship-shape condition. Such a wonderful trait. Such a shame....

"That motor cruiser. It has a great family history then?"

"Has it ever! It's survived a couple of accidents while my family cruised the Inside Passage. It was once stuck on a sandbar in an inlet because several winter storms had changed the contour of the bottom overnight. Luckily, a ship used for salvaging boats had been nearby. The damage done to the hull was minimal. Another time, a huge wave caused by an incoming swell meeting an outgoing tide pitched the boat. Poor Clay was launched overboard. And he swam to land because it was closer than the boat. Following that experience, he'd always had a life jacket on when ... sorry, I got a little carried away."

Warren studied her broken features intently before he spoke. "I'm going to need a boat for the next two months. But you're probably going to need that motor cruiser yourself."

"I'm sure you'll let me use it from time to time. Right?"

"Right." His elemental attraction to this woman whose long dark lashes and full lips owed nothing to artificial enhancements had been instant. Her magnetic aura was

magical, and he sure wasn't going to fight it. He wanted to be drawn in closer and closer. "Because there's no regular policing around here, maybe you can make use of my services. I'm a private eye, and I'd like to find out if your brother's death really was an accident, or whether the chopper was tampered with.

"The weird bugger who's been breaking the necks of cats around here. Maybe he's into killing people now. I imagine you're going to make an effort to ferret him out. Clay was sure making the effort--"

"That wouldn't work for me. I have my own ideas on how to catch that scum bag who's trying to lower the value of my dad's real estate." Kaarina's eyes narrowed. "But please, feel free to do your thing. If you like, we can compare notes from time to time."

Warren hadn't expected such a negative reaction. Was her brusqueness typical, or just a momentary lapse? My God, he was offering his services, something that was a little out of character for him. His credo was to stay clear of any job that didn't come through his Seattle detective agency.

Kaarina pointed to a row of floats and the boathouses that ran parallel to them. "Norm Gustafson will be down here shortly. He's got the keys to the yacht and the shed."

"Yeah. I've met your security officer." A couple appeared, running towards them down the wharf. Warren knew it was time to get lost. Even though he found her intriguing, disquieting, even, it didn't take a genius to crack Kaarina's code of the hills. He inwardly sighed. Those cobalt eyes, with their mysterious illuminating power, were focused on what lay ahead for her. She didn't give a damn how she came across to him. "Well, I'm off to get a look at that yacht," he said, jumping down onto the sand, "see you later."

Running to greet Kaarina were her married friends, Amy and Willie Johnson. While she'd trained under Ankau, their grandfather, they'd taught her everything they knew about the Klatala Tribe's myths, genealogy, native heritage and secret language. And, like her, they believed a depraved shaman had terrorized the villagers and caused the deaths of three people.

"Hey, Kaarina"--Amy wrapped her in a tight embrace--"we're so sorry about Clay. That crash is so clouded in suspicion. One of the rotors had come off..." She paused for a moment and then continued. "They're saying it was a mechanical failure. But like I told you in my email, I'm sure that ruthless shaman caused that accident. Those troopers keep their whirlybirds in excellent shape."

Willie's brush cut scraped her forehead when he kissed her on the cheek. "Trooper Dave had to leave the chopper on the helipad in front of the oil dock because the fog had closed in. That must've been when the creep loosened one of the rotors."

Kaarina battled with an emotional tidal wave. Still numb from the shock of hearing about Clay's death, all she could manage was a stiff nod. To think her brother had crashed into the sea while searching for a reprehensible soul practitioner was too tragic for words. Jamming her hands into the pocket of her jeans, she finally managed to swallow the lump in her throat. Setting her jaw firmly, she gave her friends a grim smile. "That monster ranks up there with the shamans who affect people's minds by taking their power and intelligence and giving it to someone else."

Willie made a fist with his right hand and slammed it into the palm of his other hand. "We've just got to stop Lakitcina. There's got to be a way."

"Lakitcina," Kaarina said, "you've given the lunatic a name?"

Willie nodded. "I gave him the name of a sorcerer who practiced bad medicine in the old days. Any problem with that?"

"Lakitcina it is," she said, resting her hand on Willie's arm.

When Amy looked out at the ocean, there was dread and foreboding in the depths of her dark eyes. "Can you believe it? As if we didn't have enough trouble around here without a tsunami. That wave was the stuff of nightmares. Did you hear about it?"

Kaarina shook her head. "Not till I got here. During that seven hundred mile ferry trip from Seattle, I was out of the loop. Sound asleep. And when I arrived at Millport, everyone else was asleep."

"It could've been worse for us," Amy said. "The epicenter was a few hundred miles north of here, and it caused a huge wave to make a destructive sweep of the coast. But fortunately, before it reached us, it smashed into that massive stand of trees on the Kotlinchuk Peninsula. They sapped its energy. But an hour later, the second smaller tsunami swept away that soggy tree barricade and deposited those creepy crawlies onto our beach." Amy shook her head as if a mosquito was torturing her, and glossy copper highlights flashed in her long thick blue-black hair. With her jewel-shaped face and skin like golden satin, she was an Indian princess of the fairy tale variety.

Willie stepped behind his wife and wrapped his arms around her waist. "I know you had to spread your wings in the big world, Kaari, but this is where you belong." He nodded toward the end of the wharf. "I saw you talking to Warren, our favorite fair-weather visitor. So, were you able to divert his attention from old rusted hulks and have him assess Klatala as a crime scene?"

"Yeah. He said he's ready to do his thing, but it sure isn't the way we're going to go after that killer," she said, placing her hands on her hips.

Willie shook his head. "We need all the help we can get, Kaari. This is no time to be selective."

Kaarina knew he was right. Determined as she was to be more trusting of other people's intentions, she'd started off badly. "Okay, okay. Warren Kyinauk is hereby acknowledged as a member of our team. That is if he still wants to help."

Amy fixed Kaarina with a look, at once quizzical and hurt. "Why did you stay away so long? Thirteen years for heaven's sake! Grandfather was so proud of the job you were doing as a shaman intern."

Kaarina felt Amy's gentle reproof keenly. She realized the three of them had changed in profound ways over the years, but hopefully their sense of purpose would find a way to merge again.

Amy's disapproving look indicated that she had more to get off her chest. "When you took off, you broke Ankau's heart. He's eighty-eight now, and when Willie's brother, Lukwala, was ready and able to command the powers, grandfather made him shaman. But he failed.

"Charlie Jack, a middle-aged fisherman, hadn't measured up to his dad's expectations, and his spirit was sick. Because his heart trouble was getting worse and worse, Lukwala decided to perform a soul retrieval. His plan was to make a connection with Charlie's dead father and ask him to release his son's lost energy. But when Lukwala's waking mind was tuned out in the underworld, Lakitcina entered his frequency and distorted his reception. Before Lukwala was able to make another try at bringing back Charlie's lost soul part, the guy's weakened heart broke. It just stopped

beating.

“And the evil one also psychologically damaged Lukwala’s other patient, Nancy Thomas. He’d journeyed to the Land of the Dead, and his power animal had directed him to where her soul part was tied to a tree. He was ready to bargain with her abusive ex-husband who’d been killed in a drunken brawl. But that diabolical shaman was able to link up with Lukwala’s oscillating cosmic vibrations. His very wavelength and energy field. Prevented as he was from bargaining with Nancy’s abuser, Lukwala was unable to return with her fragmented spirit. Now Nancy suffers from even more soul-shattering trauma.”

Kaarina considered this. “Lakitcina influenced Lukwala psychically, so he must’ve been hiding in the lodge, waiting to undermine Lukwala’s success.”

“That’s what we think, too,” Willie said, loosening his hold on Amy, “but when the villagers saw that Lukwala had failed to heal his clients, they lost faith in him and he disappeared.” He set his metal-rimmed glasses a little higher on his prominent nose. “That murdering rat’s not only wrecked Luckwala’s career, but we think he’s abusing the animals, too. If we’re right, he’s got a bear and a falcon under his possession. We think a bear’s responsible for killing dozens of cats, and that falcon’s been breaking into houses whenever it gets the chance.”

Amy’s depthless eyes narrowed reflectively. “Falcon has that great natural food supply in the summer, and I’ve never heard of that bird breaking into a home before now. And as for bears, they steer clear of the village. No one’s ever had a run-in with one of them in the past.”

Kaarina had a hard time believing that a bear could be the ruthless shaman’s spirit guide. Some shamans received their powers from that animal. “If no one’s actually seen a bear attacking the cats, maybe Lakitcina’s killing them.” Willie’s job in the old cannery, that was perched atop wooden pilings jutting over the ocean, started at eight. Recently designated as a heritage site, the large L-shaped, slanted-roof structure had a picturesque angularity that was to be lovingly preserved. But in this present climate, it could present an eerie ambience for those working inside. Every floor vibration, footstep and scratching sound could be just the tricks of an old creaking building or the evil shaman getting ready to make his next move.

Leading her friends over in the direction of the plant, Kaarina mentally ran through the complex workings that went on in the cannery during a peak fishing season. Her dad had taken her on a tour of the plant in the mid eighties, and she’d written an essay about salmon canning for a social studies assignment.

Along the production lines, whining spinning blades, spraying water, fish guts and scales had created a smelly mess. Accidents were common around the Iron Butcher, and the loss of fingers had been common occurrences. Apart from that work area, the main floor was taken up with freezers, managers’ offices, workshops, labs and a village store. A vast net loft was above the main floor, but the electrical room, machine shop, power plant, drying shed, icehouse and reduction plant were separate buildings on the periphery.

It was usually the millwright’s job to dismantle, repair and re-assemble the mechanical plant--a winter long job when the plant had been in operation. But he’d fled, too. So now Willie and Norm had the job of repairing the structural damage, and remedying insect infestation and dry rot after the plant had remained idle for the past twenty years.

Her thoughts then drifted to the man whose help in the weeks ahead would be crucial to her success. “Now what about Ankau? How is he dealing with the madness around here?”

Amy held Kaarina’s hand as they walked. “Grandfather wanted to go head to head with Lakitcina, but we discouraged him from getting involved. His powers have weakened, so he’d be risking his life.”

When Willie took off to get her suitcases, Amy stopped walking and gave Kaarina a concerned look. “Ten years ago ... when your little son drowned, I wanted to be with you. But I’d just had a miscarriage and I wouldn’t have been much comfort to you.”

“Grandmother Laila helped me climb out of my black pit of despair. Lars was just three, but I have loads of memories to draw on. He’ll always be with me.” Kaarina’s train of thought abruptly went off track, and she pointed to a painting of a sleigh and a reindeer on the side of the cannery wall. “That painting ... it’s sure not one of Willie’s.”

Amy spoke in a frightened whisper. “No way. That wasn’t there when we left the cannery yesterday. It’s not meant to be a Christmas decoration, that’s for sure. The way the paint’s been splashed on so carelessly, and it feels so much like blood. Talk about creepy.”

Walking up to the graphic, Kaarina ran her hands over it. Just a touch, and her mind sailed off into the soul craft world of the Arctic Saami aboriginals of Northern Europe.

With a concoction made from boiled Red Alder bark mixed with saliva, the shamans painted just such an image on their sacred map drums. And after they ate poisonous mushrooms that had been purified by the reindeer’s metabolism, the instrument’s rhythm and tone enabled their souls to leave their bodies and fly as reindeer beyond the limitations of their body. In the celestial levels of existence, heavenly spirits filled them in on high level spells, and in the infernal regions of the earth, they found a one-stop shop for battling demonic forces and solving their tribes sundry problems in their unending battle for survival.

Kaarina had to force her thoughts back into the here and now. She turned to Amy. “The reindeer’s importance in a Saami shaman’s soul retrieval performances is legendary. By damaging this wall with something so essentially Saami, it’s Lakitcina’s way of telling me that he shares the same myths, legends and beliefs as I do.”

Willie returned with her suitcases and put them onto the forklift that was parked in front of the cannery office. Giving Amy a knowing look, he nudged Kaarina with his elbow. “Okay. Let’s talk about you, Kaari. In your e-mail you informed us that you’d had a head injury. Can you tell us more about that? When Amy learned about it, she dreamt that you nearly died. She couldn’t sleep for days.”

Kaarina walked back to the row of saw horses where a few old fishnets hung in readiness for mending. “Six months ago, I was driving up to my ski cabin at Mount Baker. And when I had to swerve off the road to avoid hitting a wolf, I was badly hurt when my car smashed into a tree. When I finally woke up, one of the nurses told me that I’d been out cold for two months.

“After that. I had to struggle with severe memory loss for a month or so. But I had no trouble remembering that it was my great grandmother, Maga, who’d played a strong part in helping me to find my way back to consciousness. And I remember her warning, too. My life will be unfilled if I continue to ignore the job I was destined for.”

Willie let out a whoop and did a little circle dance while he pretended to beat a drum. “Then you’ve been reborn! So you’ll have no trouble with the trances. Once you get to the underworld, you can do battle with Lakitcina.”

Amy angrily punched her husband in the ribs. “That demon’s shown that he’s capable of causing illness and death. And whatever happens to Kaari’s wandering spirit happens to her physical body. So don’t talk so flippantly about such things. Haven’t you been listening? She’s already gone through hell.”

Kaarina sighed heavily. “As you two might’ve guessed, I haven’t exactly been in tune with the vibrations of the universe during my absence. So we’ve got a lot of work to do before I’m ready for an out-of-body experience.” She chose not to worry them with the disturbing fact that in order to induce an altered state of consciousness and tap into underworld frequencies, she’d have to dismantle the psychic barrier that still blocked some of her crucial brain chemistry.

“I’d better get to work, now,” Willie said, glancing at his watch, “but before I do, I’ll walk you up to the Trolley House.”

Kaarina shook her head. “I’ll be fine. And don’t worry about my suitcases. Suji will get them later.”

“I can walk with you,” Amy said.

“Thanks,” Kaarina said, “but I’ll be fine. Now get home and give Ankau a decent breakfast.”

Amy laughed. “Grandfather will feel like celebrating now that you’re back.”

As Kaarina climbed the foothills that led to her home, she heard Raven’s deep ‘kaugh’; it was lower and more hoarse than Crow’s nasally, high-pitched call. Looking up, she saw it swoop overhead as if to greet her.

A few minutes later she, once again, picked up on the malevolent force responsible for killing her brother. Shivering, she psychically pulled back and adjusted her focus. There was much to do before she’d be ready to confront the killer, so it was best to stay in harmony with herself and the mountains.

Being alone under a limitless Alaskan sky had once been a solitude to die for. Casting off the ups and downs of a teenager’s life and relaxing in the harmonious company of the trees, plants, birds and animals had had her warming to her destiny. And now it was wise to recapture and expand on that kind of spirit strength without allowing negative thoughts to surface.

As she trudged up the slippery boardwalk that led even further into the chattering rainforest, her thoughts drifted to the main reason why she was eager to rid Klatala of the menacing entity. After five years in and out of a Seattle hospital, her father, Joosef, had been turned down as a candidate for a heart transplant. Now he planned on leaving his home in Poulsbo, Washington, and returning to Klatala in the fall. But, to have him come home to this deserted village after he’d spent a lifetime building it into a self-reliant community was unthinkable.

A few minutes later, when she reached a small shed that the Indian, Saami and Norwegian villagers called the “Trolley House”, she was filled with instant fury. A splash of red paint defaced Willie’s painting of Killer Whale on the side wall. He’d taken great pains to maintain the highly stylized artistic form of the northwest Indians (square mouth, numerous teeth and high elongated head) and developed his own pigments as well. By soaking copper rock in urine, he’d made a greenish-blue pigment and yellow was

developed from ochre and wolf moss. Then he'd mixed them and other colors like red, black and white with salmon eggs, and somehow managed to get the consistency just right. Now all that painstaking work had been for nothing.

Tamping down the rage that roared for release, she forced herself to focus on the tasks at hand. She walked into the shed and climbed into a beautiful miniature version of a San Francisco cable car. A four-seater, it offered the only means of scaling the rocky twenty-five degree slope. Her grandfather, Olaf, had engineered its construction himself. From its underground cable to its wooden brakes, he'd been determined to make it an accurate replica of the real thing down to the last detail.

It was always an exhilarating experience on the trip up the hill, but going back down was a heart-stopping thrill. The weightless, flying sensation and the view that stretched far out into the Pacific Ocean were a breathless combination. The ocean defined this part of Alaska. To the villagers, each tide line and current were landmarks; instead of road miles, the time it took to make a trip by boat was how everyone described distances.

As the little train made its way up the rocky incline, the muscles along her jaw line tightened. Three months, that's all the time she had to rid the village of the evil force bent on destroying it. And if she were to succeed, she'd have to have some allies who were willing to go the distance.

Chapter Two

Kaarina released the grip's hold on the cable and the trolley came to a stop. After getting out of the car, she opened the engine room door and walked down the brick path that led to the Sajantila mansion. In the fifties, Olaf had used Sikorsky helicopters to lower the granite, brick, logs and steel in its construction. Solid and permanent, it would long survive the hundred or so wooden bungalows that dotted the foothills. Standing with open arms at the massive front door with its stain-glassed portrait of Raven was Suji Mayazaki. The same age as her father, sixty-five, he'd lived in Klatala all his life.

"Hey there, Kaari Yaki!" Suji said, rushing out to hug her, am I glad to see you."

Kaarina felt the nervous tension radiating from his wiry frame. "When I heard about Clay, I got here as fast as I could."

Suji broke their clinch and grasped her shoulders while his fierce dark eyes held hers. "They just found the helicopter," he said brokenly, "it spiraled into the ocean nose first after a rotor came loose."

"Clay was never crazy about flying...." Unable to talk while they walked toward the house, Kaarina's mind sped to those times when Clay and her were together in Seattle. He'd been an Assistant Professor of Archaeology at the University of Western Washington and she'd been an insurance investigator. For eight years, they'd shared dinners, plays and music concerts whenever their job schedules allowed it. He'd had a couple of serious love affairs in his life, but he'd always made time for her. Especially that disquieting time after her rape when he'd listened and comforted. If she'd had to suppress that vicious turn her life had taken, she would've become despondent.

"I would've gone down to the dock to meet you, but I thought you might want to be alone with Amy and Willie."

"Thanks. I did appreciate that time with them. I met up with a handsome frogman, too." Kaarina moved through the open door and into the foyer. Sitting down on an antique leather armchair, she removed her runners.

"That'd be Warren Kyinauk. I guess he told you about his close encounter with a tsunami." Kaarina nodded. "He'll probably be leaving Takatal Bay now that his boat was wrecked."

Kaarina shook her head from side to side. "No, he's sticking around. The strange sea life in the bay is of great interest to him. Anyway, I gave him permission to rent the Black Hawk."

Suji cocked his head in a manner that indicated he couldn't believe what he'd just heard. "I wondered when that guy would get off his ass and help us. Clay talked to him about joining our team, and at first the guy was gung-ho when it came to helping out. Then he backed off. Clay thought he'd changed his mind after he'd found out that Lakitcina had psychic powers. But who knows?"

"Under Clay's guidance as manager of the corporation, the locals were able to take care of their own policing during the past five years. But, when Lakitcina started sneaking around the village in the dead of night, bashing his drum and uttering threats

like some ghost from hell, no one had a clue how to corner him. And they began to fear for their lives.

“Anyway, a meeting was held in the community hall, and the villagers informed Clay that they were all leaving. And the consensus of opinion was that Clay should get out, too.”

Kaarina nodded. “Well the villagers must be glad that they weren’t around for that tsunami. They’d start to think that Lakitcina had the power to disrupt the ocean floor.” Together for the past five years, Suji and Clay must’ve become very close. So she’d redirected the conversation. Suji would appreciate that. He was a person who had layers of formality protecting his emotional downers.

Suji led her into the living room. “When the gang working down at the cannery and in the lab were told that a second wave was on its way, they had just enough time to get on the cable car and get up here. Although that tsunami turned out to be much smaller than the one that hit the bay, it bashed the boats around and left them all waterlogged.”

Kaarina sat on a mid-Victorian oak armchair, that her mother never allowed her to use, but Suji remained standing. When she was five, she recalled how her precocious faith in her own destiny had initially amused Suji. Then he’d seen a snapshot that Kaarina had taken of a wolf carrying her backpack. Coupled with her great grandmother’s reputation as a shaman, he was finally convinced that she was the genuine article.

Part of her training, under Ankau’s direction, was to spend a couple of days in the mountain from time to time. That, too, had set the household in an uproar. As it turned out, it wasn’t the wild beasts of the forest that had ripped her spirit to shreds, it was the two-legged beast her parents had deemed responsible and trustworthy.

During the fishing season, she’d balanced her cannery work with a burst of irresponsible behavior, and Suji had strongly disapproved. When she’d left Klatala, her relationship with him had been strained. In his books, she’d been given too much freedom, and in her books, he was an uptight pain-in-the-ass.

For the next few months she’d be relating to him in a close personal way, and if all went well, he could be one of the main members of her team. He knew the topography of southern Alaska as well as any of the crack bush pilots in the territory. In the past, he’d flown several villagers, suffering from various illnesses and injuries, to the Ketchikan hospital and helped Alaskan Fish and Wildlife troopers search for missing boaters, hikers and snowmobilers.

“Are you hungry?” Suji asked, as he walked out of the room.

“I’m ravenous. I haven’t eaten for nearly twenty-four hours. The water in the gulf was kicking up and it made for a bumpy ride, so I decided to forgo dinner yesterday.”

“Okay, then. Come into the kitchen when you’re ready.”

* * * *

A narrow strip of land hemmed in by the Pacific Ocean to the west and the coastal mountains to the east, Klatala was twenty-five square miles in all. A decaying and rickety system of boardwalks led to the bunkhouses, family cottages, oil dock, electric power plant, mess hall and the recreation hall. The one Kaarina walked on now followed the Nukaosa River to Takatal Bay. It wasn’t a pleasant hike. Over her shoulder, she lugged a large mesh bag filled with her scuba gear, and whenever she stumbled on the precariously tilted boardwalks, she hissed profanities through her teeth. Once things were back to normal these wooden walkways, as well as the stairs leading up to the bungalows would

get the attention they need.

Warren had moved the Black Hawk to the bay, and he'd just phoned to ask Kaarina if she'd like to go scuba diving. Did she ever! It would give her a chance to check out the displaced deep sea fish before nature righted herself again.

In places, the creaking boardwalk was in such disrepair, the dense forest threatened to win back what it had lost. These hemlock, spruce and cedar trees had miraculously survived the fires that burned the cannery down twice over the last three decades. Because they'd been well trained, the villagers had managed to prevent the fires from spreading beyond the waterfront.

Gulls and Cormorants abounded in these parts, and she recognized one of Raven's deep guttural calls. There were about eighty of them in his repertoire. Many legends told of his power to mediate the shaman's transformation between human and animal spirits. When she was eleven, she'd had the great honor of gaining him as an ally. Hopefully, he'd soon make her aware that he was still one of her familiars.

Takatal Bay was a wide-open extension of the ocean with an unstable slope that dug deeply into the seabed. The recent tsunami was only one of a series of past upheavals. There'd been several small quakes, landslides and eruptions during the eighteen years she'd lived here.

Kaarina paused to watch a swan, one of the few bird species that remained here year round. As one of Ankau's guardian spirits, she'd been called on whenever the old shaman made his soul retrievals in the past. A symbol of the shamans' spirit flights, Swan was the bird that flew the highest, and like the Indians of Southeast Alaska, Kaarina's Saami ancestors held her in high regard, too. In Saamiland dozens of petroglyphs testified to that.

Here, too, fantastic life forms from different layers in the ocean's depths had been hurled ashore, willy nilly, by the tsunami. Their decomposing corpses were strewn among the wrecked wharves, houseboats and a myriad of weirdly festooned uprooted trees. The forest that had grown down to the waters edge was no more. It had been pushed back about a thirty feet.

The Black Hawk, a stunning timeless classic with a 44' twin-engine motor yacht, circa '89, currently fitted out for ocean cruising, was moored at the only wharf that had managed to stay intact.

Warren poked his head out from the bridge above, after she walked up the ramp and knocked on the starboard cabin door. "Hey, Kaarina. I'll be right down. How about a coffee on deck?"

"Great. What happened to your wrecked troller?"

"Kalervo towed it out of here early this morning. We're going to haul it over to Millport tomorrow."

Much relieved once she'd dumped her scuba gear on the deck, she poked her head into the main cabin and checked out the galley's teak dry bar and dining counter that separated it from the salon. When it came to offering the maximum use of space and helping a guest to relax in style, this boat had it all. Warren was bound to fall in love with it. Closing the door, she strolled aft and collapsed in a deck chair.

As a teenager, cruising was one activity she'd loved sharing with her parents. Overcome with bittersweet pangs of nostalgia, she recalled their trips to the archipelago. Warmed by a Japanese Current, its complex labyrinth of coves, lagoons, inlets and

channels and fiords had given her an opportunity to get acquainted with hair seals, sea lions, porpoises and dolphins.

Her sturdy little rowboat, 'Deerdancer', with its fifty horsepower engine and top speed of thirty-five miles an hour, was always brought along on those trips. And, whenever her parents cast anchor to visit one of their many friends and acquaintances, she'd jumped into the rowboat and gone racing along the coastline with the Dall Porpoises. With their strikingly marked bright white aprons over jet-black bodies, they were the most playful of the sea mammals.

She'd named one of the friendlier bowriders, 'Wanda'. As frantically active as other members of her pod, she'd danced and raced around the boat and then poked her pointed snout into the boat and stared at Kaarina with her bright almond shaped eyes. Once her mischievous wide grin had served as a racing challenge, they were off. If Wanda thought Kaarina was going too slowly, she'd taken great pleasure in tipping the boat over.

The rollicksome Wanda had become another one of Kaarina's guardian spirits, so it was imperative that they meet soon. On wondering if Wanda was still alive after thirteen years, dark thoughts surfaced. Wanda hadn't yet matured during their time together, so she'd been younger than five. Although very little was known about their mortality, seventeen years was a rough estimation of a porpoise's life span. Her worrying was mercifully interrupted as Warren appeared and set a tray that held two mugs, a carafe of coffee and a carton of milk on a weathered deck table.

Warren scratched a grizzled mug that hadn't been shaved for a day or two and sat down on the deck chair at the other side of the table. After pouring the coffee, he handed her a mug and nodded toward the beach. "The damage is unbelievable. All that old-growth forest gone forever out at the Kotlinchuk Peninsula and here along the shoreline. What a tragedy."

"According to the Alaska Warning Center, the quake that caused the tsunami had a magnitude of 6.9, and its epicenter was three hundred and eighty miles north of here." If the development and growth of her psychic abilities were at peak performance, she'd say that this man with an Indian aspect to his looks was weighed down with dark secrets. Behind those eyes, some dark twisted event struggled to surface. Was he haunted like she was? Mind, body and spirit? Had he allowed a shadowy memory or a recent tragedy to rob him of a part of his soul? Why was he alone? Surely his wife or girlfriend would've loved to join him in his underwater activities.

"Yeah. I checked it out, too. And yet, after that second seismic wave and the several aftershocks that followed, there was no extensive damage done to the islands in the surrounding archipelago. That probably means that the displacement of marine animals isn't that far-reaching. But there's still a strange giant-sized predator-prey system near the surface of this bay. It's so damn sad. They'll all succumb from heat or barotraumas eventually. That's why I phoned you. I thought you'd like to get a look at them before the inevitable die-off.

"With my underwater video camera, I'm going to get pictures of the ones covered in bony plates and large scales. I'm sure oceanographers and marine biologists would like to see pictures of them. Up to now, they've been photographed from a submarine, or from some kind of a submersible, but never in the life-rich warm surface waters.

Kaarina was keenly aware of Warren's eyes drifting to her bosom from time to

time, and she cursed her well-worn bra. Although she planned to go wild in this neck of the woods, it would have nothing to do with abandoning herself to sexual pleasures. Males seeking female bodily contact would have to look elsewhere. Picking up on her discomfort, she noted that his sly grin drew attention to the lines around his eyes and mouth. Those grooves were evidence that his smiles came easily and often. But most of a detective's happy faces were used to mask suspicion and wariness, so maybe he was just good at dispensing artificial sunshine.

"Now, to change the subject," he said, "Suji let it slip that you gave your dad a hard time when you were growing up."

"Well, I'll let it slip that Suji is a big fat gossip. But I admit it. I'm guilty as charged. During the fishing season, I got into no end of trouble. Poor dad, he was a community leader trying to ensure Klatala's survival as a self-sufficient community, and I was this brat who did everything she could to show how little authority he had in his own home." On observing how Warren's thick black hair dipped down to graze his shoulders, Kaarina forced herself to stop imagining how it would feel if she ran her hands through it. Was she actually capable of a warm human response after years of playing it cool? Unbelievable!

That unconscious animal grace in Warren's movements indicated a reluctance to conform to urbanity. His casual approach and the blackness of him typified the aboriginal, the mythological. It hovered over him with a sense of power and mystery. Then there was his chosen field of work. A shadowy world, where battles were won and lost at a pace well beyond the normal. His scraped and prematurely lined face testified to that.

Warren smiled crookedly and gave her an indefinable look, so she reached over and nudged his shoulder. "What's on your mind? I feel like I'm being placed under a microscope and studied for imperfections."

"Aren't you afraid that the few guys who are hanging in here will move away too?"

"Yeah, there's that. And, my dad's failing health has me worried, too."

"You love this place, don't you? I get the feeling that you'd like to throttle that shadowy killer with your bare hands."

"When I was younger I got caught up in the spiritual power of this village. And now I want to recapture its magic. Klatala is like nowhere else on earth. Can't you feel the generating power of the mountains?"

"Aha! I sensed that you were on a personal quest."

"When I made a special ally of Wolf when I was five, my parents realized that I had a shamanic genetic coding like my great grandmother. To refuse such a calling can be very risky. I could've become neurotic, psychotic or die. So they had the village shaman, Ankau Johnson, take me under his wing."

"Then you view nature as a spiritual energy system."

"Without a doubt. I've experienced the truth of such matters in my flesh and bones! Skepticism is not an option when you've seen what I've seen." She was surprised to find out how deeply disappointed she was that he wasn't more open to these matters. Like the Saami, the Indians, pure blooded or not, were enjoying a cultural renaissance. Had he turned his back on his heritage?

"So you believe this shit-disturber is a shaman?"

“Ankau believes that his grandson’s failure as a shaman came about due to Lakitcina’s shamanic intervention. And I have no doubt that that was the case.”

“Shamanism ... isn’t it a primitive vocation? A remnant of an ancient time?”

The patronizing way he dismissed her calling was absolutely infuriating. Her earlier thoughts about something missing from her life--like a sensitive male friend--completely evaporated. Her survival instinct surfaced and a strong urge to beat him to a pulp had her insides heating to a full boil. “How can you dismiss a spiritual take on life as irrelevant? Down through the ages, it was the shamans who introduced art, music and religion into the world. Their spirits have connected with the universe. They’re healers, herbalists, preservers of ancient traditions--”

“Okay. Okay. If you’re going to get stoned and fly off to never-never land, good luck. From what I understand about this flight-of-conscience craziness, your lifeless body will be up for grabs. Are you really that trusting?”

Kaarina banged her coffee cup on the table. Hard. Without knowing it, he’d zeroed in on one of her greatest fears.

“Shaman, witches, warlocks,” he continued, apparently unaware of her mounting anger, “and unbalanced snake oil salesmen are all the same to me. Their brain chemistry is all out of whack. According to Suji, that devil has a trained falcon and bear doing some of his dirty work. So first things first. I say we track them down and shoot them.”

“Then the evil rat will just find a couple of replacements,” she snapped. Oh hell, she thought, shrugging her shoulders and throwing up her hands, there was no way Warren was going to accept shamanism as anything but quackery. A prickly heat sensation started at the back of her neck and spread into her hair.

Warren was a detective stuck in his ways. Reaching out and trying to understand her point of view was too big a stretch for him. His imagination didn’t extend much further than the last bestseller he’d read or the most recent movie blockbuster he’d seen.

Damn it, she’d told him more than she’d intended to and that annoyed her. Just because he looked like he had some Indian blood didn’t automatically make him a candidate for an immersion into his tribe’s beliefs in telepathy, mysticism and the transcendental. Confining the conversation to things he’d be interested in would be a wiser course. “This bay you’re so interested in, is more of an open beach, and the offshore slopes that dig down over three thousand feet into the seabed are very unstable.”

“Yeah. My dad told me about the submarine landslides and how easily they can be triggered. He used to fish around here. In fact, he lived here until he was thirty. Doesn’t talk about it much though. It’s as if he wants to forget about that time in his life. But I’m sure glad he told about the sunken ships in the offshore waters.

“The marine history around here is unbelievable. There are four thousand shipwrecks along the Alaskan coast. During the Gold Rush, ships from Russia, Britain and America, that were no more than wooden and steel coffins, took hundreds of gold-thirsty prospectors to a watery grave. And no wonder, what with gales pushing ships into rocky slopes and dangerous reefs cutting into the hulls, it was every man for himself.”

“So what salvageable items have you come up with so far?” She knew all about the hazardous currents, fierce storms and how gale-force winds can whip up waves in an ebbing tide. The shipwrecks, too. What she didn’t know about was this guy’s true nature.

“It’s illegal to bring up things like ship’s figureheads, cannons or masts. It’s best to leave relics like those for posterity. But I’m thinking of bringing up a rusted anchor

and donating it to your makeshift lab.

“Now how about you? What kind of work do you do when you’re not busy making plans to slay the evil dragon?”

“I worked for an automobile insurance company in Seattle, their Special Investigation Unit. But I’m on leave now ... for an extended period.”

“Well. Well. Well. As I told you, I’m in law enforcement, too. I run a private investigation agency. The five guys and one gal who work with me are mainly concerned with challenging evidence rounded up by police. Most of our assignments come from two lawyers who specialize in murder and sex assault cases.”

“For you to take a four month holiday every year ... that means you have a very dependable staff.”

“They’re a great group.” Warren stood. “Okay now, let’s get going. I’ll get my gear.”

Before Kaarina retrieved her wet suit, she mentally checked the list of diving accessories: dive light, watch, compass, pressure gauge, depth gauge, weight belt and weights. Finding everything in order, she got into her suit and gear and flopped backwards into the water.

It was a strange scene. Sea animals that used glowing lights to confuse and attract were at a loss in the warm surface waters. A viperfish with its row of lights inside its mouth, a lanternfish with glowing lights under its eyes and an anglerfish that used glowing bacteria as bait at the end of its fishing pole would soon die.

Others that used camouflage strategies were in trouble as well. Relying on drab tones of red, black and white no longer worked as efficiently. The same went for a few smaller fish that depended on their large jaws and razor-sharp teeth to get food that was scarce thousands of feet down. They found them unnecessary in a world of free-floating plants, fish larvae and single-cell organisms.

As Kaarina made her way around the bay, she caught sight of a volleyball-sized sea urchin gobbling up an anglerfish and a ratfish munching on crabs and clams. So it was, on down the food chain. Predator eating prey. Prey eating predator. She couldn’t wipe away the tears welling behind her facemask as she swam past a yard-long shrimp dining on a diminutive nearly transparent deep-water squid. These mysterious creatures of the deep should only surface in books and movies, not unravel on the surface of Takatal Bay.

Breathing in another atmosphere, Kaarina compared swimming in the largely undiscovered underwater system with tunneling through the dark endless depths of the earth. Ninety percent of this watery realm was unknown, and the multi-layered spirit world wasn’t exactly woven into the fabric of human life either. Both were comprised of equally fantastic hierarchies of strange exotic entities. As balanced dynamic communities, they could be either hazardous or helpful to humans.

Whenever she’d dropped in on the Pacific Ocean around Alaska, she could always count on beluga whales, killer whales and porpoises to relate to her with trust. Their love of entertaining two-legged creatures was well known. When she did her scuba diving in Australian and Hawaiian waters, however, she’d never mingled with seals when sharks were nearby. Swimming near box jellyfish, stingray, barracudas and moray eels was to court disaster.

The same thing held true during her mystical communions with the spirit world.

She'd have to avoid the haunts of evil underworld advocates like demons and vampires. Bloated with power, they fed upon lost souls frantically flopping about in the dark waters of the lower world. Like Great White Sharks that were able to distinguish between prey swimming peacefully and prey that swam about in a panic.

As Warren videotaped the strange sea life, he was disturbed by the thought of Kaarina jumping out of her skin and exposing herself to one shadowy traumatic experience after another. Psyching herself into different dimensions and interacting with helpful and evil spirits was bizarre to the extreme. His dad had turned his back on the old Indian ways and he'd immersed Warren in a world that was visible. Real. Scientific. So Kaarina's beliefs were completely alien to him.

Almost against his will, fascination and admiration for the feisty beauty with spiritual ambitions surged like daylight after a long dark Alaskan night. Truth be told, Kaarina's pluck had attracted him from the start. Since his first chat with her, his disapproval of her job choice alternated with pure horniness. Now he was in a virtual lather of sexual neediness. She, however, didn't seem to be the least attracted to him. That meant that he had no choice but to sublimate his raging libido by literally immersing himself in his exploratory work.

Warren's obsessing about Kaarina was rudely interrupted as he was suddenly hauled down through twenty feet of water in split seconds! Holy shit!

Sucked from his gaping mouth, his oxygen tubes were lashing about his head like cobras spewing not venom, but precious clouds of H₂O. Something big, very big was pulling on his leg and dragging him down, down, down, as he squirmed uselessly. At this point a hackneyed image popped into his head: he was caught like a fish on a hook. Stupid really. This situation was in reverse. He wasn't eating this worm with a thyroid condition of monumental proportions, it was intent on devouring him.

It was amazing how such thoughts could co-exist with the panic that threatened to overwhelm him. Insane. Peering through the roiling bubbles, he saw a truly monstrous squid. The better part of its massive heaving bulk was only barely discernible through the murk. From the midst of its thrashing tentacles, it saw him by means of a glowing green unblinking eye the size of a semi's hubcap!

During his disorienting plunge into the deep, Warren had lost his camera. Shedding more stuff was crucial! Unbuckling his weighted belt, he frantically rid himself of the rest of his scuba gear.

Kicking and twisting in a futile effort to rise, he felt as defenseless as one of the baby whales that squids held underwater until they drowned. His struggles were increasingly feeble as his muscles became starved for air. Forced as he was to remain still in the airless gloom, the crushing weight of the water pushed in on him from all sides.

The growing numbness in his hands and feet alerted him to the fact that his heart was weakening. Just as he was about to give in to his desperate nervous system's fatal urge to breathe, he caught sight of Kaarina. Descending like an angel in a shimmering aura, her diving lantern shone like a jet's landing lights as it pierced the nest of deadly sucker-lined arms closing in on him.

Through the tangle of eel-like appendages propelling him towards a poisonous beak that would poke him to death before a raspy-toothed tongue rammed him into its esophagus, his peripheral vision picked up the flash of a knife. Thunderstruck by the speed and accuracy of Kaarina's attack, he watched as she sliced into one of the

monster's ghastly dinner-platter eyes. Thankfully, that was enough to piss off the ink-spewing blob.

It was impossible, but Warren thought he heard the great beast scream in rage and agony as it immediately released him and sucked itself out of sight into a boiling blue-black cloud.

Warren was totally disoriented by the time he was freed. Kaarina must've sensed this because she raised her arm and pointed him in the right direction.

Chapter Three

On the deck of the Black Hawk, Kaarina and Warren took turns helping each other hose off the squid's dark syrupy ooze. And later, after they'd showered and changed, Kaarina poured them both a tumbler of her father's best scotch.

"I can't believe it," Warren said, "the damn thing grabs onto anything. Inedible as I am, he still had it in for me. Thank God you had your Dive Knife Stiletto handy. I managed to lose mine in a wreck the other day, and I haven't had a chance to replace it. I broke rule number one. Never go underwater unarmed."

"I'm sure dad's got one or two knives around here somewhere." Kaarina got up from the booth and rummaged through an old metal trunk near the entrance to the pilot's cabin. "Here we go." She held up a knife. "This Vintage Scubapro sure brings back memories. Dad's cut through many a fishing line with it. One time he got caught in a fishnet, and he'd had a hell of a time convincing a shark that he wasn't a seal."

"Thanks, this'll do fine till I get over to Millport." Throwing back a belt of the scotch, Warren drank in the beauty of his grinning heroine with her long black hair slicked back and gleaming in the slanted sunlight. He'd never forget the wondrous sight of this brave and beautiful woman descending to rescue him. She'd embodied a Valkyrie, a warrior maiden of the Norse myth variety.

This brush with death had induced something that was as close to a spiritual epiphany as Warren had ever experienced. Now he was in the glow of experiencing the aftershock of surviving that event. Kaarina had pulled him up and away from a sea monsters grasp, only to have him drown in her dangerous psychic aura. Her lovely and vital presence and the sweetly searing scotch came to a focus that ignited a fire in his loins.

"For a while there," Kaarina said, "I thought I'd ... we'd lost you. I'm sure you were under water for nearly three minutes. Your eyes had gone dark and your face was pasty white. Do you have gills hidden somewhere?"

"The pressure at that depth must've tricked me into believing I still had air in my body. It's a wonder I didn't puncture my ear drums." Talk about hidden organs, he thought, grinning sheepishly.

"That squid's arms were ten feet long at least, thick as telephone poles. As long as a bus, it must've weighed in at three tons. Cutting into a tentacle was the first thing that came to my mind, but that would've taken up too much time. So slicing into the largest eye in the animal kingdom was the way to go."

"All your talk of tapping into the supernatural has had me scratching my head. But I'm telling you, my brain harnessed a pretty weird kind of psychic energy when it was starved for oxygen. Some aspect of myself went flying up into the sky and it looked down at my body under the water. Does that count as an out-of-body experience?"

"Certainly. You're now ready for a shamanic initiation."

Warren picked up on her teasingly sarcastic tone, and he gave her a painful look. Did this wildly independent mystic-maiden have any idea how fearless she'd been? Her

strength of purpose as she'd confronted that corpulent rubbery blob had been extraordinary. She'd saved his life, and he was in her debt. "Seriously though, I'm starting to think that anything's possible in this neck of the woods. From what I've heard, this place has a colorful history. How about giving me a rundown?"

"The Taquala Tribal Council, along with my dad's financial help, spearheaded archaeological research in nineteen seventy-two. It was called the Klatala Prehistory Project. And every summer for the next five years, the cannery crew shared the two sixty-bed bunkhouses with university students who were involved with the fieldwork.

"Several archaeological sites revealed ten thousand year old information about the Indians' ancient tools and weapons as well as the flora and fauna. I was just a kid then, but I can remember how the village came alive when our population swelled to over five hundred. Cannery workers, fishermen and university students joined forces. Love affairs blossomed and Klatala got some new blood.

"A few years later, dad had to close down the old cannery. The development of fast refrigerated transportation of the raw fish being one of the reasons. And then he bankrolled the construction of a new plant for processing specialty seafood. The village corporation runs it now and everyone's a shareholder. Over the years, dad's also given several small businesses a leg up.

"When he had a heart attack five years ago, Clay took over." Her hand began to shake, and she hastily gulped down her coffee.

Aware of her distress, Warren tried to distract her. "What's the plan, Kaarina? How're you going to get things back to normal?"

"I'm hell-bent for leather to become a shaman. I believe it's the only way I'll be able to outsmart Lakitcina. Amy and Willie feel it's entirely within my grasp. They figure that if eight years of higher education is enough to get an aspiring doctor or lawyer on their way, it's long enough for completing a shamanic course. All learning is ongoing, so experience is key, too.

"And though I tried to blow you off earlier when you offered to help us nail Lakitcina, we really need your help. Not only do we need to stop Lakitcina in his tracks, we need to find out who's helping him. He can't be working alone."

* * * *

An hour later, Kaarina arrived at the imposing five thousand square foot Johnson Lodge. It had been renovated many times, increasing in length and height to meet the needs of the community growing up around it.

The four totem poles at the entrance, although they were over a hundred years old, remained unaltered. Hewn from huge cedar timbers, each one was a universe in its own right. Sacred or ceremonial, there were layers upon layers of amassed meaning in each pole. From the Indian's standpoint, there was a connection between their daily lives, their art and their actual and mythical history. In such a harmonious worldview, animal, human and supernatural realms were intimately interrelated.

The one to the far left of the massive front door was dedicated to Raven, teacher, transformer and culture hero. Out of the hundreds of stories recounting his invariably obscene and comic adventures, the ones portraying him as an unscrupulous and lascivious trickster were Kaarina's favorites. As a young child, she'd loved to hear them told over and over again.

Amy answered the door. "I wondered when you'd get around to paying us a visit.

How did your dive with Warren work out?" she asked, grinning impishly.

Kaarina followed Amy into the great hall where a second set of four beautifully carved totem poles supported a lofty roof composed of massive wooden cedar beams. As a child, Kaarina had learned all the tales, legends and myths the carvers had so marvelously depicted in the enduring wooden text of these great cedar poles.

Kaarina hated to shatter Amy's light-hearted mood, but she had to be told of Warren's near-death experience. So, once they were seated on one of the two well-used sofas that were covered with bright hand-woven blankets, she gave her a rundown.

A tearful Amy kissed Kaarina on the cheek. "I'm so proud of you. You were so unbelievably brave."

Willie rushed in, all smiles. Amy had set her sights on her husband when the three of them hung out at the lodge and worked on their high school correspondence courses. Not only smitten by his deep-set coal black eyes, mesmerizing bass voice, she'd been impressed by his maturity and diligence as he'd concentrated every last ounce of his energies on his assignments.

Clay had told her that he was a first-rate lab technician. No surprise there. His tribe had excelled in classifying the nature and behavior of plants, fish and mammals from time immemorial.

"Warren just phoned," Willie said, dropping to the floor in front of them, "and told me about your battle with the squid. My God woman, were you hurt?"

"I'm okay." Kaarina assured him.

Willie's laugh held a nervous edge as he drew his legs close to his body. "The spirits must've been guiding your hand then. It's amazing, incredible." He was literally vibrating with excitement. "I told Norm about it, so he'll be on his radiotelephone spreading the news."

Amy grabbed Kaarina's hand. "And while we're on the subject of strange sea life, Willie and I got pictures of those beached critters in the harbor before we buried them."

"Great," Kaarina said. "According to the information I found on the Internet, warm water affects the giant squid's buoyancy. So it must be stuck on the surface, and it'll soon suffocate because its blood doesn't carry oxygen very well. And when that monster winds up on the beach, invite me to the burial."

"Will do," Willie said. "But speaking of things to do, it's time to get back to my job. I've got to start up the pumps and force some cleaning solution into those old cannery retorts. It's an endless job. Oiling and greasing all the machines, pipes, conveyors and processing tanks takes up most of my time."

Amy's dark eyes lit up with an inner fire. "Willie's working as a janitor when he should be with me working with our tribe's cultural remains. Just think about it, our symbolic artwork is finally being recognized. Museums and universities are not only returning the cultural remains and artifacts of my ancestors, they're urging private collectors to follow their example."

The smile Kaarina directed at Willie turned into a frown. The job he'd been assigned was certainly not his by choice, and he must be seething inside. "I know you'd rather be back in the Turtle Shell doing lab work. Blame dad, he's the one who told Clay to give you and Norm that cannery job."

Willie threw out his arms. "When I was younger, Joosef taught me everything I needed to know about keeping that huge plant from rusting away. I know the inner

workings of every piece of machinery in the plant. Gutting, canning, weighing, sorting, cooking, I've done it all. So it's no wonder he wanted me to work with Norm."

Amy shrugged. "I know. I know, Willie. You've told me over and over again. The idea is to get the cannery ready for Joosef's inspection. But I still feel that job can wait. It's dangerous to be in that plant with all that machinery."

When Willie stood, Kaarina jumped to her feet and hugged him. "I promise to get you more help. Amy's right. Lakitcina had threatened to gut Clay in the Butcher Machine—"

"We heard about that," Amy said, as she got up and put a protective arm around her husband. "That's why I want Willie out of there."

Willie rolled his eyes and grinned at Kaarina. "Now you know why I married this little scrapper. She's my protector."

Kaarina took Amy's face in her hands. "That's only one of the reasons you snatched her up. Beauty and brains all wrapped up in a sexy package--"

"Okay," Amy said, "that's enough. Lunchtime's over for me, too. Before Indre and Arvo Maki get back from Poulsbo tomorrow, I've got to finish opening a few boxes of skeletal remains that came in by chopper yesterday."

Willie pointed to the kitchen patio doors through which Ankau could be seen sitting on a lounge chair reading. "Your squid-bashing gave grandfather a tremendous boost. His belief in your strengths just went up a notch. Ridding the planet of that demonic shaman is all he can talk about lately. And he believes you're the one who can do it."

Standing at the door, Kaarina watched her friends hurry off together, and gave thought to how the past years had changed her. While working in Seattle, she'd spread her wings when it came to acquiring experiences in her job and participating in a feminine-oriented social life. When it came to her true and trusting persona, however, only a few people had dared to test her defensive shield of polite reserve.

Keeping her own counsel was part of a shaman's job, and she'd get high marks for that requirement. But, when it came to having unshakable confidence in her ability to deal with the underground forces of darkness during a reality shift, she'd get a failing grade. That meant that all those protective mechanisms she'd used to keep people at bay--particularly men--had to be dismantled piece by piece. Dealing with unresolved fear. Yuk.

As she walked by the open-tread staircase made of split cedar logs, she glanced admiringly at the giant hand-carved eagle head looking down from the gallery above. The beautiful ceremonial robes made of goat hair and cedar bark, that hung over the railing, were Amy's contributions. The headdresses, masks and crest hats were Willie's.

The Johnsons took pride in preserving wooden artifacts like the birch wood bows, rattles and ceremonial boxes. They were especially proud of the seaworthy seventy-five foot canoe they'd constructed and placed on display in a special shed out back.

Overwhelmed with sadness at Ankau's fallen status, Kaarina paused before going out on the verandah. The authority he had over his tribe was no more. His grandson, Lukwala, had tried to take over for him, but Lakitcina had proven his power was stronger when he'd interfered with his two soul retrievals. One patient had died, and the other had had a relapse. Now that the Taquala Tribe no longer looked to Lukwala for help with their mental and physical problems, he'd disappeared.

The sunlight silvered Anka's long white hair. It was as thick as it was a dozen years ago, but with no black threads in the mix. His wispy mustache, that drooped down at the sides of his mouth, and wire-rimmed glasses gave him the look of a storybook wizard. His face was a little thinner with more wrinkles and more loosening of flesh. The hardships and strenuous ordeals he'd endured over the years must've taken their toll internally as well. And, according to what she'd read, Anka risked the loss of even more of his power whenever he took on the role of teacher.

On seeing her, Anka raised his arms in a graceful welcoming gesture as he stood up. "Ah, Veleda, my little Saami shaman. You're back where you belong."

"Paxala, my favorite teacher!" Kaarina laughed with delight as she was engulfed in the old man's gentle, but still powerful bearhug. He'd given her the pet name Veleda, the Latin name for 'wise woman', when she was around five. Her namesake was the first of the great female heroines, the embodiment of deep soul wisdom.

Patting her cheeks tenderly with calloused age-worn hands, Anka nodded at a large wooden chair. "Sit down, we have much to talk about."

Kaarina felt his eyes on her as she fiddled with a couple of the chair cushions before she sat down. "I can't believe Clay's dead...." Her throat tightened up and she gave Anka a helpless look.

"It's a terrible tragedy. Terrible. Your parents must find it hard to bear."

"Clay loved his job as an assistant archaeology professor, so he'd taken over the cannery management to please dad. And he'd done a terrific job. So now it's not only dad's heart that's damaged, it's his soul, too."

"The Klatala Tribe believes Lakitcina's responsible for his death. And it's further proof that that devil is resorting to desperate measures. So you must continue your shamanic training at once."

Kaarina nodded. "I feel that you and I had never lost our close connection. Like a couple of years ago, when I phoned you and told you I thought Wanda was in trouble. And you'd told me that she'd been mistaken for a miniature orca that same day. Those fishermen would've hauled her off to an aquarium if you hadn't stopped them."

"Well, I've experienced an even more recent underlying dynamic between us."

"You sound very mysterious, Paxala." The latter was an Indian name for shaman, and when she'd been around three years old, she'd fallen in love with the word.

"Maga made a mysterious appearance in my dream on the night of your accident. So I knew instinctively that something was wrong in your life. Wolf was in the dream, too. That meant that he's still a major force in your life."

"And when you finally contacted us two months later, and told us you'd been in a coma, I knew you'd have to work hard in order to make yourself well again. And here you are. You've been in contact with pain and death, and you've surmounted it."

"Maga never mentioned that she'd invaded your dream world. What she did do, was remind me that the shamanic tradition in the Sajantila family had remained unbroken down through the centuries. And, by ignoring my obligation, I was headed for an unfulfilled life." Several Saami families living in the village made Anka's skills part of their holistic approach to getting well, so he'd learned all he could about Saami customs, history and spirituality. That was fortunate because mixing the Indian and Saami shaman traditions was always a concern for her. If she was being presumptuous for adopting some of the local Indian tribe's philosophies, she wanted a sign of some kind.

“You’ve been lucky, young lady. Some Indians who’d walked away from their shamanic calling have suffered terribly. Sickness. Hardship. Insanity.”

“Believe me, Paxala. I know. I know. But now I want you to give me your opinion about that two month coma I was in.” Her accident had given her an awareness of her own transience, but her brother’s death was still to be worked through.

“In a way, it was a kind of death, and through your own strengths you healed yourself. In the future, when you’re dealing with the crisis situations of others, you’ll have the knowledge to understand and manage it. As a wounded healer, you’ve had hands-on experience.

“In a way, your involvement with law enforcement will prove of great help, too. Just like a shaman, you’ve been treating people and their sources of emotional and physical distress. Crisis situations.

“Every event, every dream, every encounter with animals and other human beings, however insignificant it may seem at the time, is potentially crucial to one’s success or failure in spiritual matters. I’m sure you can tell of many times when your shamanic training helped you with your investigative work. Your great imagination, perception, and your ability to unlock the magic of the mountains ... you had those attributes when you were very young.”

Kaarina nodded. Ankau’s words spoken in that composed authoritative tone of his deeply resonated with her. She was already seeing her past in a different light. Not as a diversion from true work, but as a preparation for it. She had sense enough to know that her response could be of profound importance to this formidable man. Although he was full of encouragement, he’d be wondering if she had what it took to replace him as shaman. “I was sometimes able to filter out the stuff that kept my brain from accessing the greater reality. Especially when it came to focusing on chop shops where crooks dismantled stolen cars prior to selling the parts. During my lucid dreams, I was able to zero in on a number of them.

“More recently, when my job was investigating stolen car rings--theft for export--I was able to pinpoint the harbor area where stolen cars were delivered to outgoing ships. I told my fellow officers that an anonymous informer had given me the information. If I’d told them the truth, they’d have thought I was nuts.”

“Lucid dreams, as you know, are stepping stones on the shamanic path. Now I want you to make use of both your detective and shamanic training and get to know the people in the village. Find out who you can trust, and who might be giving comfort to Lakitcina. We must find out who is beating his sacred drum when he induces trances and acting as his informant. His identity is being hidden from me somehow.”

Kaarina saw that the conversation was over. It was urgent for her to begin at once. She must become Ankau’s eyes and ears. By using her growing powers to supplement his, maybe she’ll be able to see things the intruder had veiled from him. On rising, she grasped his hand and promised to report back to him soon.

* * * *

On reaching the Tenu Fiord where Kalervo Hilma and Jerry Stableford made their homes on the water, Kaarina found the area in a state of unbelievable neglect. The narrow beach was littered with rotting fish, rusting oilcans and broken-down barges. The tsunami couldn’t be blamed because it hadn’t come anywhere near the fiord.

The three ancient totem poles, with their carvings of wings, talons and limbs

interwoven with figures like frogs, beavers, sea lions and bears, as well as the heraldic figures raven and wolf, sat well back from the beach. One pole represented four clan house groups. For the memorial pole, a carver had used animals but no clan crests and a third pole depicted the history of a past social upheaval. Their presence testified to the sacred potential of this place.

It needed attention. Now.

There were other uplifting sights, too. This saltwater fiord was narrow and countless thousand foot waterfalls spewed down from the granite cliffs above. Below the surface, undulating life forms were involved with the ebb and flow of an underwater food chain. Then there was the wildlife. A bear gobbled down a fish across the way and a couple of seals loitered on a rock nearby.

The scow behind Kalervo's gillnetter "Oystercatcher" held Warren's wrecked boat. When it came to developing teamwork around here, that was definitely a good beginning.

The other troller with its two upright poles pointing to the sky was anchored at a longer wharf about twenty feet away. So it, and the rundown float house with its sloped metallic roof moored nearby, must be Jerry Stableford's.

The bleak and depressing ambience of the scene now took on an eerie and ominous quality as the sun disappeared behind thick gray clouds and a clammy fog closed in around her.

She jumped slightly when her old school pal, Kalervo, appeared on the deck of his boat.

"Kaari, I'm so glad to see you. Come on up."

Kaarina grabbed the work-roughened hand that reached down for her. Kalervo easily hauled her up over the short railing above the gunwale, and she was sent sprawling onto the deck.

Kalervo apologized profusely as he helped her up. "You've lost weight, Kaari?"

Kaarina laughed. "Ever the charmer." He was one tough hombre, too. His physical strength had inspired a number of local fisticuff legends. As a teenager, he'd often been involved in brawls at the Saturday night dances. That's when other guys learned that competing for his lady-of-the-moment was a no-win situation.

"I've just made some coffee. Would you like a cup?"

"Yeah. That'd be great," she said, as she tucked her T-shirt back into her shorts.

"You're taking over for Clay, eh?" Kaarina nodded numbly. "Poor bugger, to have his life cut short by that evil bastard. Trooper Dave was a neat guy, too. He had a wife and two kids. What a tragedy."

Kaarina followed Kalervo to the wheelhouse in the bow and sat down beside a makeshift table. While she watched him grab a bag of cookies from the open shelf above her and then move to the nearby propane stove to fill two mugs with coffee, she took a good look at him. During the past thirteen years, he'd filled out a little. Although he was the same age as she was, ten years of working outdoors had left its mark.

He'd told her that he lacked melanin, but the hot sun and the cold winds had given his face a ruddiness that could certainly pass for a tan. His square jaw and a nose that was slightly crooked--a result of having it broken twice--gave him the look of a fighter who'd lost a few bouts. His mouth still turned up at the corners, giving the impression that his smiles still came easily.

In a harsh, strained voice Kalervo awkwardly extended his sympathy to her for the death of his old friend, Clay.

Kaarina was anxious to change the subject. "How's the fishing down here these days?" Swinging her head around, she nodded at the ceiling where dozens of lids had been banged into the ceiling. The glass mayonnaise jars, which were screwed into them, held a myriad of colorful fishhooks. He'd be able to fish alone when he trolled, she thought as her investigative skills came into play, but there had to be at least a two-man crew whenever the nets were set in the water.

"Good for some guys. So-so for me. And you're wondering why I'm still hanging around here on a weekday. Right?"

"Well why not? This is the height of the season. I thought you fishermen only touched port on the weekends." She glanced at a stern-mounted reel and roller for setting and hauling nets. "Wasn't this boat originally your dad's?"

"Yeah. But unlike him, I don't spend half the year out on the ocean. With ten years under my belt, the loneliness and the demands of the job really got to me. My God, sometimes I couldn't shower for weeks at a time. So, once the boat was paid for, I cut back. Staying out here's a cheap way to live. I don't need much. Neither does the crusty old bugger I hire when I do some gillnetting."

"If that does it for you, that's all that matters." But she didn't think it did. Intuitively, she knew that something was out of whack in his life. And it wasn't just his job.

"Now what's on your mind, Kaari?"

"As you know, dad's very sick and he's planning on coming back here in the fall. Clay never told him about the trouble up here, so he doesn't know that the village is in danger of being wiped off the map. So I'm going to try and have it up and running before he returns. I was hoping you might have some information Clay didn't know about. Fishermen are regular news hounds. They're always tuned in on your VHF radios"

"Clay was right on top of things. So no, I'm a little out of the loop out here."

"Come on, Kalervo. You guys are always listening in on each other's calls."

"Unlike Clay, I've had no run-ins with ... what do you call that guy?"

"Lakitcina. Willie named him after an evil sorcerer. And I'm hoping to nail the bugger. That's if the gang that's still hanging in here gives me some help."

"Well, Lakitcina must've heard that I'm one tough fisherman because he's stayed the hell out of my way."

"Yeah, he wouldn't want to tangle with you." Unable to hide a smirk, she turned and feigned a sudden interest at the way the boat began to bob and roll as the swells pushed it against the wharf.

Kalervo's fingers busied themselves in a thatch of straw-colored hair. "I've changed quite a bit since our school days. No dances, no bars, no fighting." Down came his arms, and he imitated the feinting movements of a boxer. "But I'm ready to hunt down that crazy man who's raising hell around here. Just say the word."

"Thanks for the offer. I won't forget it. What the villagers need right now is somebody who's willing to keep the store in the plant stocked with essential foodstuffs. Tourists aren't exactly flocking here for their summer vacations, so the ferries don't stop here anymore. That means there are no more food deliveries. There are lots of non-perishables stored away--"

“But no fresh farm produce or dairy products.”

“Right. Clay didn’t mind taking dad’s Black Hawk for a spin over to Millport every week, but I’ll be too busy to continue that routine. What I can do is figure out what we’re going to need each week, and then order it by email. So what do you say? I’ll pay you for the service.

“Sure. No problem. That thirty-mile run is a breeze when the winds are calm in the morning. I’m hauling Warren’s wrecked troller over there sometime this week, so get your order in.”

“Great. Thanks so much.” By associating with Kalervo in this way she’d be able to keep an eye on him. There was no doubt in her mind. He was troubled about something. He’d been on the edge of telling her about it, and then he’d censured himself.

Kaarina pointed to a heavysset man who’d just clambered onto the roof of his wheelhouse. “Is that Jerry Stableford?”

“Yeah. He owns the ‘Sea Serpent’. He’s been here for three years now. Not much for chitchat, that guy. He’s a loner like me. Spends a lot of time hunting grouse in the mountains.”

“I’d like to meet him.”

Kalervo gave her a conspiratorial grin. “I guess you want to know what he’s up to besides harvesting fish and fowl, eh?”

Kaarina laughed. “Clay must’ve told you I worked as an investigator for a car insurance company.”

“Yeah. Not all that surprising. You were fearless in the old days when the part time workers poured in here during the fishing season. You were game for anything.”

“I was never known for punching out a guy’s lights though. Swimming with the gang in the middle of the night, and partying hearty, that’s all I was guilty of.”

Kalervo gave her an awkward look. “And there was another thing you weren’t into those days. Booze. It sure brought out the worst in me.”

“Okay. That’s enough nostalgia. Let’s get over to Jerry’s boat.” In preparation for clambering over the side of the boat and taking a giant leap of faith, she grasped the short railing above the gunwale.

“Hey,” Kalervo called out, “just a minute, I’ll help you down.” He swung over the railing and jumped down onto the float. Reaching up, he grabbed her by the waist and lifted her down.

That brief touch had caused a sharp wrench in Kaarina’s belly. Why the terrifying jolt to her nervous system? She turned her head to hide her fear. “Thanks,” she said, looking down at some decaying planks as if they were of enormous interest.

Over at the Sea Serpent, Stableford waved them aboard and climbed down off the pilothouse roof.

Once Kalervo had attended to the introductions, Kaarina’s observational skills came into play. She guessed Jerry was about fifty-five. Of medium height, thick-necked and stocky, he had the look of a boxer who’d been knocked around and KO’d a few times. His long hair, dark brown with gray patches making some major inroads was tied back in a ponytail. The severe style accented his swarthy deeply lined face.

“What’s up, you guys?” the older man asked, as he led them through the clutter on the deck.

“Just saying hello to everybody,” Kaarina said, “and trying to calm nerves around

here. I intend to visit everyone in the village. I'm hoping some of them will help me save Klatala from a ruthless takeover."

"Wish I could help, but I'm hunting or fishing most of the time. Just trying to make ends meet."

Among the items in the scattered mess Kaarina recognized an icebox trap and an edge trap. Both of them extremely cruel means for trapping wolves. Kalervo hadn't mentioned that Stableford killed wolves as well as grouse.

Kaarina picked up the signals that Stableford was deeply angry about something. Barely able to remain polite, she wondered if he was the wretched creature who was helping Lakitcina carry out his twisted agenda.

Jerry's pilothouse was almost identical to Kalervo's with the same sink, cupboard and table setup. After indicating they sit down, Jerry pulled a stool over and sat at the end of the table. "So you're Joosef's daughter. I hear he was quite the guy in his heyday, but he's run out of steam, eh?"

"I guess you could say that," she said, "his heart problems have certainly slowed him down." What a cynical way to describe her dad. Joosef was more than 'quite the guy'. According to an article written about him in a Juneau paper, her dad's leadership qualities were similar to the coastal cannery managers half a century ago. During fishing strikes, when incomes were cut and tempers flared up, those men managed to keep the respect of the fishermen.

Jerry wore a muscle shirt that showed off his weight-lifter arms, and when he squeezed his hands together forcefully, his bulging biceps were on full display. "So you're going to chase the bad guy off your dad's land."

"I'm going to take a stab at it."

The muscles in Jerry's face wrinkled into a patronizing look. "I hear you're some kind of an insurance investigator. So you've had some police training. Right?"

"Some."

It was with great difficulty that Kaarina squelched the urge to respond in kind to his boorish arrogance.

"What makes you think," challenged Stableford, "that you can ferret out that friggen prowler--"

Kalervo stood and growled protectively. "Come on, man. Kaari's trying to get the villagers back here before her dad returns in the fall. The old guy deserves to see Klatala in the same shape he left it in."

Stableford grunted and jumped up. "If that weird bastard comes after me, I'll shoot him."

Although Kaarina knew she'd be pleased if he carried out his threat, a growing uneasiness had her rising and standing beside Kalervo. "I won't bother you any further, then," she said, trying hard not to show the contempt she felt for the guy and his crummy attitude. "Be sure to give us a shout if there's any trouble out here."

Stableford made no reply.

Prime suspect, Kaarina thought.

Chapter Four

Kaarina hiked up to the steep cliff path leading to the Tuxagu Cave. A local landmark, it was famous for its ancient aboriginal pictographs and, according to Ankau, it had been a sacred site for mystical anchorings and important shamanic rituals in the past. It was here that time and eternity ran alongside each other, and shamans heard the voices of their ancestors.

Upon entering the cave, she was greeted by the familiar, but always thrilling spectacle of the multi-colored images of wild animals decorating the depths of the grotto. Illuminated by the eerie light filtering through the mouth of the cave were many vibrant stylized apparitions of wolves, grizzlies and ravens.

Ankau's ancestors had managed to produce these awe-inspiring scenes with no more than whittled sticks and brushes of leaves and fur. To ensure their adherence to the rocky surface, natural pigments were mixed with animal fats and fish oil and, in the process, they'd created a highly durable chemical coating. Her son, Lars, would be twelve if he'd lived, and he would've been fascinated by the mythical messages the artwork conveyed.

Kaarina sat on a huge, flat boulder that still showed the eroded traces of images and symbols carved and painted on it centuries before. Leaning back against the wall, the loss of her son and her brother combined into a crushing blow that had a knot in her stomach growing and tightening. Closing her eyes, she tried to stem the tears but she couldn't. They rolled down and she sobbed uncontrollably. Her body shook from the onslaught.

A short while later, exhausted from her dizzying emotional outlet, she forced herself to concentrate on the ecological disaster in the bay. In this magical place, maybe she'd be able to come up with a way to lessen the impact on the sea life.

Some of the drab-colored sea creatures and mammals were equipped with gas-filled swim bladders or oily livers that solved the buoyancy problems inherent in pressure variations. But getting back down between the zones was beyond the capabilities of some of the others. Not able to vertically migrate, they wouldn't survive the heat or the low water pressure for very long.

Ankau had once told her how an Inuit shaman transformed himself into a fish and swam down into the depths to appease Sedna, the ruler of all life in the sea. His people were starving because she'd been punishing them for breaking taboos. By appeasing her anger, he'd gained her favor and got her to release the sea creatures, thereby making them available to the fishermen.

It occurred to her that if life in the sea could be willed up to the surface, why couldn't it be psychically led back down into the depths? Inspired by the Inuit shaman's example, Kaarina wondered if it was possible to induce an out-of-body journey and direct the displaced sea life to their respective levels.

The grotto resounded with the echoes of her laughter. Performing an out of body state of consciousness was well beyond her reach. Before she attained the healing

projections of a shaman, she had a lot of preliminary work to cover.

Closing her swollen red eyes, she wondered how she'd ever be able to distinguish the benign from the demonic spirits. While traveling in other dimensions, how was she going to maintain her poise in the presence of those trickster types who, with equal capriciousness, could induce both intense mystical joy and horrible torment?

The next thing she knew, she was standing on the shoreline looking out at the bay, as she tried to enter into telepathic contact with Wanda, a porpoise who was one of her guiding spirits. There was always a chance that if they worked together, they could get the giant squid, the strange fish and outsized crustaceans back down in the depths.

Gradually tuning her nervous system to the profound and fundamental rhythms generated by the ebb and flow of the sea, she felt the exhilarating experience of slipping free of her physical body and entering that second, great realm of being that is, for some reason, invisible to the denizens of ordinary reality.

Utterly unrestricted by the normal boundaries of material space, Kaarina immediately found herself floating in the ocean offshore. Although her spirit double was all but indistinguishable from her physical body, it required no artificial breathing apparatus to survive underwater.

Wanda appeared as if from nowhere and performed a joyful, barrel roll of greeting. This activity resulted in a cone of spray coming off her head that resembled a rooster's tail. She darted back and forth as if to say "let's get going."

The deluge of indescribable perceptions and sensations almost overwhelmed Kaarina, but she managed to concentrate on the job at hand: joining her therapeutic intention, greatly magnified in the spirit realm, to Wanda's extrasensory sonar capacities. Together, she hoped they'd be able to influence the behavior of the misplaced sea creatures,

Climbing on to Wanda's back, Kaarina held on tightly to her dorsal fin and focused all her psychic willpower in an attempt to contact the struggling sea life. Hopefully, they were in the range of Wanda's radiating beam of echoes and were eager to return to their proper depth before it was too late.

Having completed a great sonic sweep of the bay, Wanda retraced her tracks. Everywhere Kaarina looked, previously lethargic sea creatures, which ranged without any apparent rhyme or reason from the most delicate jelly petticoats to the impenetrable, spike-encrusted armor, began to undulate their way down into the depths.

Where was giant squid? If he were in range of Wanda's radiating beam of echoes, surely he'd jump at the chance to return to his home before it was too late.

Wanda arched her back, thrashed her tail, and propelled them, at lightning speed, through the bluish gloom. Kaarina felt her powerful thrusts as her stocky body dove down, down into a world of darkness and near-freezing temperatures. On reaching a depth of at least three football fields, the amazing fauna began to settle into their respective zones. Giant squid and his fantastic physiognomy, however, was nowhere to be seen.

Once the operation was deemed successful, Wanda propelled Kaarina skyward at a truly frightening velocity.

Just as they broke the surface, Kaarina awoke to find that she was still sitting on the rock in the deepening shadows of Tuxagu Cave. The rocky arch of the entrance perfectly framed the sun and a great bank of rolling, orange fog. Her try at combining her

will with Wanda's in an effort to direct the displaced sea life back down into the depths had been a dream! A dream!

But finding that her underwater adventure didn't come about in a 'core' ecstatic trance didn't have her spirits spiraling too far downward. Indigenous shaman didn't rate a basic spirit flight over a lucid dream. So, even if her this-world experience lacked power, she thought there was a chance that she'd telepathically willed some of the mysterious sea life homeward.

Kaarina hurried down the path from the cave, determined to consult with Amy and Arvo and Indre Maki, the three lab technicians, before they quit for the day. They'd set up their operations in the warehouse-sized Quonset hut named the Turtle Shell, a building with a previous life. Hoisted from a Navy military base in Ketchikan and plopped onto the Klatala cannery grounds after the Second World War, it was still in fairly good shape. Made of corrugated steel, U.S. Navy pilots, who'd once used it as a barrack, engraved the name "Turtle Shell" over the two entrances with a cutting torch. These days, half of the huge complex was used as a mess hall, the other half for archaeological work.

Kaarina had often eaten lunch in the mess hall when she'd worked in the cannery, and whenever the rain had pounded on the roof, she'd felt like she was sitting inside an overturned metal bucket. The afternoon winds usually rolled off the roof like water, but sandbags were placed on the roof whenever the winds howled stronger than usual. If it got hot inside, there were a couple of fans to cool things down, and if it got cold, the potbellied stove was stoked up.

Kaarina entered the lab side of the Turtle Shell. Along the sides were the ten by ten foot paneled offices and storage areas, and down the center were rows and rows of tables similar to the ones in the mess hall. For the last three years, Amy, Indre and Arvo's jobs, among others, were to catalogue the artifacts and aboriginal remains that museums, private collectors and universities were returning to the Taquala Tribe. As well, they had to work on the vast inventory of native artifacts accumulated from dozens of local archaeological sites thirty years ago.

Indre, a trim, athletic-looking woman in her mid-twenties appeared to be examining the button robe, eagle dagger and oyster catcher rattle that were laid out in front of her on one of the long tables. Clay had often praised her for her skill at identifying rare or damaged items, not to mention her contagious enthusiasm for what others considered tedious and unrewarding labor.

On sensing her presence, Indre swung around. "Oh, God, Kaarina, I'd just boarded the ferry for Seattle when I heard about that helicopter crash. What a hell of a guy Clay was, what a good and decent man. I'll always be grateful for the training he gave me. He was the guiding spirit behind the drive for a Klatala Heritage Center." Indre's words had come out in a breathless tumble. Then she broke down and sobbed.

Kaarina hugged her consolingly as they tearfully shared their sense of loss. "And with your help we're going to keep his dream alive."

"Amy's already left," Indre said, swiping at her tears with the back of her hand, "she always walks home with Willie at the end of the day. But Arvo's still here." She turned and circled her mouth with her hands. "Hey, Arvo, Kaarina's here."

A slightly rotund, bronze-skinned man, standing at a long metal table covered with, what at first sight, seemed to be nothing but broken rubble, waved them over. His

graying and receding hairline was one of the indications of the thirty-year difference between his wife and him.

After carefully wiping the dirt from his fingers on an old rag, Arvo gently shook Kaarina's hand.

Kaarina's primary psychic impression was of Arvo was his intense love for his young wife. If she read the vibes emanating from this guy with any kind of accuracy, she believed that he'd never know what it was like to feel old as long as he was in the company of this blond. As he extended his condolences, Kaarina recalled her dad mentioning that Arvo had been one of those university kids, who, thirty years earlier, had unearthed proof of Klatala's ten thousand years of continuous occupation. Digging the archaeological sites, photographing the profiles of the trenches, as well as making drawings and maps had been his areas of expertise.

According to Clay, Arvo's jealous nature was legendary. It had surfaced several times whenever one of the part time kids, who earned their university tuition by working in the cannery during the summer, made a play for her. It must've been hard on Arvo, Kaarina thought. Pretty blond Indre's toned and suntanned thighs were shown off to best advantage by her short shorts, and that swaying of the hips when she walked probably had the young guys' loins on fire. The thought of losing his lovely wife to a younger guy must've been a constant theme in Arvo's thoughts.

Kaarina saw that Arvo was identifying leg bones. A big clipboard was divided into three columns labeled Femur, Fibula and Tibia. Arvo followed her glance and laughed. "Bones, bones and more bones. We're up to your thighbones in thighbones."

They all laughed.

Kaarina nodded to the books stacked on three of the mess hall's tables. "I see Clay's left you with lots of reference material,"

"We couldn't function without them," Arvo said, "but our greatest tool is the Dell Precision 670 computer Clay bought with the University of Colorado grant money just before--"

Indre took over. "Its software programs are the best there is. We've also got a video production computer."

Arvo pointed to three more tables piled high with wooden boxes. "Because so many of the bones are structurally weak, we have to be very careful handling them. But you can't fault the university students. They did a good job of preserving what they managed to unearth. After brushing the dirt off the bones of animals like caribou, raccoons, weasels and bears, they washed them, swabbed them with alcohol and preserved them with transparent glue."

Kaarina picked up and examined an antler. "Deer are sure present in these parts."

Arvo picked up a huge bear skull. "The remains of bear, caribou and deer are particularly plentiful. They go back more than ten thousand years. The body parts of ringed seal, and marmot are even older--twenty thousand years or more." He cradled the bear head with what Kaarina could only interpret as affection.

Indre laughed. "Arvo loves his bones, but I'm most impressed by the richness of the local aboriginal culture. For ten thousand years, some of the Indian tribes have managed to hold on to their culture and living patterns. Their shamanic traditions fascinate me. They were so focused on imagination, intuition and the symbolic, especially--"

Arvo interrupted her. “Indre is more of a fan of shamanism than I am. All I see is trickery and human gullibility. All that superstitious claptrap involving rattles, drums, whistles and masks. Charlatans claiming to have retrieved their patients’ lost soul parts. I mean, c’mon....”

Indre glared at him, and Arvo looked puzzled for a minute and then cast an embarrassed look at Kaarina. “I apologize, Kaarina, I forgot about your background, your great grandmother....”

Kaarina smiled and shook her head. “We’ll have to have a serious debate about shamanism sometime, Arvo, but there are more important things to deal with right now. As you probably know, I’ve been asking all the locals for any leads to the identity of the guy who’s been terrorizing Klatala. Have you two had any close encounters?”

“Not yet.” Arvo’s dark blue eyes hardened. “That cowardly creep and his falcon. I’d sure like to get my hands on him. People never used to lock their doors around here. It was such a trusting community. Do you have any idea why we’re under attack?”

“Not a clue,” Kaarina said, “but I intend to find out. My dad spent his life building Klatala into a solid community. And his work has been for nothing if I can’t get things back to normal around here.”

* * * *

The following afternoon, as Kaarina walked down to the cannery, she recalled a summer day when she was ten and her dad had allowed her to watch the cannery workers performing their repetitive, monotonous and mind-numbing jobs while machinery pounded and clanked. The noise was surround-sound, the stench was of the cat-food variety and slime and gunk were everywhere.

The floor plan was unbelievably complicated. The fish were held in nine holding tanks before two people fed them into the “Iron Butcher”. After they were beheaded, their tails and fins were cut off and some of their guts removed.

Four thousand square feet were taken up by the three production lines where the butchered salmon underwent more guts and slime removal at the hands of thirty workers. Then there were more assembly lines and processes to cover before the cans of fish ended up in the five huge retort cookers. Storing, freezing, weighing, filling, and cooling equipment took up room, too.

She found Willie and Norm, identically clad in sturdy denim overalls stained with paint and grease, standing in the net loft above the main cannery floor. This huge room was crammed to the rafters with creaking racks hung with old nets, scales, turntables, parts of unidentifiable disassembled machines, innumerable boxes, crates and barrels. There were even a couple of broken-down forklifts that had been winched up into the loft and awaited repairs.

“Don’t tell me you guys are mending nets now,” she said facetiously.

Willie’s brows furrowed in a frown. “Very funny. No. We were eating lunch downstairs when we heard a big crash up here. Thinking it was Lakitcina, I rushed up here to confront him.”

Norm pointed at an overturned stack of tackle boxes. “Oh, come on, Willie, I told you that I was airing out this floor. Some large bird probably flew in through the window and knocked that stuff over.”

Willie threw up his hands. “Damn it, Norm, if you don’t put a screen in that window, we’ll get more critters in here. Birds and mice have already found their way into

the dryer shed. And who knows what I'll find when I start cleaning out those large retorts."

Norm gave him a sympathetic half smile, and then turned to Kaarina. "Cleaning this old cannery when it's empty of workers isn't the greatest of jobs, Kaari. We had Clay watching our backs during the last two months, so we could do with at least another guy in here. Willie should have someone with him at all times."

At the sound of a thud on the stairs, Kaarina jumped. Relieved to see that it was Kalervo dragging a cumbersome gillnet up the stairs, she let out a rush of air.

"I hope you don't expect us to repair that thing," protested Willie and Norm almost in unison. Then they laughed a little louder than seemed merited.

With a discordant clatter of corks and lead sinkers, Kalervo dumped the torn and tangled gillnet at their feet. "Hell no. Don't be foolish. The damn thing is beyond saving. But I was sure you wouldn't believe what happened to my net unless you saw the evidence.

"I was anchored at the mouth of the Nukaosa River, just about to haul in my net, when a bunch of bloody seals swarmed in and started to gobble up my fish. I grabbed a tin of weights, washers and whatnots and started pelting the buggers. Then a couple of the younger seals managed to get their fins tangled in the netting and the rest of those bastards started ripping 'em free with those nasty little teeth of theirs.

"By the time I hauled in the net, it was a total write-off, and I was left with nothing but fish heads."

Willie put his arm around Kalervo's shoulder. "Bad luck Kalervo. And I bet there was a fish collector boat in the area ready to tally up your haul."

Kalervo pulled on the belt of his brown wool pants, and his face took on a hopeless expression. "It's no use kidding myself anymore. I'm a lousy fisherman. The fish are always outsmarting me. And the best fishing areas are all cleaned out by the time I've figured out where they are."

Norm's puffy eyes took on a sympathetic look. "Don't get discouraged, Kalervo. Sure, fishing's not the easiest job around, but you've probably learned a few tricks of the trade by now."

"You're wrong, Norm. I haven't. I just suck at it. Then there are the reefs, fog, groundswells and gale winds. As for the crap I've been catching--"

Willie let out a deep sigh. "I told you before, Kalervo, you're catching all kinds of unwanted critters in that net of yours because you're not bringing it up soon enough. Just a little sunlight, and the hake and dogfish come out of hiding."

"It's not only that," Kalervo said, "it's the damn expense. Keeping the nets in good shape"--he looked down at the mess on the floor--"is killing me. It'll cost me a few thousand to replace this one. Then there are all the closures. The old geyser who works with me when I use the gillnet, I can't keep him busy enough. I'm only allowed to use it at certain times of the year and only in certain places. But trolling's not for me, either. After putting several lures on each of my seven lines, the boat has to be in constant motion. And while I'm looking up and waiting for one of them to vibrate with fish, I get so damn dizzy."

Kaarina threw up her arms. "If you want a different job, Kalervo, there's one right here. Willie needs someone to cover his back as he steam cleans and lubricates machinery. You can start by treating the substructure with wood preservative. What do

you say? The pay's good."

"Okay, I'm your man, but remember, boss, I offered to do the grocery shopping over at Millport, too."

Kaarina nodded. "Whenever you make that trip, you get the day off with pay. Starting next week, you can take Willie along with you"--she gave Willie a pat on the back--"is that okay with you, Willie?"

"You know it is," Willie said, "my relatives moved over there two months ago, and I'd like to spend some time with them."

* * * *

In the mansion the following day, Kaarina wandered around the living room while she waited for Suji to call her into the kitchen for breakfast. The sterile arrangement of antique furniture had always grated against her native sensibilities. In this village where nature ruled, all the ultra refined European craftsmanship was ridiculously incongruous. A Rosewood tea table, Regency fruitwood writing desk--an *escritoire* on authority of her mom--chaise lounges, a wildly ornate dining room set and an imported snooker table were so out-of-place it was a crime.

Then there was the old collection of rare and endangered species mounted along the walls in the hallway, as she headed for the kitchen, that made her feel even queasier. Tigers and panthers weren't at home in Alaska. As for the wolf and bear mounted as mere amusement specimens, it was an abomination. Olaf had been the hunter, but she couldn't hate him for what he looked on as his God-given right. Back in his day, there'd been no great furor over the senseless killing of animals.

Among the trophies were pictures of her ancestors who came to Alaska early in the last century. The Saami lacked a sovereign state, so they referred to their heritage as 'a home that lived in the heart'. With no unifying physical appearance, they'd been identified as brown Swedes, white Indians and black Norwegians. Strongly stigmatized at the turn of the last century, their ethnic distinction provoked many derogatory slurs.

Characterized as everything from sly villains, noble savages to witches, some of the Saamis rejected their identity. In order to get around any preconceived notions, they'd blended in with the Scandinavian community.

How different it was today. No longer outcasts or "Lapps"--which meant a patch of cloth in need of mending--the Saami were actively trying to rediscover their roots. A portrait of her great grandmother, Maga, a shaman who'd once prevented the spread of small pox among the Klatala villagers, had her thinking of the mystical DNA she shared with her. An incredibly strong woman into old age, Maga's earlier shamanic work in Alaska wasn't allowed to interfere with her work in reindeer husbandry.

Above her picture was her husband Gunvald's dark hairy visage. A born leader, his Saami followers had numbered in the dozens when they'd made the trip from Saamiland--a territory vaguely defined as meandering across Scandinavia, Finland and Russia--to Alaska. The group of Saami immigrants, who'd looked to Gunvald for leadership, had been hired by the United States government to teach reindeer herding skills to the Indians here in Alaska. When their tenures ended after the standard three-year period, some of them married into Eskimo families.

Gunvald, however, was one of the lucky few who'd prospected for gold in Nome and amassed a small fortune. He'd bought this stretch of land and started up a fish cannery. Since then, the latter had been handed down from one son to the next.

Prominently hung above the entrance to the kitchen was a magnificent painting of Olaf. Dressed in a brightly embroidered sapphire coat and a tall hat festooned with glittering crimson feathers, he looked down at Kaarina with a commanding glare. Pride and authority radiated from his aboriginal features.

Her grandmother Laila's portrait was next to Olaf's. She'd been deliriously happy when Joosef took over the management of the cannery. For years, she'd longed to join her kids in Seattle. Before Kaarina had moved into her Seattle condo eight years ago, she'd lived with Laila and Olaf for five years. Her son, Lars, had inherited his great grandmother's thick night-black curly hair, smooth bronzed skin, oval face and wide dark eyes and just like Kaarina, Laila had felt like she'd lost a part of herself when the little guy drowned.

Walking into the kitchen, she was greeted with the familiar sight of Suji, the chef. Surrounded by blender, juicer, food processor, exotic ingredients, spices and copper pots, he was in his element. In the past, she'd often been absent for his well-planned meals, but when they were involved with a local theatrical production, she hadn't missed one. That was when they'd enjoyed a great rapport. Suji had inherited a 'Kabuki' gene because he excelled at making masks and designing costumes, and she'd loved acting. Throwing herself into another person's character was as good as it got. As well, the two of them had also taken on any other job that came their way: set designer, head of props or stage manager.

Suji set a pot of tea and two cups on the table as soon as Kaarina sat down at the refectory table. He then returned to the cooking area to fetch a small dish that gave off a pungent odor. Briefly vanishing again, he reappeared with the main dish. "Here's your favorite, Kaari Yaki," he said, sitting across from her, "pancakes topped with eggs, noodles and shrimp."

Kaarina toyed with the side dish of sautéed kale, spices, garlic, onions and oil. "Do you know any recipe that doesn't have kale in it? Since I've returned, you've put it in everything...soups, salads, stir fries and pasta. And you know I don't care for it."

"Here we go again. My God, when are you going to branch out and acquire some new tastes? As I've told you many times in the past, kale has anti-cancer properties. It detoxifies and wards off eye diseases like cataracts."

"All right, chef, if you give it to me in small doses maybe I'll give it a try." Smiling inwardly as she devoured a lightly steamed shrimp, she recalled how hard Suji had struggled to get her to eat his favorite food, sushi. In her books, raw fish and other stuff wrapped in seaweed and rice were neither tempting, tasty nor tantalizing. Clay, on the other hand, loved raw fish. Suji had always sat down with him when sushi was the offering for the evening. Not a wise recollection, the tears were assembling behind her eyes.

"Whether you like it or not, I'm going to make sure you get plenty of kelp, too." There was a teasing, playful lilt to his tone of voice.

"I know. I know. Seaweed has high levels of iodine and potassium."

"Algae will be on the menu, too."

"With no stem, roots or leaves, that is some strange plant."

"It has chlorophyll, and it contains all the minerals found in the body, and in the same concentration."

"Well, if it really has stress-relief qualities, you can serve it by the loving

spoonful.”

“Good to hear.”

“But no squid. I don’t care if it’s been grilled, fried, or basted in its own ink. Out in the chuck, I got a glimpse of a giant squid that the tsunami coughed up.” They were settling into a relaxed banter, and Kaarina was pleasantly surprised at how quickly they’d fallen into such a comfortable rapport.

“Aren’t you stretching the truth a little?”

“No way. The old fisherman who piloted me over from Millport identified it.”

“Unbelievable! There are many Japanese novels about those tentacled devils. One writer wrote about the sheer numbers of those massive monsters and their eventual try at ruling the world. Other admirers of that mollusk have written about their expertise as great wrestlers and lovers--”

“I don’t want to hear about that monster’s winning ways. Thank you very much.”

Suji poured the tea and passed a cup of the strong and steaming brew over to Kaarina. “To change the subject ... did you know that Arvo, Indre and Amy have sent hundreds of animal bones, human remains and stone tools to the U.S. Geological Survey in Menlo Park. That’s where they’ll get a more detailed analysis.”

“Great. Dad will sure be pleased to hear about that.” On picking up a shrimp with her fork, Kaarina was reminded of the more fantastic variations of this creature on the beach out at Takatal Bay. Sad, really. Remembering how they’d been flung onto the shore like so much garbage had her stomach knotting as an inimical chill washed over her, so she diverted her train of thought. “I hope you’re keeping that chopper out back in good shape. We’re going to need it.”

“Fortunately, that evil bastard hasn’t come near it. For a while there, I slept in it. Scared as hell that he’d try to put it out of commission.”

Kaarina suddenly felt genuine concern for Amy and Willie’s godfather. “You’re not thinking of leaving, are you?”

“No way. Thanks to the Johnson family, this was my home from the time I was a baby. It’s all I’ve ever known. That’s not to say that I’m not in fear of my life. With no policing in the village, Lakitcina has free rein to do what he damn well pleases around here. Even if we did have a trooper or a public safety officer on call, what could he do? That S.O.B. is invisible.

“Clay did everything he could to get the villagers to stick it out for a while longer. He was out every night trying to track the evil bugger down. He’d grab a nap now and then, but that was it. He had the troopers here for over six weeks. Believe me, that takes some bargaining. Those guys had the whole archipelago to cover, and they had so little to go on. It was like trying to track down a phantom.

“The day everyone took off for Millport, Clay cried. I heard him in his room. But he was no quitter. He had me piloting him all over the surrounding area--especially here in the Kagona Mountains--right up until he died.”

Kaarina sat back in her chair, clasped her hands behind her head and looked around the kitchen. If Suji continued to talk about her brother, she was going up to her room and cry until she didn’t have a tear left. “What about you, Suji? Have you had any run-ins with the that depraved shaman?”

“A couple of weeks ago, I was awakened by loud drum sounds, the prowler’s usual method of harassing us. That was followed by the sound of breaking glass coming

from the wine cellar in the basement. By the time I got down there, he'd taken off. Hundreds of dollars worth of fine wines had been smashed. I haven't had the heart to tell your dad about it."

"You always lock this place up tighter than a bank vault...."

"Weird, eh? Other than smashing wine bottles, he didn't touch anything else. But the other villagers had had stuff stolen ... a tent, sleeping bag and Coleman stove."

Kaarina interrupted his flow and asked the question they'd both been avoiding. "Why did Clay team up with Trooper Dave? Something must've had him deciding that enough was enough. If you're holding back information because you think it'll blow my mind, forget it."

"Come on, Suji, I worked on the Seattle waterfront. Nailing thieves who loaded stolen cars onto ships headed for the Pacific Rim wasn't exactly the safest job in the world. So I'm not going to take the next boat out of here. This guy has already made me his next target. After all, I'm taking over for Clay. But he'll soon find out that I'm no easy prey."

"Spoken like a true leader." Suji took a thoughtful sip of his tea. "Four days ago, Clay was repairing the conveyor belt in the old cannery when the creep threatened him. He said he'd gut him in the butchering machine like a raw salmon and let his falcon scoop out what was left of him if he didn't get out of Klatala. Clay couldn't describe his face because the nut wore a black and green mask."

"In Saami mythology that particular mask represents death, pathology and decay. So he's pretending to be a person who is dead. Another of his practices that points to a knowledge about the customs of Nordic soul practitioners."

"Anyway, the creep reappeared the very next day while Clay was swimming in the lake. He'd just come out of the water because a thick fog had suddenly closed in and the guy was waiting for him. Clay's clothes were draped over his arm with his falcon sitting on top of them. He warned Clay that his falcon could've easily clawed his eyes out while he was swimming. Damn it, poor Clay. A lesser man would've skedaddled."

"Not Clay, that's for sure. He wouldn't have been able to live with himself."

Kaarina thought about Suji's history as he got up and began to do the clean-up around the sink. In the spring of 1942, following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the Federal Cabinet took drastic action under the War Measure's Act and removed all Japanese citizens from the west coast. At that time, the Mayazaki troller was docked in the Port of Seattle, and it was forcibly taken away from Suji's parents before they were interned. Because Suji had been in the care of the Johnson family while his parents had gone fishing for a few months, he'd remained uninterned in Klatala. According to Amy, her dad, Joosef, was the only one who thought Suji should've been with his parents.

In 1951, when his parents came back to Klatala, Suji helped his dad establish a wooden rowboat business. But his eyes were always in the sky. Once his dad retired and moved to Seattle, he was able to spend more time in the air. It was Joosef who taught him to fly, and when Suji was put in charge of the chopper and the mansion twenty years ago, he'd been overjoyed

After breakfast, while searching for a sign of Lakitcina's way of breaking into the mansion, Kaarina found an Indian petroglyph in the attic. Her dad had probably put it there years ago and then forgotten about it. The Indians who'd populated these parts thousands of years ago had carved a picture of bear on the surface of the large boulder.

To the Taquala Tribe, it would be of great interest, so she was going to get Arvo to wheel it from the Trolley House to the Turtle Shell.

Suji helped her load it onto a wheelbarrow and place it on the bench in the back compartment of the cable car. Once she was seated up front, she pulled back the lever and the car took rope. As it crawled through the engine room, and made its way across the half block of track leading to the edge of the steep incline, her thoughts were on Arvo and his wife. Her sixth sense told her that something wasn't right between them. Had something unpleasant happened to them while they were visiting in Poulsbo?

Then she was on the alert. Something was terribly wrong. It sounded as if the cable had snapped beneath her feet. The little car, instead of traveling down the incline at five miles an hour, began to pick up speed. She pulled back on the lever that was attached to the main track brakes, but the car didn't come to a stop. It continued to hurtle down the mountain.

Just before it entered the Trolley House, she pressed down on the pedal that operated the front wheel brakes. They worked with such force, the petroglyph, narrowly missing her head, flew through the train's front window. Following that, it crashed through the small garage's window, bounced across the boardwalk and out of her line of vision.

At first, she was unable to move. All she could do was pray that the large stone wouldn't hurt anyone as it made a straight drop down towards the docks.

Slowly pulling herself together, she got out of the car. As she walked back up the mountain, she found that it was tough going in sneakers. Hiking boots were what was needed for this climb. It had rained the night before, and the tracks and rocks were slick.

Working for a car insurance company had made her aware of people's reaction time. One second of inattention and death and destruction could be the result. By not equating riding in her grandfather's contraption with driving a regular car, she'd allowed herself to become preoccupied, and her reaction time had been far too slow.

By the time she reached the top of the steep cliff she was exhausted. Turbulence deep in her gut grumbled away. It was so strong, she felt physically ill.

Ready to divert some of the anger she'd aimed at herself into someone else's direction, she ran into the house, slipped into the office off the great room and phoned Norm. After she gave him a rundown on what happened, she told him to check out the cable car immediately.

Suji came into the office and leaned against her dad's old roll-top desk. "What're you doing back here, Kaari Yaki? I thought you were taking the petroglyph to the mess hall."

"I was nearly killed when the cable car careened down the mountainside totally out of control. The underground cable snapped, and those blocks of pine wood dad calls brakes, had no traction at all. And before I remembered there was another braking system, the car came very close to smashing through the Trolley House. My God, I could've wound up in the ocean."

"Death came too close, eh?" he said, in a quiet soothing voice. He tipped her head and looked deep into her eyes. "Norm's not doing his job, eh?"

"Right. He's supposed to keep that unit in top shape, but he's not doing it. Maybe he's getting too old to carry out his three jobs. But keeping our water and electricity flowing can't be that time-consuming."

Suji knelt down in front of her. His dark eyes now level with hers. “Norm’s not young anymore, but he’s perfectly capable of holding down a job or two. He usually gives that little car a thorough check-up once a month. And since he’s been the town’s engineer we’ve never had an accident with anything mechanical.”

It suddenly occurred to her that Suji usually picked up their groceries today. So he might’ve been the one who had a hell of a scare. “Norm will be up here within the hour. So let’s see how he likes climbing that cliff.”

Suji stood up and ruffled her hair. “I think you need a drink. How about a scotch and soda?”

“I’d appreciate that. My nerves are jangling.” Her forced trek up the steep muddy incline had sapped her energy, but not her rage. The adrenaline that coursed through her body was still in high gear. Slumping down in the padded swivel chair, she put her feet up on the desk and tried to simmer down.

Suji was back in a couple of minutes. “Here’s some nectar of the Gods, Kaari Yaki. It’ll help you to unwind.”

“I guess you’ve realized that it could’ve been you who got a taste of your mortality. This is grocery day.”

“It occurred to me, all right. But once I got started on our pork dumpling dish, I wanted to finish it. I planned on going shopping later in the day. Believe me, I’m pretty shaken up. And I’d appreciate it if you tell Norm I can take over for him if he finds he can’t handle the job.”

“Will do.” When Suji left her to unwind, she reread the condolence cards she’d received. There were five from the guys here in Klatala as well as fifty or so from the gang over at Millport. In order to fit them into a letter slot, she had to remove a bundle of post cards. Behind them, jammed into a crack, was a yellowed change-of-address card. It was postmarked 1987, and it informed Suji Mayazaki that the Raattamaa family now lived in Saamiland. Strange. Suji had never mentioned that he knew someone in Saamiland. The reprehensible shaman was Saami. Was his name Raattamaa?

That’s ridiculous, she admonished herself. Twenty years ago, she was eleven, and she couldn’t have cared less who Suji’s friends were. So she wasn’t about to question him about it. It’ll all come out in the wash, she assured herself. After all, he was her dad’s most trusted confidante.

By the time Suji showed Norm into the office, Kaarina had dozed off. But she quickly came out of her liquor-induced nap and glared up at the man who was supposed to keep her safe.

Standing stiffly on the other side of the desk, Norm’s ruddy face was even redder than normal after his hike up the slope. Overweight and wearing far too many clothes, he was glistening with perspiration. He pulled on his bushy gray eyebrows so hard, Kaarina thought he was trying to pull them out by the roots. “The cable had been cut, Kaarina. There’s no mistake about that. And whoever did it made an attempt to make it look frayed. I don’t think the guy who tampered with the car meant to kill you. But he hadn’t counted on my neglect to keep those pine brakes in shape. And between the cable snapping, and those brakes not working ... it would’ve been my fault if you’d been killed.”

“You knew that cable car would be a labor-intensive job when you took it on. If it’s too much for you now that you’re working in the cannery, fine. Suji’s a mechanic. He

can take care of both the chopper and dad's toy car."

For a moment, there was a dense silence as Norm ran his hands through the fringe that circled his head. "Last weekend I was up in Juneau trying to get some information about the condition of that helicopter Clay was in. They're piecing it together and trying to figure out if it had been tampered with." Frequently clearing his throat, his voice was husky, almost hoarse. "That was when I normally spend time on the cable car. I'd thought next weekend would be soon enough."

"Suji offered to help you--"

"Great. I'd appreciate his help. Things are getting a little hairy with that Lakitcina guy trying to scare the hell out of us. My God, if anything happened to you or Suji because of my neglect, that'd be the end of me."

Chapter Five

The following day, Kaarina decided to go ahead with the archipelago cruise Warren had mapped out. Because it was still sprinkling out, she had to be careful about her footing as she walked down the cable car tracks. Then it was the slippery cleats on the boardwalk that proved treacherous.

Glancing around when she reached the base of the mountain, she saw the bear petroglyph leaning against an ancient spruce tree. Set up like a display item, the carving had been carefully positioned. While she was relieved the huge rock hadn't hurt anyone, she felt uneasy. Norm said he hadn't seen the petroglyph yesterday, so Lakitcina or his accomplice must've placed it there during the night. Was the perverted wretch trying to tell her that a bear was one of his familiars?

As she walked along beside the river, Kaarina's thoughts were on some of the legends and lore that her dad had told her when she was a kid. According to him, her Saami ancestors looked on a bear as sacred, a connecting link between man, animal and the spirits. Ritual slaying, feasting and returning the bear's skull and bones back to its home were all carried out in order to ensure its soul's reincarnation. Lakitcina must be aware of Saami beliefs, so if he'd cast some kind of a spell on this revered animal and used it for ill, he was beyond evil. Surely his eventual spiritual punishment would be equal to the crime.

"Welcome aboard," Warren said, when Kaarina reached the bay half an hour later, "Kalervo just phoned and told me about your frightening ride on that trolley yesterday. My God, Kaarina, don't you think it's time that relic was updated?"

"I've got it on my 'to do' list," she said, as she joined him on the deck of the Black Hawk.

Once they were in the galley, Warren opened the portholes and then went over to the work area, filled two glasses with ice and grabbed two Cokes out of the fridge. Joining her at the booth, he put one of the glasses in front of her and poured her a drink. "Kalervo said your grandfather built that little train over half a century ago. So it's not safe anymore. Surely Norm can come up with a safer contraption. One that's not dependent on grips, levers, wooden brakes and underground cables."

Kaarina's mouth was parched after her mile and a half hike. On chug-a-lugging the bubbling brew, she found herself gasping for breath. "After Norm inspected the damage, he came up with two reasons for the disaster. One was his neglect to check out the wooden brakes, and the other was foul play. The underground cable had been cut. It had been made to look frayed, but Norm said no way. So Lakitcina's found a way to keep Suji and me on tenterhooks."

"Then dismantle that trolley. It's an easy target."

"It'll be all right for now. Suji and Norm will take turns checking it out. Installing steel rods for brakes might be a solution."

"Beats me why your grandfather built that house so high up on the mountain."

"I've often wondered about that, too."

“So why don’t you move into the house the millwright used to live in?” Eyeing her carefully, he placed two hands around his glass and twirled it back and forth. “It looks like first class accommodation, and it’s lower down the mountain. You’d have a little hiking to do, but at least you can come and go without fear.”

“Suji’s lived in the mansion for twenty years. So it’ll be up to him to make the decision. Now that’s enough talk about my living quarters. Let’s discuss the guy who’s out to wreck our well-being.”

“That mask of death, black and green, it’s really all we have in the way of a description. And, for all we know, he could be right here in the village hiding out in one of the empty bungalows. If he’s staying in the mountains, he must’ve found some kind of a shelter.”

“People have lived in and around this village for thousands of years. I’m sure there were a few hermits among them. So there’s bound to be some kind of a rough mountain hut that’s still livable.”

“For him to stick around here for weeks at a time. I’m inclined to think no way. Even if he has some kind of shelter, he’ll soon get tired of eating small game and berries.”

“Shamans are pretty good at roughing it. They can make do with very little in the way of food. He could even be fasting.”

“Supernatural stuff beyond the ordinary. That’s what your beliefs are all about, aren’t they?”

“I guess you could put it that way.”

“So they’re sure as hell going to impact on how we go about nabbing this guy. Right?”

“Right. Before I can reach my true potential, I’ve got an initiation period to cover. The power to change my state of consciousness requires intensive conditioning and mental training.” Engaging the demons that dogged her. That was going to be the tough part. Thirteen years ago, when her trusting heart had been ripped out of her, she’d run from the scene of the crime. Her ability to trust was left here in the village, so it was here she’d have to regain it. In order to weave a seamless tapestry between the underworld, middle world and upper world, she’d have to free her trapped soul part from a tangled and dark jungle of fear and mistrust.

“But Kaarina, why would you want to become a shaman? That job will be an overwhelming responsibility. And most likely a thankless one. Kalervo told me that Ankau’s been a scapegoat in the past. When anything went wrong in the village, he was blamed. And he was often mocked, even after he’d conducted successful ceremonies.”

“I know the downside, believe me. The resentment ... I sure picked up on that when I was teenager. Some kids thought Ankau acted superior because he set himself apart from the community for weeks at a time. A few of the older people even thought he violated conventional behavior far too often. Not everyone believed that he had a real relationship with the spirit world.”

“So why put yourself in a no-win situation? Immersing yourself in some kind of a dream world, living on the edge. Isn’t there a chance that you might lose your way? Besides, people will only see you when they’re sick. And if you can’t make them well, what then?”

“I’ll only take on patients who have a strong will to live. A successful outcome

won't be totally on my shoulders."

"Yeah, I guess every health practitioner would like to treat people with a strong healthy mindset."

His tone was sarcastic, and it infuriated her. "To you, a shaman is some kind of witch or warlock . . . a shifty trickster. And when I'm finally able to induce a trance, I get the feeling you'll think I've been hypnotized, drugged, psychotic or under someone's possession. But my calling isn't whimsical nonsense. By right of inheritance, I'm a shaman. I either follow my predetermined fate or I'm destined to be a miserable mess for the rest of my life.

"But I admit it, my initiation isn't going to be easy. My ego will often be squashed because there's a part of my personal unconscious--my shadow side--calling all the shots and it's a real stumbling block."

"What about having an animal at your beck and call? Willie told me that a sperm whale and a swan are two of Ankau's helpful spirits. Have you lined up a couple?"

Kaarina topped up her glass. "I'm almost sure Wolf will be one of my guiding spirits. But that's yet to be worked out."

"That animal's so near-sighted. It wouldn't recognize its own mate a hundred feet in front of him."

"His other qualities make up for that shortcoming. Not to mention other traits like generosity, discipline and concern for others. During your lifetime, a wolf will no longer be looked on as a denizen of the wilderness. He'll be hanging around your neighborhood and getting along just fine."

Kaarina's senses rippled outwardly. She heard a crunching sound like heavy feet walking along the beach. On looking through the porthole, she thought she saw a bear dart between the trees, but it could've been a deer. Her awareness of what was going on around her had heightened during the past week, and she couldn't be more pleased. In nonordinary reality, sensual acuity was vital.

"So," Warren said, after he'd taken a drink straight from the bottle, "our job today is to scope out the archipelago and interview the summer crowd as well as the permanent residents. But our usual tools of the detective trade won't be much use. With fogbound islands, abandoned settlements and a network of bays, coves and inlets to check out, all we need are binoculars."

"Lakitcina's not going to be seen in public with a mask on. He might dress like a fisherman . . . dark wool pants, plaid wool shirt and rubber boots. Then there are the kayakers and other nature lovers. There are so many strangers around it'll be hard to pick him out of the crowd."

Warren got up and put the glasses and bottles on the tray. "I'll wash these, and then we can get started. The waterways should be easy to navigate this afternoon. There's no fog or heavy wind in the forecast."

* * * *

Warren dropped Kaarina off at the Klatala dock about eight hours later. She just started to climb the boardwalk that led to the Trolley House when Amy came tearing out of the electrical plant.

"Am I glad to see you," she blurted out. "Willie's in trouble, I just know it. He's been missing all afternoon. Kalervo, Norm, Indre, Arvo and I have looked everywhere."

Taking Amy by her shoulders, Kaarina gave her a steady gaze. "Walk me through

what's happened, step by step."

"Around one o'clock, Kalervo's forklift hit a loose board in front of the fuel dock and it ended up with two wheels dangling over the edge of the piling. It was a direct drop of thirty feet into the chuck, so he'd panicked. Luckily, Norm heard him yelling for Willie and he was able to pull him to safety.

"After that, they both looked for Willie, but they couldn't find him anywhere. I joined Indre and Arvo in the hunt and for the past four hours we've looked everywhere."

"Then we'll have to go over the same ground again." Kaarina tried to shove thoughts of foul play to the back of her mind. But what else could've happened? Willie would never go anywhere without telling Amy. Those two lovebirds were always checking each other out.

Amy ran her hands up and down her arms. "Grandfather wondered what was going on when I phoned to see if Willie had gone home. So I had to tell him he was missing. He wanted to help, but I said we had enough volunteers."

"Good. Now I'm going to the net loft. How about you?"

Amy's stoic approach collapsed. Raising her arms, palms forward, she turned her dark terror-filled eyes on Kaarina. "Everyone's sure that Lakitcina killed Charlie, Clay and Trooper Dave, so maybe he's found a way to kill Willie and made it look like an accident."

Kaarina grabbed her and hugged her tightly. "If we stay calm we'll be able to think more clearly."

Amy pushed away from her. "I hate it when I give into hysteria. My silly outburst. It's not me. You know that."

"You don't have to explain..."

"Yesterday, Willie was upset over the damage to his biggest mural. You know, the one he painted at the entrance to the community hall."

"Oh, no. Willie's been working on that mural since he was a teenager. Damn. Damn. Damn. Can it be saved?"

"Willie said he's going to try. And he's going to get rid of all the spray paint in the store. Maybe that'll put a stop to the graffiti." Amy took off at a fast trot. "I'll be out at the community hall if you need me," she yelled.

When Kaarina arrived upstairs in the cannery, she saw Kalervo heading his forklift in her direction.

"Where've you been, Kaari? I tried to get hold of you hours ago."

"I was on the Black Hawk. Warren and I were investigating abandoned logging camps and ancient Indian settlements for signs of Lakitcina."

"I don't get it. Why couldn't you guys answer your radio telephone when you were back on board?"

"We were investigating those fiords, channels and lagoons where there's no VHF radio coverage."

Kalervo closed his eyes and shuddered. "I don't know where else to look. The six huge retorts were the first place I searched. Willie had been busy cleaning those metal ovens earlier in the day. And I remembered a story Norm told me about the time he was the lead security guard in here. A young fisherman had vandalized the machine shop, so he'd dumped the bugger into one of the retorts--"

"He what?" Metal baskets of stacked canned salmon were wheeled on tracks into

the long, round tubes of the retort. It was then cooked by way of hot steam that reached three hundred degrees and pressurized to keep the cans from exploding. Just thinking about the potential for an accident, had Kaarina wondering if Norm went off the deep end from time to time.

“The door bolts to six inches ajar. The guy wouldn’t have suffocated.” The armpits of Kalervo’s sleeveless T-shirt were wet and perspiration dripped down his husky arms.

Kaarina gave him a grim look. “Where else have you guys looked?”

“The old boiler room, the warehouses, generating plant and the coolers and freezers. We’ve searched all of them.

“Norm’s in the power plant right now. Then he’s off to the machine shop. The Maki’s are checking out the storage areas again. There are stacks of large boxes in there, so they’re going to open every one of them. Why we’re hanging on to all those old empty salmon tins I have no idea.”

“And you’re off to...?”

“I need to take a closer look at those rows and rows of pallets in the freezer that takes up half the space downstairs. If they get off-balance, they could fall over and kill someone.”

Watching Kalervo take off in the forklift, Kaarina shook her head and sighed. The guy drove far too erratically. No wonder he nearly went into the brink with the darn thing. And if any racks of pallets were knocked out of kilter, his reckless driving was most likely the cause.

Kalervo’s story about locking a guy in one of the retorts had her rechecking the dryer shed where more huge ovens were used to dry the bone meal. She’d no sooner arrived there, than she heard a clanging sound, but she found no one in the place after a quick search. About to open one of the ovens, she was shoved forward. Her head hit metal and for a moment she felt dazed.

“God damn you,” she roared, as she swung around and darted around the dryers. There was no sign of anyone. Norm had heard those banging noises a few days ago, and he’d blamed it on the cannery’s ghost. When the cannery was open, old Erich had the job of walking up and down the dryers with a sledgehammer and loosening the bone meal that clung to the sides of the oven. Whoever pushed her was no ghost. Ghosts didn’t have bad breath smelling like regurgitated fish.

She continued her inspection, and stayed in the shed until she was sure that Willie wasn’t trapped inside one of the dryers.

Rushing to the far end of the cannery where the office, lab, changing room and kitchenette were situated, she began another thorough search. She didn’t care if these areas had been checked several times already. Lakitcina could be staying in the cannery from time to time. With elevators, stairs, hundreds of places to hide, it was certainly livable in the summer.

There was a kitchen just off the cannery store. Washroom facilities, too. As for food, the freezers were full of frozen vegetables, meats, fish and poultry, and the stockroom shelves were loaded with canned foods and staples. And while she was in there, she was going to remove some of the ceiling tiles that opened up into the attic crawl space.

A little over an hour later, Warren came over to Kaarina as she bent over the store

freezer examining some newly caught salmon. "I found Willie. He was fishing with Jerry."

Kaarina slammed down the lid of the freezer. "Thank God. But damn it, why didn't he tell someone where he was going?"

Warren slapped his hand against the top of the freezer after she closed it. "That's Jerry's catch in here. He told me that he's donating it to the gang in the village. When Willie saw those King Sockeye this morning, he wanted to catch a few of his own with some of the lures he'd collected. So he'd asked Jerry to take him fishing.

"Anyway, on my way over here in the Black Hawk, I took a different route--a bit of a shortcut--and I saw Jerry's troller out in the chuck. I couldn't help wondering why he hadn't come ashore and joined in the search, so I checked him out with my binoculars. The first thing I saw was that giant squid from hell. It had its deadly eel-like lashes wrapped around the boat's hull. Some of its other arms were tangled up in several fishing lines. The damn thing had the boat listing so badly it was in danger of taking on water.

"Jerry and Willie hacked away at one of its two long tentacles with a couple of what looked like halibut gutting knives, but the bugger wasn't letting go. And just before I reached them, the squid, with a lightning spurt of one of its tentacles--from a distance of twenty feet at least--snagged Willie. And the poor guy began to yell and holler. Legs and arms flailing."

Kaarina thought of interrupting his saga and asking him how everything turned out, but she didn't. If either Jerry or Willie had been hurt, he'd have said so by now, so she kept her mouth shut. The guy had a story to tell and it was a good one.

"It's the same squid that tried to drown me. The eye you cut into is covered with a dark film, so it no longer has the best eyesight in its watery realm.

"Anyway, I brought the yacht alongside Jerry's boat ... at the stern where there were no arms flicking about.

"And I'm telling you, the minutes it took me to tie the cruiser to the troller seemed to take forever. But I was finally able to grab an axe and climb aboard. After I chopped halfway into the top club part of the tentacle that held Willie in a vice-like grip, it gave up its prey. Following that, the devil kind've turned in on itself and slithered down into the depths, taking a couple of trolling lines along with it."

"Do you think it's out of commission now?"

"Not completely. But I did some major damage."

Kaarina laughed. "It's dazed and confused at the best of times, so every injury must chip away at its chances of survival. With only one eye in working order, and a useless tentacle maybe it'll be less likely to go on the attack."

"Let's hope so. By the way, there's something you might not know about Jerry. He told Kalervo that he's collected all those animal traps he set out in mountains, and he's sold them to a metal scrap outfit in Millport."

"And, for his show of solidarity, a giant squid grappled his boat and wrecked his fishing equipment."

With a sigh, Warren turned to go. "Poor Willie, he's talking like a crazy person now. He thinks that squid is under the possession of Lakitcina. What kind of crazy talk is that?"

"Not really. It sounds like that giant squid gave him the biggest scare he's ever experienced." She had no problem understanding why Willie's imagination had taken off.

With a shaman for a grandfather, it wasn't such a stretch.

* * * *

Amy found Ankau asleep on the sofa in the living room. "Wake up, Grandfather. We've found Willie."

Ankau's eyes fluttered open. "Willie ... he's safe?"

"He's fine. He was out fishing on Jerry's boat."

"Wonderful news," he said, making no move to sit up.

"Are you all right? You sound as if you're exhausted."

"Not really. I'm feeling every one of my eighty-eight years today because I didn't sleep well last night. It was the thump of a cane or stick on the attic floor that woke me up. Then I heard the screech of a bird. You and Willie wouldn't have heard it because your bedroom's on the main floor." As Ankau slowly rose from the sofa, he appeared to be concentrating on each move required to position himself against the cushions.

"Oh, no. It sounds like Lakitcina's on the prowl again."

"That's what I think, too. Bellowing down through the trap door, he made a few scary forecasts."

"And they were?"

"If I try to use my shamanic powers, I'd only embarrass myself. And the only spirit flight Kaarina will take is in a helicopter back to Seattle."

Amy sat down on the bed and took her grandfather's hand. "Now there's something else that's troubling you. What's caused your eyes to cloud over? A shaman is entitled to his periods of melancholy, but you're not just in a bad mood, are you?" After tucking his hair behind his ears, she gave him a penetrating look.

Ankau couldn't hide much from Amy. She was a see-er, and she probably knew that Lakitcina was partly right about his waning powers. She'd acted as his spirit helper when he'd healed his sick clients in the past, so she deserved to know that he was in trouble. "How can I restore spiritual power to sick people or bolster their immune defense systems if my own mind won't respond to my will?"

"Now, why are you letting Lakitcina destroy your confidence? Just think of what you've accomplished in the past."

"When I heard Willie was missing," he said hesitantly, "I went into a deep trance."

"You what? You journeyed into another reality without me to watch over your body."

"I wouldn't have done such a foolish thing if I hadn't had that visit from Lakitcina last night. I was so sure he'd done something terrible to Willie. So I used the drumming CD to help me take a shamanic flight to the world of the dead. Swan was waiting for me, but she hadn't seen Willie. So I asked her to take me to my ancient ancestors.

"Sometime after I slipped into Swan's body, she was elfshot. An arrow pierced her wing. Unable to fly, she was captured and locked in a cage."

As Ankau continued, his words were drawn out in a breathless stop and start manner. "I've often come up against demonic intrusions while journeying, but being elfshot, trollshot or dwarfshot were never involved. From what I've read about Nordic mythology, they're the devils that Saami shamans are liable to encounter.

"It's as if they were trying to show me that my powers are waning. To make matters worse, I had no time to unfocus my astral projection into Swan's form. So some of my life's energy is trapped inside her body. And this fatigue I feel will become chronic

and soon spiral down into a deadly sickness.”

“Oh, Grandfather, what have you done? When Swan was captured, I would’ve sensed you were in danger and quickly awakened you. And your soul part would’ve returned intact. But now, if those little demons kill Swan, your health will fail.” Amy knew that her grandfather was probably right about his own inner demons causing his spirit loss. She, too, was thinking it was time for him to restrict himself to jobs that involved low level work like herbal remedies.

“A troll, a really weird looking guy with a crooked nose and long tail, was in charge. As well as bows and arrows, axes were in evidence, too. Those demonic spirits, drunk with power, thrived on tormenting Swan. The last time I was forced to deal with demons similar to those, I was searching for that five-year-old girl who was the missing piece of Rosy Kiksedi’s spirit. Her child self. Her uncle had sexually abused the poor woman and denial was taking up too much of her energy. To get her disconnected soul part safely back to her, I’d had to turn into a warrior.”

Willie came into the living room with a cardboard box with fish poking up through the flaps. “Jerry gave me these King Sockeye, and I’m cooking one of them for dinner.”

Amy rushed up to him. “Grandfather’s not feeling well, and you’re to blame. In order to find you, he took a soul journey and shape shifted into Swan while he was in the underworld. And some vicious little warriors caged Swan, so grandfather’s essence is held captive, too.”

Ankau raised his head, reached over and tapped the box Willie carried. “Now Amy, you’re always telling me to stop dumping on Willie. Well now you’re doing it. You’re safe, Willie, that’s all that matters.”

While Ankau rested and Willie cooked dinner, Amy phoned Kaarina and told her what had happened to Ankau. Her friend’s response was just as she’d hoped. In order to retrieve Ankau’s soul part, she needed Amy to give her a crash course in the performance of a deep trance.

Stored in Amy’s computer was all the information she’d gained from Ankau over the years. After running it off, she arranged the material in the order it would be presented. As Kaarina’s valued and trusted helper, she’d give her some careful tutoring. In the future, if anything went wrong after her friend induced her deepest trance, she’d have to share the blame.

When Amy had everything packed, she went into the kitchen. “You go ahead and have dinner with grandfather, Willie. I’m going to have a talk with Kaarina.”

Willie’s mouth turned down and his dark eyes looked drawn. “I’ve sure made a mess of things, haven’t I?”

Although Amy was still fuming about his uncharacteristic lack of responsibility, her heart went out to him. He’d had a hell of a scare.

* * * *

“I’ve just come out of a medium trance,” Kaarina said, when Amy arrived at the mansion. “Between the drumming CD, the chanting, dancing and rattling that Suji and I did, it worked out quite well.”

Amy took the spirit stick from Kaarina, and then sat down on the sofa in the great room. “This wolf carving is great. Where’d you get it?”

Kaarina dropped down beside her. “Kalervo found it in Millport. And it was so strange, the way it seemed to add authenticity to my performance as soon as I attached it

to my staff.”

Amy gave her a searching look. “How can you be sure you experienced a medium trance?”

“My arms and legs became rigid, but I could still open my eyes. All I had to do was suggest that I wouldn’t feel pain and I didn’t. Suji said I banged into the corner of the table, but I hadn’t reacted in any way.”

“Now, before you proceed to the deep trance, you need to be aware of the evil forces you might run into while you’re in the lower world. They’re ready to track you down and snare your wandering soul, so you must always be on your guard. If they attack you, you’ll have to kill them.

“So try to contact Wolf. Your success in meeting up with your spiritual helper is all-important. Ankau’s life depends on it. And another thing, until I suggest you see something that isn’t there, and you see it, you’re not ready to do any shape shifting.”

Suji came in with some green tea and wa-gashi, a Japanese dessert made of beans, sugar and rice flour, and put them on the coffee table. “Good evening, Amy,” he said, making a slight bow. “I must apologize for not helping with the search for Willie today. I was in the mountains looking for Lakitcina’s hideout. But Kaari Yaki tells me he’s back home.”

Kaarina had trouble believing that Suji was hiking in the mountains. In the past, he was always bemoaning the fact that there were far too many bears in the Kagona Mountains. Whenever he was in the mood for some physical activity, he got on the treadmill in the exercise room.

“My husband was out fishing,” Amy said, “and the only thing he attracted with those precious lures of his was a giant squid.”

Suji’s lips were held together so tightly they almost disappeared. Shaking his head as if ridding himself of the sight of Willie in the clutches of a squid, he gave Amy a sympathetic look. “Willie’s brush with death had me thinking of that aggressive giant squid some Japanese scientists had caught on film a few years ago. Three thousand feet down in the depths, it battled for several hours to free itself from the bait they’d lowered. So it’s not as sluggish as once believed.”

“Feel free to laugh,” Amy said, “Willie deserves to be the joke of the day. Because of his irresponsibility, grandfather went off half-cocked, and he’s going to get very sick if his lost energy isn’t returned.”

“Ankau meant so well,” Suji said, “so don’t be too hard on him.”

“It was all so unnecessary,” Amy said. “He used a CD to accompany him. No chanting. No dancing. How crazy is that? For the past ten years, I’ve always been there to keep an eye on his psychic state, and if I sensed he was in trouble, I got him back and grounded him. So why didn’t he phone me and tell me what he was up to?” Amy’s dark eyes teared up. “And one thing’s for sure. He won’t be dropping consciousness and entering into an altered state any time soon. If ever.”

Chapter Six

On his way to visit Arvo, Indre and Amy at the Turtle Shell, Warren's thoughts were on Kaarina. In a rugged land where nature ruled and not civilized culture, he'd come across a polished gem. The strong-willed beauty, who'd saved him from drowning, planned on becoming a selfless shaman. Zapping herself in and out of parallel worlds by the sheer force of her will. How improbable was that? What was she thinking? That shamanism is the trailblazer to quantum physics?

"Hey," Arvo said, when Warren walked into the makeshift lab, "I've never seen that wound you got from Giant Squid."

Amy and Indre rushed over and joined them.

When Warren pulled his right pant leg up, Amy whistled. "It's show and tell time." At the sight of the large wrap-around bruise above his ankle, she groaned, and gave it a close inspection. "Oh my God, Warren. Your whole leg is black and blue. It's been badly damaged by those small teeth-filled suckers in the club of that squid's tentacle. It's just as big as Willie's wound."

"That bottom-dweller had planned on drowning me and having me for lunch. If Kaarina hadn't sliced into one of his volley-ball sized eye, it would've succeeded."

Amy gently ran her hand over Warren's circular scars. "If it weren't for you, my husband would've been finished off with eerie efficiency, too. So he's not going out on the water until he sees that feeding machine's carcass rotting on the beach."

"Perfectly understandable," Warren said, as he lowered his pant leg, "The downside is that that carnivorous mollusk can make do with a lot of missing parts. Having one eye might slow him down a little, though."

Arvo slid in beside Warren when he sat down at one of the tables. "I'm curious, Warren, why are you hanging around here? A tsunami put your boat out of commission. And when you go diving, a squid under the influence lurks in your playground, and it's ready to give you a death hug."

"I guess it's my law enforcement sensibilities at work. There's no policing in the village, and this guy, Lakitcina, thinks he can get away with murder. He's also capitalizing on the unsettled atmosphere around here." Warren gave Arvo a studied look. "Saying that monster was under the influence. What did you mean? Influence of what?"

Arvo shrugged. "Their blue-black blood is thin, and it doesn't use oxygen very well. As for its buoyancy problem, that must be driving it crazy. So it must be operating like a delusional sea monster. Hypnotized in a way, it's striking out at anything that moves. Its active predator nature has spiraled into overdrive."

"Yeah," Warren said, "it's not that bottom-feeders's style to troll for prey near the surface of the ocean." Why was Arvo going into such detail about his 'under the influence' remark? He was acting like a man who'd let something slip.

Indre turned sideways and her dark eyes bored into Warren's. "You've got another reason for not heading back to Seattle, haven't you?"

Warren managed to keep a straight face. "And that would be?"

“Our gutsy leader. She’s caught your eye, hasn’t she?”

She sure has. Her determination to have this community humming by the time her dad gets back is so damn commendable. I’ve never met a more focused woman.”

Indre nodded. “That’s why Arvo and I are carrying on with the archaeological work. Joosef deserves to see his village as it was when he left. Allowing a man like Lakitcina to empty it and buy it for a steal is unthinkable. And another thing, there’s no way that ruthless killer is acting alone. The cats that were killed, the tram tampering and the B and E’s. I’m sure someone in the village helped him carry out those crimes. Who knows? Maybe it wasn’t Lakitcina who attacked Kaarina in the drying shed.”

“My feeling exactly,” Arvo said.

Warren looked down at the ivory barbed harpoons, spears and knives that were arranged on the table. “As Lakitcina and his accomplice get more desperate, they may resort to using weapons.

Amy picked up one of the harpoons and aimed it into the worn tabletop. “Don’t worry. Whenever Kaarina’s in the Land of Shades, she’ll go fully armed.”

Warren groaned. “What’s wrong with good old fashioned police work? You know, like catching the guy and putting him in jail?”

Amy placed the harpoon back on the table. “Lakitcina’s a shaman, so Kaarina has to be prepared to confront him in an alternate reality.”

* * * *

Kaarina borrowed Norm’s speedboat the next morning, and she was soon riding through the easily negotiated waters of the archipelago. When Warren had directed their cruise among the intricate networks of coves, inlets and channels the other day, they’d stopped to visit an older couple who made their living by working in a quarry, and another middle-aged man who painted large canvases of forest scenes. Now she wanted to touch base with a few more loners: the people who fished and

hunted and, for the main part, kept to themselves.

Clouds were overhead, but rain wasn’t in the forecast. Gulls swept over the surface of the water. And their dipping, snatching and gulping lent a kind of rhythm that rang true for the whole wilderness ecosystem. In the air, ground, sea, and forest, creatures feasted on each other. Like them, she was out hunting, too. For a man. But she didn’t want him for dinner. What she wanted to do was make him disappear.

It didn’t take her long to find the red-roofed floathouse on the shores of Latvala Island. She’d wanted to talk to the owner the other day, but he’d been away. As she tied the speedboat to the wharf where brown kelp and white driftwood moved lazily in the water, she noted that the small speedboat she’d seen here the other day was gone. On finding no one home again, she returned to the speedboat.

While untying the painter, she whirled around when she heard a crunching sound in the woods behind her. She caught a glimpse of a two-footed human who masqueraded as an animal. Whoever it was, blended in so well with the foliage, it was uncanny.

All her senses stretched outward as she went in pursuit. Wrestling her way through the rain forest, she followed the sharp male odor that was mixed in with the rich wet smells of the large evergreens.

Then surprise, surprise, she was led back to the beach. It was a man. He came to a stop and just stared at her. Blue-black hair hung limply down to his shoulders, and it was allowed to fall forward and cover half his face. Over tattered jeans and a black T-shirt, he

wore a deerskin cape. The deer's head was worn like a hood on top of his head.

Something about him was familiar, but she couldn't put her finger on it. Then she knew. The strong Johnson nose was unmistakable. He was Willie's brother, Lukwala. What on earth was he up to? Shamans were given a lot of freedom. But wasn't this taking strangeness a little too far?

Turning, Lukwala made his way back into the forest.

Kaarina cursed herself for not talking to him. Since when had she ever been at a loss for words? Damn it. She might've been able to enlist his help.

A short time later, Kaarina docked at Snatali Island, a well-populated vacation spot a mile north. The other day, a rustic-looking log cabin nestled in a well-protected small harbor had caught her eye. She'd seen a man standing out on the rickety wharf, but he'd taken off as soon as he'd seen her.

Because she didn't want to tie up at the crumbling wharf structure, she slowed down and cut the motor about twenty feet out from shore. After she anchored, she stepped down the rope ladder and into the red dinghy that trailed behind the boat.

The open beach with chunks of driftwood bleached white by the sun and the ebb and flow of the water made a beautiful site. The ancient white clamshell garden, similar to the one that had been out at Takatal Bay before the seabed earthquake, must've been handed down from one Indian generation to the next for thousands of years.

Once she reached shore, she dragged the dinghy further up onto the beach, and took off for the hand-hewn log house that fit in so well with its surroundings. Although dozens and dozens of other summer homes dotted the shoreline and were well populated at this time of year, this cabin was at least a couple of miles away from its closest neighbor.

A middle-aged man, his lips making a hard thin slash in a heavily lined face, rushed out of his house. After removing his glasses, he peered at her as if she were a strange animal. "This is private property"--throwing out his arms in the general direction of the beach--"there are lots of other places where you can nose around."

Kaarina doubted that he owned any part of the surrounding shoreline. "I won't keep you. My name's Kaarina Sajantila, and I just wanted to know if you've seen a strange-looking masked man in these parts. He's been causing all kinds of trouble over in Klatala."

He reached out to shake her hand. "Gunnar Pedersen, and I've heard that that son-of-a-bitch is raising hell over there. He's probably the same guy who's robbing us blind here on Snatali."

"Robbing you?" Gunnar's face was covered in dark and gray patches. He hadn't shaved for several weeks, so she gathered there were no women in his life. Either that, or he planned on growing a beard.

"Yeah. It started early last spring. He raided our cabins before most of us arrived here for the summer. He stole my eighty-pound tank of propane, and other families have had their fridges, food, computers, fuel and even an old fish boat stolen. So no one's leaving anything of value behind when they take off in the fall."

"Do you think he could be hiding out in one of the abandoned cabins or shacks around here?"

"Some of us around here are loners, but we keep in touch. We even organized a search party. There wasn't a sign of the S.O.B. anywhere. So we know he's not hiding

out on this island.”

“Then I’ll scratch Snatali off my list.”

“What’s the bugger been stealing from you guys in Klatala?”

“He’s stolen just a few things. Stuff for spending a few days in the mountains...a tent, sleeping bag, food. But what scared the hell out of everyone was his systematic killing of all the cats in the village. Everyone’s fled to Millport.”

“Jeez. That doesn’t sound like the same guy, does it? What do they say in cop’s language? It’s not the same--”

“M. O. But there could be a tie-in.”

“But it’s going to be hard to finger the guy, isn’t it? At this time of year there are so many strangers around.”

* * * *

Back in Klatala, Kaarina, walked down to the sparkling clear blue Klatala Lake where Clay had seen the ghostly-looking weirdo and his falcon. Caressed by the breeze, she recalled her teenage years when the lake had been her summer retreat. She’d had to put in her time at the new cannery like everyone else. After sorting out rocks, unwanted fish and seaweed from the raw shrimp before they went to the cookers and peelers, a fishy odor had clung to her even though she’d scrubbed her skin until it was as red as a lobster’s. A dip in the lake had always made her feeling less smelly, although she could never be sure.

After placing her towel on the rough warm sand, she dove into the lake’s cold mysterious depths and opened herself up to the possibilities. What was the evil shaman planning to do next? Was she his next target?

The subtle roar of the Ishkitan Waterfall drew her attention. Swimming closer, she picked up on a movement high above. Peering through the fine spray, she saw a wolf on a rocky outcropping beside the top of the falls. Marveling at the way he stood so still, she treaded water and gazed up at him.

His coat was reddish black and his mask served to draw attention to his eyes, making them appear larger than they were. Because his fixed stare was aimed at her, she responded to him from deep within her psyche. As a child, her mother had read European fables to her. In them, wolves were characterized as evil and sly. At the same time, however, she was also aware of the reverence and fascination the Indians had for Wolf. So it had been easy for her to ignore character traits not based on fact, and maintain her respect for the way wolf packs conducted their lives.

That wasn’t to say that a wolf was always good. If the leader of the pack turned cruel, he wasn’t allowed to stick around. So the Wolf who watched her now could be one of those mean loners. Something tattooed on her soul, though, told her that he was the same wolf she’d befriended in her teens.

After her swim, she sat up on the beach and searched the tree-lined lake for a sign of Raven. But only a bald eagle, that feasted on bear’s leftover fish scraps, and a black-tailed Deer quenching his thirst had come down to the water.

* * * *

Amy ran up to Kaarina when she walked into the Turtle Shell. “Look at our latest find,” she said, pointing to a large rusted anchor. Warren said it belonged to a sunken seiner about ninety feet long. He found it a few miles out from the bay. Based on the steel hulled boat’s construction and fishing gear, he thinks it’s been under water for twenty

years...maybe even sixty. He brought us part of the boat's engine, too. Arvo's working on it. It's covered in anemones."

Indre's blond candy-floss hair bobbed up and down as she strode toward them. "Warren said he had something of interest for you, too."

"Thanks. I'll pay him a visit then." Kaarina glanced at two tables that had previously been empty. "Were all those bones found here in Klatala?"

Amy nodded at one of the tables. "Yeap. And so far, we've been able to identify the bones of thirty-nine species of mammals. The ones used as food sources have been separated from the ones killed for their skins. A third group supplied both food and hides."

Indre gestured to Arvo who was working at the far end of the room. "Hey Arvo," she yelled, "we're having a meeting." Then she turned to Kaarina. "Arvo's got thirty-five types of birds identified. He's so caught up in that project, he's spending the evenings down here."

Arvo wiped his hands on a towel as he hurried toward them. "It's so damn exciting, Kaarina. The ferry stopped here earlier and dropped off more bones. They were dug up without the permission of the Klatala Tribe, so a Colorado museum has returned them."

Amy's dark eyes glowed. "We're getting ready to give them a proper burial tomorrow. Being packed away upstairs in a faraway museum is no place for my ancestors' bones. The dead are just as important as the living, and now we can honor them by making sure that they're no longer restless. Can you come?"

"I'll be there. Just tell me when and where."

Indre picked up a skull and ran her hands over it. "There were very few artifacts buried along with the bones, but what we have, we can rebury them, too. They're mostly beads and pendants...clam shell, bone and amber."

Amy picked up an oyster catcher rattle. This was removed from a shaman's burial site. A private collector returned it. Isn't it great? People are contributing to our sacred ways . . . not make money off them. To add to our sacred objects, the Taquala Tribe has stored away masks, rattles, headdresses and basketry. We can get started on our heritage center as soon as everyone gets back here."

Kaarina threw out her arm to take in a table of mammalian, bird and shellfish specimens. "Your tribe is going to be so pleased. They can interpret their own history now and keep it close at hand."

* * * *

Warren was studying the pieces of steam pipe from the sunken seiner when Kaarina opened the door to the galley. "Come on in."

"Amy told me you have a surprise for me." Slipping into the booth opposite him, Kaarina picked up a piece of chain and examined it.

"Just a minute. I'll get it for you." He went over to a drawer close to the stove and took out a compass.

After he gave it to Kaarina, she ran her index finger across the etching on the back of it. "Bergitte . . . that's a Saami name. So maybe a distant relative of mine had his boat capsized in a storm, and this is the name of his wife."

"You sound like you're interested in genealogy."

"I'd love to know more about my ancestors. There were a few Sajantila families

that immigrated to America in the early nineteen hundreds. But I have no idea where they live now.”

“At the turn of the last century, that’s when the ships first began to keep passenger lists. You can get some of the information you need on a searchable database in Norway.”

“Why didn’t dad know that?”

“It’s a pretty recent resource.”

“I still can’t help wondering why my great grandfather and his followers settled in Klatala. It must’ve been hard to carve out twenty-five square miles from what was dense old growth forest.

“It was probably no more of a challenge than living and working in the cold, barren country they came from.”

Kaarina put down the compass, arched one of her eyebrows and gave him a searching look. “This compass has nothing to do with the direction you’re going to take me now, does it?”

Warren tried to suppress his surprise at her keen insight. “You’re right, I’m focused on a much larger treasure that’s not quite so old, and I want to make it my own. But I can’t purchase this big ticket item without your approval.”

“Shoot”

A guy over at Millport wants to buy my dad’s repaired fish boat. The price he’s offered suits my dad just fine. He can sure use the money. But then I’ll need another boat. This motor launch . . . I’d like to buy it.”

“Can’t do. While dad’s alive, he has to know it’ll be there for him.”

“Then I’ll rent it for a couple of months. Okay?”

“Okay. And if you help me capture Lakitcina, the charge will be minimal. But keep in mind that I’ll want to use it from time to time.”

He nodded his consent. “I have one request. I want to be with you the next time you plan on cruising the archipelago. Okay?”

Kaarina’s dark eyes studied him intently. “How did you know what I was up to yesterday?”

“I’d gone over to Millport and rented a kayak. As I paddled among the islands, I saw you talking to a guy who looked more like an animal than a human being. I was just about to rush to your aid when he took off into the woods. Who was he?”

“Lukwala, Willie’s brother. As shaman, he’s entitled to act as bizarre as he wants to. And he seems to have taken that freedom to extremes.”

Warren was on the receiving end of a look that had a hint of guilt in its delivery. “Okay Kaarina, are you ready to confess? You’ve done me wrong, haven’t you?”

“Afraid so. I checked out your detective agency on the Internet.”

“Your verdict is?”

“When it comes to investigating sex assault and murder cases, your team is top-notch. Then I found a write-up about your dad, Jake Kyinauk. I had no idea he’d been a legend around here. When it came to outsmarting the spring salmon, no other fisherman could compete with him. He’d lived right here in the village, so I couldn’t understand why I’d never heard of him.”

“Norm told me that my dad had a row with Joosef. So I phoned dad, and he said my mom lost her first child because no one in Klatala could help her with the difficult

delivery. And he put the blame at both Joosef and Ankau's door."

"Well, I was curious, too, so I phoned my mother. According to her, the baby's death was a result of a tragic set of circumstances. A few months before your mother lost her child, my dad had advertised for a full time registered nurse, but no one had applied for the job. And, because your mother was afraid of flying, she hadn't agreed to board the helicopter for a flight to Ketchikan until it was too late.

"Mother also said that your father resented Ankau because he thought he had too much power in his role as healer. If Ankau hadn't lived in the village, he believed that there would've been a more determined effort to find a qualified nurse. But it was the Indian midwives who assisted the women who opted for home births here in the village, not Ankau. Unfortunately, they'd had no experience with breech births."

Warren straightened his shoulders and brushed back his long hair. "Dad must know that he'd made an error in judgment. He should've taken my mother to Ketchikan a few weeks before she was due to deliver."

"My family has had problems, too." Kaarina ran her fingers over the name on the back of the compass. "When I was a teenager, I rebelled. During the summer months, when nearly a hundred part-time cannery workers filled the bunkhouses, I chose to pal around with the most disreputable group. I partied every chance I got. Suji could barely stand me, and I drove my parents crazy."

"And you went too far. Right?"

"Right. For three days I stayed up in the mountains and lived on berries, edible plants and water. Mom was frantic. She'd thought a bear had eaten me. Anyway, she upped her liquor consumption, and the night before I came home, she fell down the stairs and broke her hip.

"Up to then, she'd been a closet drinker. But after her accident, everyone in the village knew mom had a problem. Dad was one of those people who psychiatrists call enablers. So he was just as guilty as I was."

"Did your mother ever get help with her drinking problem?"

"Up until her accident, she'd been begging dad to let her spend the rainy winter season with her sister in Poulsbo. So he gave in."

"That must've been a real wrench for Joosef."

"His ego took a real fall. He was forced to admit the harmony he'd been able to establish in the village wasn't reflected on his home front."

"Okay, let's get back to our hunt for a criminal. We've got different reasons for bringing this Lakitcina guy to justice and different ways of going about it. What's your next step?"

"I haven't quite decided. One thing's for sure though, I have to work on my psychic gift."

"Now why do I get the feeling you're about to do something dangerous?" That ability to dig beneath her skin and get to her soul's connection with every living thing was so damn far-fetched to him. But he couldn't deny the mesmerizing quality of her dark inward-turning eyes of hers. If she chose to hypnotize him, he'd be a highly suggestible participant.

"Before I can use my power against Lakitcina, I need to prove I have the strength and courage for the job."

"And how are you planning to reach your goal?" She was right to insist they work

separately. He was going to stick to gathering facts, while she put some far-out mystical practices into play.

“A solitary journey into the mountains starting tomorrow. It’s a spirit walk, gaining wisdom through ordeal. So I won’t be in touch with you for a few days. It’s a big deal in a way, but I’ve already done some groundwork. When I was a teenager, I ran to the mountains whenever I was troubled. Commuting with nature was how I coped with life. As far as fearing the animals, it never occurred to me.”

“But Lakitcina’s out there somewhere. His bear and falcon--”

“The sooner I know what I’m up against, the better. Besides, the mountain is my bailiwick. Wolf and Raven will watch over me.”

“There’s no way I can discourage you from going on this lonely hike, is there?”

“No.”

“Well then, before you leave, have you any suggestions for a guy trained in regular police procedure?”

“Lakitcina’s getting help from someone here in the village. So try to figure out who has the time to aid and abet a guy bent on a land grab.”

After Kaarina left, Warren thought about what Kalervo had told him about a ceremony where the native participants howled, chanted and wailed in order to work themselves into a frenzy. After they’d dressed up in the animals’ skins and heads, he’d watched as they’d bayed at the moon like a pack of wolves and growled like bears while down on all fours. When they imitated the characteristics of a wolf or a bear, they really got into the act. The shaman joined in the contorted dancing, too. By shaking his rattle and hissing, crying and groaning, he was able to induce a trance.

Imagining Kaarina working herself up to the point where she acted like someone on a bad LSD trip and collapsing into what would look like an epileptic seizure was bad enough. But to morph into a spirit form that could only be seen psychically had him experiencing a strange sense of unease. Even though he knew shamanistic practices went back twenty thousand years or more, he couldn’t look on them as an addition to holistic medicine.

There was an upside to her ambitious quest, and he was thankful for that. According to what he’d read on the Internet, a shaman intern must have many personal experiences to draw on. Kaarina’s last job as an insurance investigator had involved getting the goods on international car theft rings. So, yeah, she brought a lot of smarts to her strange new vocation. She was a down-to-earth keen observer of everything that went on around her.

Chapter Seven

The mountain trail had a rainforest density, so Kaarina found it slow going as she tunneled through the undergrowth. The timberline at the two thousand foot level was her goal, and when she reached it, she planned on camping out in the mountains for a few days. Longer, if Wolf took his time making an appearance.

Before she could become a bridge between the higher and lower states of existence, she had to know if Wolf would be there for her. Without a strong guardian spirit like him to depend on, she'd lack the confidence needed to release her soul from her body and descend into the underworld.

As part of the wind, sky and rain, Maga also gave her strength of purpose. And, although they'd been nothing dramatic, the tentative connections she'd made with the spirit world before she left Klatala at eighteen, also lent fire to her resolve. Sometimes it was something as delicate as a message from an eagle feather that had her insight and clarity increasing in subtle ways.

Some shamanic societies believed supernatural beings haunted the forests and were capable of both good or evil. They were blamed for every unfortunate experience people encountered while hiking in the hills. Even the actions they'd taken and thoughts they'd had. The only people immune to the whims of those spirits were the shamans. Folk Lore like that suited her just fine.

Shadows were everywhere, so it was hard to tell if she'd really seen a bear standing on an overhang about thirty feet in front of her. The sun was behind the trees, so everything had turned into dark silhouettes. Sure enough, descending the rock formation was a grizzly. The wind was still at her back, so it must've smelled her. Instead of making a detour and getting out of her way, it headed straight for her. Climbing a tree was out. Even a stout one. This animal was unpredictable. If it took a mind to climb a tree as fast as a black bear, it could.

When it was within fifteen feet of her, she made an effort to telepathically communicate with it. "I'm not a threat to you. So please step aside and let me pass."

The bear raised its body and stood on its two hind feet. Frozen to the spot, Kaarina stared at muscles bunched in tension as it snuffled the air with a few rough shakes to his powerful head. She looked away when it stared into her eyes. The moment hung in there. Tense. Still. Fierce.

Then the grizzly charged.

She stood her ground. Raising her arms as high as she could, she yelled as loudly as she could.

It pulled up a couple of feet in front of her. Then it backed away, leaving the smell of a big wet shaggy dog in his wake. It was a bluff.

When the bear charged again, it purposely knocked her down.

She was pissed off now, and her common sense advised her to bring out her main weapon: pepper spray. Instead, she jumped up and stared straight into the grizzly's eyes. "You have no right to try and scare me. I'm not your enemy. Get away from me. Go on

your way.” If that didn’t work, she’d roll up into a ball and play dead.

The bear pawed at the ground for what seemed like an eternity. Then, after snapping its teeth and shaking its head, it ambled off into the woods.

Somewhere deep inside, the bear’s scary tactics had summoned up Kaarina’s inner strength and changes had taken place deep in her psyche. Up to now, she’d always managed to steer clear of grizzlies. To her, they were like serial killers waiting for the right moment to rip her apart. That scar on her inner nature was gone now. That bear could easily have killed her with one swing of its paw. As for being under Lakitcina’s possession, no way. That bear’s actions were right in character.

In need of a rest, she climbed up on a large boulder and had a drink of water. At first, she thought it was an eagle sitting in a spruce tree a short distance in front of her. When it flew nearer to her, rigid straight wings holding up its stealthy narrow body, she knew it was a falcon. With its dark brown wing tops, tan undersides, long tail with the black stripes and wide wingspan, it was easily distinguishable from other birds.

A falcon was the definitive lethal weapon with its strong hooked bill, notched tooth, talons and eyes that worked as sensors. As a spiritual aide it could be invaluable.

Climbing down from the rock, she continued on her hike to the timberline. As she followed the river the Indians called Atmak, she saw a mass of shadowy crows. They were snatching the hapless salmon that were struggling up the river to spawn. The shrill harsh cries they made when she entered their domain had her thinking about their brains. They were five times larger than a pigeons.

Falcon was back. Swooping down, he pierced a squirrel with its talons and then perched on a cedar branch to gorge on its afternoon snack.

That was the moment Lakitcina chose to jump out from behind some black raspberry bushes. Behind the green and black mask, his blue eye cut through her with a laser-like blow. The other eye looked inflamed and unfocused. And as for that right foot of his, something was wrong with it, too. His limp was very pronounced.

With a lightning response of strength she’d built up from within, a flow of energy switched on in rapid succession and she was beyond fear. “What is wrong with you? You’ve terrified a peace-loving community. But why? What is driving you to do such cowardly acts of violence ... killing Clay, Trooper Dave and Charlie Jack?”

“You’re just spouting wild accusations. You know damn well you can’t prove that I’ve done anything criminal. But you can take this as an absolute truth. One way or the other, I’m going to get control of this land. I’ve come all the way from Saamiland to claim it.”

“And you can go right back again. No one has a right to Klatala except my dad.”

“Well, he won’t have it for long. He’s a criminal, and he should’ve been exposed long before now.”

“Criminal! The man’s a saint.” Stepping outside herself, she was ready to smash the guy’s windpipe if he came at her with intent to harm.

The creep shrugged indifferently. Then his arm shot out as if he was shooing away a mosquito. “Before long, there’s going to be no one left in this village. I listen in on the radiophones around here, so I always know what your little team of losers is up to.” Suddenly turning off to the left he began to wrestle his way into the forest.

One day soon, she knew she’d be forced to pit her skills against his: physically and mentally. His try at getting her to turn tail and run just now, only renewed her

dedication to become a shaman. In order to do battle with him, she'd have to mobilize the intense concentration of energy necessary to perform shape shifts and deep trances.

On reaching the dam in the late afternoon, she sat down on a rock and replenished her water pouches. After drinking her fill and having a small snack of salmonberries, thimbleberries, salal and some tender greens, she opened up her down-filled sleeping bag and placed it under a cottonwood tree. Sitting down, she leaned against its trunk and stared out at the scene before her.

She was in a clearing that offered a panoramic view of the harbor, so she drank it in like a thirsty desert nomad. Almost hypnotized by the whitecaps the wind whipped up in the distance, she wondered if life really was as endless as the water. If that were true, was she a young spirit or an old one?

What about wolves? They were the original guard dogs. Thirty million years ago, their ancestors roamed the earth, and they'd taught cavemen how to hunt and bring order out of confusion. But these days man either hated them or admired them. So wolves didn't know where humans were coming from half the time.

She had no ambiguous feelings about choosing a wolf as a guardian spirit. Older than mankind, the wisdom of the ages dwelt within his ancient brain. The European folklore that had some children fearing him was unknown to the Indians, and like them, her image of wolves had never been damaged. So, when she'd seen a wolf frozen in the headlights of her car, she'd known she had to put her own life at risk in order to save its life.

Determined as she was to fine-tune her senses, it wasn't long before the mixture of warmth and the smell of wild flowers had her feeling relaxed and drowsy. A heaviness developed in her arms and legs and she became conscious of her breathing becoming slower and deeper. On checking her pulse, she found it was slower, too.

She'd induced her first light trance in the outdoors. This was the dreamlike level whereby contact with a spirit guide could be imminent. But where was Wolf?

She was still in a kind of limbo when she picked up on an unsettling aura. As she tried to focus on what was causing the bad vibes, she discovered that it took time to get a semblance of herself. This was the moment when she realized that zoning out when she was alone had its drawbacks. Willing herself to become conscious and aware didn't respond as quickly and strongly as she hoped.

The wind was now blowing in gusts and the trees were being whipped around this way and that. Normally, the winds died down about now, but there was no letup today. Slipping into the parka she'd stuffed into her sleeping bag, she stood and looked around at her surroundings.

Wolf stood on a rocky crag about fifteen feet above her, and whatever had caused her to sense danger was no more. The animal seemed to epitomize wildness, mystery and spirit. He was territorial, and probably reading his environment much like she was. Telepathically, she sent him a message. If it reached him, he'd know that she wanted him to continue as her guiding spirit.

Wolf turned and walked along the goat trail leading down to the open space where she stood. Not allowing any doubts to rise, she tried to give him the impression she was strong and in charge, but not threatening.

At a distance of twenty feet away, even with his poor eyesight, she knew he saw her clearly. "Okay Wolf, I was knocked out cold when I swerved my car into a tree in

order to avoid hitting one of your brothers. And I'm sure he must've checked out my smell and his spirit must've relayed it to you." Her voice was strong and commanding. "Now it's me who needs help. I need a helper, a keeper of my soul. Are you up for it?"

Wolf just stood there and continued to give her his 'fixed stare'.

"Come closer," she urged.

He turned into the bushes and disappeared.

When an hour went by and Wolf still hadn't returned, Kaarina drank some water, ate more berries and then decided to get back into her sleeping bag and take a nap. When she awoke, it took a moment or two before she was able to focus on anything. Shining her flashlight on her watch, she saw both hands pointing to three. That meant that the seventeen hours of sunlight were up, and now the few hours of semi-darkness had closed in.

There was movement a few feet away from her, and when she aimed her flashlight in the direction of the crunching twigs she saw Wolf. His eyes worked exceptionally well at night, so she knew he'd given her a good going-over while she slept. Turning off the flashlight, she waited for his next move while her eyes adjusted to the dimness.

After pushing herself into a sitting position, she found herself eyeball to eyeball with the animal the Indians referred to as teacher. "Okay, Wolf, can we please get reacquainted? I want you to honor me as your shaman and be my guide to the spirit world. I need your loving support, your intelligence, and your vital energy."

Wolf remained frozen in place.

Forcing herself to remain calm and in charge, she thought of her strong Saami heritage. Her semi-nomadic relatives dated back to the Stone Age. They were a sturdy people, and their power was strongest in a dark forest.

Wolf grew from forest-dwelling roots, too. Like her people, he traveled long distances and excelled at hunting. His howling that vibrated through her body like a heart-wrenching song was his way of communicating with the spirit world.

"In my fight to defeat a demon, you are to be my spirit ally. And one day soon, I'll merge with you on an astral plane." Over and over, she repeated her last eight words. They became a litany.

Wolf simply stood there, so she slipped back down into her sleeping bag, and pretended she wasn't interested in him any more.

Apparently he'd watched over her for the rest of the night, because he was still there in the morning. As soon as he saw her sit up, he bowed down. That meant he wanted to play. "Okay, Wolf, let's have some fun."

Getting out of her sleeping bag, she stood and heaved a large stick as far as she could. "Okay, go fetch." When Wolf bounded after the stick like a playful puppy, heavy dew-laden branches released their loads and a light wind spread them around like rain.

"Good boy, good boy," she said, when he returned with the stick. A nuzzling session followed, and his soft fur enveloped her like a warm coat. Shaman often wore Wolf's pelt when they called on his sacred spirit for healing purposes. As a sacred medicine animal, his skin, teeth and body parts were used in their healing ceremonies.

Instead of Wolf's healing powers, however, it was his strength, bravery, swiftness and intelligence she intended to draw on. He was the perfect spiritual ally when it came to confronting the demon who might have a bear under his possession.

When Raven arrived, the game came to an end. The bird flew close to them, sat on a nearby branch, and began to squawk in that harsh voice of his. He'd most likely found a wounded or dead animal, and he must've told Wolf it was time for breakfast because her spirit guide dashed after him when he flew away. A clever bird, he knew he had lots to gain by taking on the role as messenger. He always got the leavings.

Raven's long bill, wedge-shaped tail and wide fingered wings distinguished him from a crow. A highly evolved bird, he was the symbol of ceremonial magic. Long ago, the natives, after noticing he was very playful, called him the Trickster. He also excelled as a spiritual communicator, and when it came to shape shifting, he was the greatest. Magic personified.

Kaarina stayed in the mountains for another day, but Wolf didn't make another appearance. She did, however, sense that he watched over her from a distance. There was no doubt in her mind that he was to be her guide to the spirit world. And one day soon, when she traveled outside her body, she'd attempt to meld her animal spirit with his human spirit.

The following morning, as she descended the mountain, she made good time. On reaching the reservoir, the sound of animal barks and yips had her stopping and looking off to the left. In a clearing not far from the dam, three Wolf Cubs, around seven months of age, bounded full tilt into a grizzly. As she watched, the sound of their whines and whimpers soon indicated they were on the losing side. A few minutes later, after they made a hasty retreat, the bear gave a haughty shake of his head and lumbered off into the woods.

Wolves could hear sounds from several miles away, so she wondered why the parents hadn't come to the aid of their youngsters.

She was on her way again, when short, high-pitched barks had her stopping in her tracks once again. Wolf's cool demeanor was no more. Pacing around the pit in a fit of anger, grief and pain, his lips were lifted high and drawn back, his fangs were bared and his ears were raised and bent forward.

Kaarina's stomach lurched, and her heart's electrical system went into a racing mode. Someone had dug a large pit and covered it with a net made of rope. Because large evergreen branches had covered the trap, Wolf's mate or pup had fallen into the hole and become entangled.

Approaching the pit warily, she waited to see how he'd react to her presence. On recognizing her, some of the anxiety in his face disappeared. He moved away from the pit like a policeman turning the crime scene over to a detective.

Walking up to the edge of the pit, she was sickened and stunned by the sight of Wolf's partner tangled up in the rope net. The more she tried to get loose, the tighter the ropes twisted around her body.

The hole had been dug recently because the mounds of dirt around the edges of the pit were not heavy from a recent rainfall. When Kaarina knelt down to get a closer look at the poor animal's predicament, soft chunks of dirt fell into the hole and made the captured animal even more fearful.

Maybe Jerry had just finished digging this pit, she thought as a rage of betrayal surged through her veins. Her anger heated up and became a stream of red hot fury. He pretended to be someone who cared about the village while, at the same time, he'd gone on killing wolves in the surrounding mountains. What a deceitful phony.

Speaking softly, while keeping her eye on Wolf from time to time, she knelt down and began to gather up as much netting as she could. Then she began to pull with every bit of strength she had in her. Wolf quickly caught on to what she was doing, and he grabbed a large section of the net and pulled too. Between them, they raised his mate out of the pit.

Speaking in soothing tones, Kaarina was finally able to calm the poor frightened animal and untangle her from the net. Wolf took over then, and rubbed himself against his mate's dirt-covered fur. Shortly after they began to whimper as if they were engaged in a conversation, they took off. They must've realized they'd been ignoring the barks of their cubs.

Kaarina gathered up the net and threw it back into the pit. Using her boots as a tool, she kicked the loose dirt back into the pit. Lugging rocks was her next project. To make sure no animal was ever hurt by stepping into the loose rocks, she piled them into a hill.

Her legs felt like they were close to collapsing as she started her trek down the last thousand feet. To make the descent even more miserable, it started to rain and the wind off the ocean blew just hard enough to push through her parka. The dirt clinging to the inside of her boots had turned to mud, and they now weighed a ton. Wet, cold and miserable beyond description by the time she reached the base of the mountain, she decided that walking to the mansion was out of the question. Shaken and spent, she headed toward the nearest place of refuge: her dad's motor cruiser.

The thought of standing under a hot shower had her forgetting how miserable she felt. She'd noticed that Warren favored the forward stateroom where he slept in the upper berth. So there'd be no argument about the sleeping arrangements tonight. The Queen-size bed in the aft cabin was hers.

Twenty minutes later, she was banging on the door to the Black Hawk's galley.

"Good God, Kaarina," Warren said, when he opened the door. "I haven't been able to get a good night's sleep since you took off for the hills."

"I'll tell you about my adventure later," she said raggedly, as she threw down her backpack, unzipped her jacket and let it drop to the deck. "I need a shower."

Chapter Eight

In the aft stateroom, Kaarina showered and wrapped herself in a terry cloth robe before she collapsed on the bed. No matter how hard she tried, she couldn't keep from nodding off. She managed to jerk herself awake a couple times and then, somewhere between consciousness and sleep, she drifted into the past.

Willie performed a comical bow, thanked Kaarina for the dance and gone off in search of Amy. As he disappeared among the revelers on the bow, Kaarina staggered and felt somewhat light-headed. Luckily, the host of the party, Wally Benson-Clark, thirtyish, overweight and balding, was nearby to help her steady herself. Was she having an allergic reaction to one of the hors d'oeuvres? Food poisoning? She couldn't be drunk. She'd only had a single white wine, and that was fifteen or twenty minutes earlier.

Grateful for Wally's chivalry, Kaarina allowed him to guide her down the hallway into one of the staterooms. The moment the door was closed, he unceremoniously dumped her on the bed and began to tear off her clothes.

In her muddled mind, she could think of nothing except her dress. It was new. She'd spent last week's paycheck on it. Bought especially for her parent's anniversary in the fall, she'd agonized over wearing it tonight. Just one wine stain, and it would never be the same. Her parents had dressed up to the nines, so she'd wanted to look her best, too.

Why in the hell was she worried about a damn dress? Charming Wally had turned into a mindless creature from the dark abyss.

Adrenaline flooded her system, and her brain sent desperate messages to her arms and legs, but putting thought into action was impossible. Her muscles remained utterly relaxed. Even her vocal chords had shut down. Her screams were silent.

Helpless and terrified, she was determined to maintain her presence of mind. Ankau had warned her that she'd eventually have to confront the diabolic side of human nature. Evidently that time had come.

She forced herself to look Wally in the eyes, but they were glazed and bloodshot from too much drink--and who knew what else--and totally devoid of compassion. He'd taken a need for power and control one step further by planning an act of pure sadism.

An hour ago, she'd exchanged cheerful banter with him. Now he was completely unaware of her as a person. Totally focused on satisfying his swinish lust, he'd removed her dress and was now puffing and sweating as he struggled to separate her limp and unresisting body from her undergarments.

His beefy body crushed her into the mattress. Reeking of alcohol, seafood and cigarettes, his breath repelled her. Desperate to throw up and cry out, as he covered her face and breasts with saliva, she could do neither.

When a Karaoke singer in the dining room above belted out "Somewhere Over The Rainbow", the incongruity of the lyrics snapped her out of her panic. A bloodthirsty ghoulish intent on gratifying himself using her body as a conduit. Without the requisite attraction and passion, it was a grotesque act. Brutal, inhuman.

Wally committed a felony when he slipped a roofy into her drink and put her at

risk for great bodily harm. There was even the possibility that he could've rendered her comatose. And, according to what she'd read, those guys who administered these deadly weapons thought their victims wouldn't be able to recall the rape.

But Wally had picked the wrong girl. Ankau had taught her a number of tried and true shamanic techniques for maintaining her awareness in disorienting situations. The essential trick, of course, was to separate her mind and spirit from her physical body and become an observer more than a participant. Easier said than done.

Laughter, the tinkle of ice on glass and feet pounding on the floor above made a cacophony of sound. Dissociation was what she was after, so she tried to achieve an altered state of consciousness by tuning in on the throbbing hypnotic frequency of the next song: the Beatle's "Tomorrow Never Knows". Unlike the drug induced altered reality brought on by the roofy, this was to be an intentional journey. She'd be aware of what was happening to her physical body while permitting fear to pass over and through her.

With the thrumming drumbeat and muted chanting that vibrated with the universe, her spirit soon took flight. Transported to the spiritual world, she took all her consciousness and memory and stored it in another dimension. Out-of-body. Slowly regaining her composure, she'd soon completely distanced herself from the paralyzed young woman lying on the bed.

At this point, she became aware of Raven's raucous shrieks as his wings battered at the porthole. He acted as a spiritual conduit for the distancing and discharging of the anger she felt toward the mindless thug thrashing and shuddering on top of her.

At the same moment as Wally grunted and collapsed at her side, Raven disappeared.

Wolf's furious howls intruded somewhere between sleep and consciousness, and she rose through the rhythms that are associated with precise states of mind to find she was on her dad's motor launch, not Wally's yacht. Sitting up in bed and looking around the stateroom that had been hers as a teenager, she wondered if that dark blot on her soul would ever stop torturing her in nightmares.

Prior to being sexually assaulted, her psychic intuitiveness would've warned her of Wally's deceitful nature on that fateful night thirteen years ago. As part of her initiation for a shaman's job had it been one of the tests? A near-death experience? Being dismantled and reassembled? Death and rebirth?

Well, it hadn't worked. Wally was trapped in her psyche and haunting her in dreams. If she hadn't been able to split herself off from much of the horror he'd inflicted, she might've terminated the ensuing pregnancy.

No longer able to rely on pure intuition, she was unable to invest trust in those not of her immediate circle. She cried out for revenge, and psychically willed spiteful malicious spirits to take possession of Wally and cause him demonic torment.

The evil bastard was a representative of a large distribution center with many outlets along the west coast of the United States. Her dad had ordered his cannery supplies through him and thought he was a decent upstanding kind of guy. It just showed how easily it was for charming scoundrels to bamboozle people.

With no knife wounds and very little bruising, it would've been her word against Wally's if she'd brought him up on charges. For every one of her helpful character witnesses, Wally could've provided one who'd testify that she'd been staggering

drunkenly and gone with him willingly.

Warren gave Kaarina an hour, and then he knocked lightly on the half-opened door of the forward stateroom.

“Come on in,” Kaarina said, “I’m ready to talk,”

Snuggled into a mountain of pillows, Warren found her freshly scrubbed face and dark tangled hair a startling contrast to her white terry cloth dressing gown. She was the hunter home from hills and those spellbinding eyes of hers could read the slightest shift in his expression. That meant he had to back off from an urge to split-off from his logical reasoning and go with his body’s neediness.

After sitting down on the armchair beside the bed, he placed his elbows on his knees, leaned forward and gazed at her. “How’re you feeling?”

“I’m fine. Really. Thanks for letting me get a short nap. I had to fill in a large pit that Jerry dug recently and it wiped me out. Wolf’s mate had fallen into it, and she was all tangled up in the net.”

“Jerry? I would’ve sworn he was doing all he could to feel welcome around these parts.” There was that insane impulse again. Something primal within him that hadn’t been agitated for some time continued to give him a bad time. Be objective old man, he said under his breath. You’ve got to remain detached and eliminate all imaginings that fit into a sexual equation. Nothing of that nature will ever balance out here. Kaarina’s crash course in a job that demanded she work with half-crazy spirits in a shadowy nether world didn’t include a summer affair with a footloose gumshoe.

“That’s what I thought, too. He took over the grocery delivery job, and it left Kalervo free to help Willie clean up the plant.”

“It just doesn’t add up. He told me that he’d collected all the snares and traps he’d set. But he hadn’t mentioned anything about filling in any holes. So maybe he wasn’t the one who dug them. Maybe Lakitcina did.” With his errant emotions barely under control, Warren was surprised that he could use his fogbound brain for anything bordering on a reasonable thought.

It seemed to take a moment before his words made inroads into Kaarina’s weary mind. “It was a freshly dug hole. So you could be right. Why didn’t I think of that? I ran into Lakitcina while I was in the mountains.”

“You ran into him? Now what does that mean?”

“It means I met him up in the mountains. The guy’s aware of my every move.”

“Did he threaten to hurt you?”

“No. With his mask firmly in place, the idea was to scare the hell out of me. He believes dad had committed a crime of some kind. A totally ridiculous accusation. According to him, he has every right to this land. And he’s going to continue scaring the hell out of us until Klatala’s deserted. That was all he said. The next minute, he was gone.”

“This guy may get progressively more dangerous then. So make sure you’re always alert in the mountains, and not halfway to the land of make believe. Look at you. What else have you been up to? Were you trying to hypnotize yourself? Was your mind tripping out and communicating with spooks?”

Kaarina didn’t feel like lying. What right had he to tell her what she could or couldn’t do in her own back yard? “I have to learn how to handle myself in any given situation. And I can’t do it by playing it safe.” Warren’s reluctance to imagine some of

the unseen forces available to her was wearing a little thin. All he had to do was cock his ears and open his eyes.

“So I’m right, you did drift off to neverland. Not too bright, young lady. It’s dangerous to fool around with that kind of stuff. Especially when you have no backup.”

“I was just relaxed in mind and body.”

“But I think it was more than that. I think you were well on your way right out of this world. Not a wise idea in the woods. Practice in your bedroom where it’s safe.”

Later, after Warren zapped a packaged meal and watched Kaarina wolf it down like a starving child, he found it harder and harder to accept what she was getting herself into. “What do you hope to accomplish once you pass your shaman test? Get your primal self closer to an ocean of time lines? Make a transformation of some kind?”

“Sorry, I need a caffeine pick-me-up first. Then I’ll answer your questions.” She nodded toward the coffee machine on the kitchen counter.

Warren slid out of the booth. “I guess I thought you’d be content with just the smell of my brew. Sorry.” After he sat two mugs of black coffee on the table, he sat down beside her and waited until she’d taken a few sips. “Okay, spiritual candidate, tell me how you’re planning to make this village safe again.”

Lakitcina’s shown that he’s capable of inducing trances to parallel spiritual realities, so I’ve got to make an effort to learn about the way of the drum in record time . . . shut down my logical reasoning and open myself up to psychic impressions.”

“The way of the drum. You mean the drum itself has power?”

“To the Indians and the Saami, the sacred drum gives us spirit voice and spirit ears. It opens the door to our world and the farthest reaches of the beyond. My ancestors used the drum not only as a compass, but to cast spells across vast distances and control the weather.”

“Whoa, there. It sounds to me like you’re mixing Northwestern American Indian culture with your Saami traditions. Won’t that be confusing?”

“Not really. I can keep them separate in my head. The more rooted I am in shamanic lore, both Indian and Saami, the better.”

Although Warren tried to maintain a tight control on his attraction for his feisty guest, it was impossible. Her proximity had him forgetting that she was a world unto herself. The electrifying range of emotions his insides were experiencing were impossible to squelch. To undo the belt around her robe. To gaze on her tight waist, soft hips and long subtly muscled limbs. To touch her perfect inner thigh....

When Warren put his arm around her shoulders, Kaarina was astounded by the magnetic energy that had filled in the once comfortable space between them. His eyes bored into her, questioning and expectant and she sensed his projection of heated emotions. Her lean, sinewy host with the piercing hawk-like eyes, sharp cheeks and strong jaw would devour her if he were given half a chance.

On feeling his lips at her neck, she surprised herself by not immediately pulling away. Layers of formality--the protective coverings that prevented her from getting close to anyone in a sexual way--had to be stripped away eventually. But this summer was no time for a side trip down a rocky path that would run its course at summer’s end.

It was when Warren nibbled on her chin that she realized the inevitability of having to deal with his stark need. Breaking away, she put her fingers to his lips. “I need you as a friend, Warren, not as a lover.” From the way he kissed the back of her hand, she

knew he was a man who practiced restraint. A clear invitation from her was necessary before he became intimate.

“Then tell me how I can fill that role.” His voice came out sharper than he intended. Damn, why couldn’t he hide his disappointment?

“Lakitcina can’t possibly be carrying out his vicious offenses without the help of someone living in the village.”

“And you think I can find the traitor among us?”

“Yes. Knowing when someone is playing a charade and putting up a false face . . . that must be second nature to you.”

Warren stretched out his long legs, and leaned back. The lady was so focused. Like an arrow being shot from a quiver. On target. And he was a PI who could help her zero in on her objective. So complicating this bizarre case by trying to add a fiery summer affair spin to the mix was ludicrous. Her plate was full. God damn it, what was wrong with him?

Kaarina spoke between taking sips of her coffee. “I have a strong feeling Lakitcina’s going to pull out all the stops in order to steal this village. He feels so damn righteous about what he’s doing. And I have so little time to expose him.”

“Have you checked with your dad? Are you sure he’s still coming? You said he was very ill--”

“Before I went into the mountains, I had a chat with him. The digital imaging in that two-way, high speed Internet satellite service Norm set up in the cannery office is great. Poor dad, his face looked so drawn. It broke my heart to see him looking so frail.”

“Yeah. I made use of it the other day. I sent an email to my dad. And it was kind of strange...”

Kaarina felt the intensity of his gaze. It was if he were trying to penetrate her defense systems. “Come on, Warren, what’s strange?”

“While I was in the cannery office, Norm asked me to do some filing. Paper work, that dealt with materials used in the cannery clean-up, was piled neatly beside the computer: invoices, receipts, order sheets and e-mails. There was a stack of business cards to be filed, too. That’s when I noticed a Seattle lawyer’s name on one of them. I flipped it over, and ‘in re to Mortensen will’ was written beneath Suji’s name. Has he ever mentioned anything about a will?”

“Not to me.”

“I checked out that lawyer on the Internet. He’s new. Just opened his office a few months ago. Anyway, I put the card with the others.”

“Good. Who knows, I might need it.” Someone in the village is helping Lakitcina carry out his reprehensible agenda, so no one has the right to privacy.” When it came to asking Suji about his dealings with a Seattle lawyer, however, she knew she couldn’t do it. Damn.

Later, when Kaarina got comfortable in the salon, Warren put their drinks on the coffee table and joined her on the sofa. Just think about it, Kaarina. While you were in the mountains, you were completely at Lakitcina’s mercy while you slept.”

“Weird, eh? So I guess I’m worth more to him alive than dead.”

Warren picked up his drink and wrapped his hands around it. “But who knows the extremes that sleazy snake may go to in the future? And if he does try to harm you, you’ll need a gun. One of my PI’s gave me his when he went on vacation. So you can have

mine.” He removed a revolver from a drawer in the side table and placed it on the coffee table.

Kaarina shook her head. “No, no, no. A gun is no weapon for a shaman.”

* * * *

Kaarina was in the mansion kitchen when a falcon flew through the open patio door. His eerily silent frantic behavior had her frozen for a moment as it sent pots, pans, dishes and food flying off the sink counter. But when it let out an unholy screech and seized her dad’s cat, Kali, by the scruff of her neck, she sprang into action.

The bird found that maneuvering its wings through the opening in the patio door worked better coming in than going out, so that gave her a chance to grab Kali by her front legs. She pulled with every ounce of strength she had in her, but the flailing bird wouldn’t release her.

The only weapon close at hand was a copper-bottomed pot so she reached for it. Soon her cries joined in with the cat’s shrill wails and the bird’s shrieks. On hitting her target with considerable force, she expected the falcon to release Kali, but it didn’t. With even more determination, the bird was able to make its way through the opening and soar into the sky.

Shocked and almost numb with despair as she pictured Kali’s neck being dislocated by falcon’s notched tooth, she reached for the sake that Suji kept up in the cupboard. Taking a good swig, and then another, she tried to get her heart rate down to an acceptable level.

There was no mistaking the bird was a falcon. The dark stripe coming down from his head, a white throat at the sides of his neck, and the narrow tail with black bands were his distinctive features. What in the hell was going on? Birds, mice and small animals of all kinds made their home in the forested mountains that surrounded the village, so there was no need for falcon to invade homes for prey. The bird was programmed, she was sure of that.

Restless and frustrated, Kaarina was eager to get out of the house and clear her head. Suji said he was going up to the dam to make sure the old woodstave water system, that wound its way down the mountain, wasn’t reduced to a trickle. At first, she had suspicious thoughts about his true reason for hiking in the mountain, but they were quickly erased. Suji had often opened up the dam after he’d noticed that the water pressure in the mansion had lessened. Although the bungalows were empty, Norm, Willie and Kalervo needed tons of water for cleaning up the cannery and Amy, Indre and Arvo depended on a constant flow for their lab work.

This was the perfect time to have a chat with Ankau. Not over the phone but one on one. It was raining hard, so she put on her oilskins and rubber boots and headed for the Lodge.

Chapter Nine

In the mudroom off the lodge entrance, Kaarina removed her rain gear and hung it up. "Hope I'm not intruding, Paxala."

"I'm ready for company. Believe me. Three days of rain, and I've got cabin fever. Before the Millport exodus, people made this place their second home. I miss the buzz, the energy and giving service to others."

Following him into the living room, Kaarina sat in an armchair and Ankau sat in the one opposite. He had the electric heaters on, and Mozart's "Overture to the Marriage of Figaro" was on his CD player. It was a pleasant ambience and the horror story she was about to tell was out of whack with the surroundings.

"Okay, my young Saami mystic, what's up?" Ankau asked. "No, wait. I think I know what it is."

"Then tell me, all-seeing medicine man. What do you think is bugging the hell out of me?" She was the only one who dared to call him that. To call him a witch doctor would be pushing her luck.

"You've had another run-in with the guy who's trying to turn Joosef's little community into a wasteland."

"Like I told you, Lakitcina made sure I was aware of his presence in the mountain the other day. And today, he pulled another fearsome tactic out of his arsenal. He had his possessed falcon make a home invasion. It flew in through the opening in the patio door and grabbed dad's cat, Kali."

"Those birds are fearless. They're certainly not afraid of people. So, who knows, all the terror that that bird has brought about ... maybe it's killing cats under its own volition."

"But there's a smorgasbord of little animals out there. Why the need to kill domesticated pets? I think Lakitcina has put him up to those cruel and disgusting forays.

"If you're right, that sinister bugger's made the mansion his main target now. So you and Suji might be in danger."

After Ankau got up and lit several candles, he closed the thick, lined drapes and darkened the room. Incense soon filled the room and Kaarina settled back into the soft cushions, placed her legs under her body and soaked up the surroundings. "You want me to open up about my main roadblock when it comes to acing my shamanic course. Right?"

"You got it."

"Okay, my dear Paxala. I can do that. Light and shadow, good and evil. I know they exist everywhere. And when people feel out of joint, I'm determined to be the one who helps them balance those powers. But give me a minute, I need to get my head together. I'm not quite sure how to go about explaining my problem."

"Fine. I'll sit beside you and do some contemplation of my own." Kaarina's look of uncertainty, which flashed across her face just now, filled Ankau's heart with loving concern. She was so close to her goal, but not quite sure of her ability to go the distance.

The netherworld, heaven, glaciers and the sea were where Ankau's guardian spirits looked for healing and guidance. They were all reached by letting his mind go wandering in an ecstatic trance. As his tribe's shaman, he'd spent his life in the service of others, weathering both hardships and failures. The rigors and demands of her shamanic calling were about to take over Kaarina's life, and like him, she'd find the rewards far outweighing the downside.

For some time however, Ankau sensed Kaarina's lack of confidence when it came to progressing to the deep trance. And here he was, no longer coming from a position of strength. Quite the opposite. He was entirely dependent on her ability to overcome her fears. Because he'd shape shifted his essence into Swan's body, his personal devils were not only holding her captive, but some of his spiritual energy, too. Thankfully, that fragment was still connected to his main consciousness by a magical silver chord still attached to his body, but pulling it back into place could only be done by a soul retrieval.

The only chance for getting his spirit back was in Kaarina's hands. If, for some reason she failed, and he were to remain soul-less, he'd become very sick and, in all probability, become bedridden. A shaman from another tribe might be able to help him, but all his hopes were on Kaarina because she was familiar with the lore and legends of his tribe. That was not to say that the visions of his people were wiser than other tribes. Just different.

Her personal connection to him over the years was of immense importance, too. As her mentor, he'd weakened some of his own powers in order to increase her shamanic promise. And, in addition to her youthful strength, strong will and a need to succeed, Amy and Willie would lend her even more strength as spiritual aides.

"After your solitary journey into the mountains," he began tentatively, "are you feeling more confident about progressing to the next step?"

"Yes. Definitely. After I pulled Wolf's mate out of that pit, I knew I had a power animal guide I could depend on. And when it comes to flying beyond the limitations of my body and achieving an increased awareness in the light and medium trances, Amy says I'm doing fine. I saw furniture, plants, windows and doors that really weren't in the room. It was like my imagination had nothing to do with my normal brain functions. It just took off and made me feel as if I were in two places at the same time."

"Now let's get specific, Valeda. What part of journeying to otherworldly realms is the most worrisome for you?"

"I know I have the right state of flow going on in my head. But an old trauma is holding me back from making further progress. I've always wanted to be the one in control. Going deeper into my psyche and having my wandering self take off from my body still hold frightening prospects for me. If I'm to kill destructive spirits or make them harmless...I need to trust my spirit helpers in an underworld descent. But I'm not sure—"

"There's no denying the negative aspects of journeying into the unknown and stepping beyond the veil. A profound trance is a bodily disengagement. And, unfortunately, there aren't many rules to follow because shamanism is all about experiencing, knowing, seeing and doing.

"Sleeping while awake, that's all it is. The secret's in the heart. When it comes to journeying to other dimensions your attitude is all important."

"I won't be in charge, though. Allowing my wandering spirit to be ridden is much like passive sexual reception. No wonder some men believe shamanism is a job for

women.”

“You were in a coma after your car accident. So you weren’t in charge then.”

Kaarina managed a smile. “That’s different. I had no choice. And if my body appeared to be in trouble, there were medical personnel watching over me ... ready to step in.”

“Amy and Willie will do the same. All you have to do is cede control of your corporeal body over to them. They’ll bring your wandering energy back if they sense you’re in any danger. All you have to do is believe that.”

“I do. I do. But what if those Saami underworld demons rule the day? I read stories about their art of magical archery. The elves have arrows that fly back to the bowstring of their own accord, and hit whatever they’ve aimed at. If I get elfshot or dwarfshot, my corporeal body could wind up with physical symptoms like muscle spasms, nervous degeneration ... even cancer. And Lakitcina has proven that he can interfere with the consciousness of other shamans and spirit aides while they’re in astral form.”

“Now look, there’s always the possibility that you may be harmed both physically and mentally. That’s the chance you take. But don’t underrate Wolf. From him, you’ll get protection and knowledge. I’ve had a few assignments in the past that involved killing. Demons like Lakitcina have often threatened my tribe, and I’ve always managed to defeat them. There are no hard and set rules for shamans, so I’d often ignored the rules of ordinary society.

“The knights of old had their fights in real reality, so it was all right for them to let the challenger choose the weapon. In non-reality, however, the guidelines are not clear at all. What the knights and shamans did have in common were the reasons behind who won and who lost the contest. The outcomes were dependent on which warrior had the most skill, strength and determination.

“Now let’s get down to what’s chipping away at your courage.” Ankau studied her coolly for a moment. “You’ve never told me why you left Klatala thirteen years ago. Amy tells me that you wanted to find yourself.”

“I’d experienced an energy leak ... I lost part of my life’s essence”--she gave the side of her head a slap--“I’ve tried hard to get it back, but without success.”

“Then you must tell me why you continue to keep a bad experience trapped in your psyche long after it is over and done with. Are you allowing an evil person to haunt you?”

Kaarina threw up her hands in the manner of surrender. “One summer, when I was eighteen, I’d accepted an invitation to a party on a yacht that was anchored a few miles out from the Klatala harbor. Wally Benson-Clark, the guy who hosted it, was well known to my dad. As a representative of a cannery supply company, he’d appeared to be a solid upstanding citizen.

“Anyway, he’d put some kind of drug in my wine. I have no idea what it was. I remember gasping for air for what seemed like ages. Then I was taken to a stateroom and raped. I’d periodically passed out, and when I was awake I was revolted by the look on his face. I was nothing to him, just someone to gratify his needs of the moment. I knew I could’ve come to you about it, but I was too embarrassed. I felt partly to blame.

“When I found out I was pregnant I ran away from everything that was dear to me. I stayed with my grandmother, Laila in Seattle. Then I experienced more trauma.

When my little boy, Lars, was three, he drowned in the river behind Laila's house. After that, I obsessed even more about that rape. I felt I'd been raped over and over again. There. Besides mom, dad, Aunt Laila and Clay, I've now added you to my list of confidantes."

"Two traumatic experiences are trapped in your psyche, and you've combined them into one horrific nightmare. Your child, Lars, will always be with you. Plan your dreams. Spend some time with him. You'll never have to say good-bye as long as you keep him in your heart. The joy he gave you will always be there for you to draw on. You are free to be with him anytime you want. Anywhere you want."

"I already do that. I incubate my dreams by focusing on Lars, and we have a great time together. My little darling was the reincarnation of my Aunt Laila. All tousled black curly hair, dimples, wide dark eyes and round face. The neighbor's dog, a friendly Doberman Pincer, had gotten loose. Lars must've backed into the water when the dog jumped on him. I'd just gone into the house for his hat..."

When her voice broke, Ankau reached over and took her hands. The emotional turmoil that tore through her sensitive spirit ripped through his damaged soul, too. "You must say good-bye to that evil man who stole your trust. Depravity, appalling as it is, must not be allowed to bring you down. So the first thing you've got to do is concentrate on the part of your soul that was taken from you. Once you're whole again, your spirit will be able to travel down to the depths and soar to the heights. You need a soul retrieval, but I can't perform it. My immune system's in a mess. Maybe you can find a shaman--"

"Over the years, you've worn many hats. Now I want you to put on the one that suits Paxala, the psychotherapist. This is a time for putting your neurological expertise to good use."

"Okay. Let's try some common sense, then. You're absolutely right. In order to deal with the worlds that border ours ... the underworld, the middle world and the world, you must play a submissive role. So you've got to learn to trust your spirit guides. You'll always be a lesser shaman if you can't perform profound trances and shape shift. To induce a deep trance, a doorway to the beyond, you need raw power on demand.

"Vulnerable and courageous, you must unbarricade your trauma. By confronting it, you can make better use of the energy it's taking up. You'll have to expose the shadowy entities that your psyche has pushed back and tried to hide. One way to work through your fear of intimacy is to put yourself in situations where you'll be forced to trust someone. You must lose your fear of being betrayed by your peers."

"Any ideas?"

"The personal problems of my tribe and the health crises I've had to deal with were many and varied. So my stamina and intelligence were often pushed to the limit. That's when I learned that whatever got the job done, that was the method I used."

Kaarina looked at Ankau with eyes full of mischief. "For a man who deals with the supernatural, you sure know a lot about the real world."

"My wife and I were able to keep our sexual partnership alive till she died. Some shamans feel that enjoying sex with a wife or lover lessens his or her power, but I found that unleashing my raw primal drive energized me. I experienced a sense of renewal and my senses were sharper. In some American tribes, the male shaman is revered if he dresses as a woman, and even more highly regarded if he marries a man.

Cross-dressing or cross-gender exercises can stimulate your psychic power.”

“Look at me, Ankau. I don’t have the requisite narrow hips, wide masculine shoulders and next-to-nothing breasts.”

“You’ll find a way. You don’t have to be a hairy hulk.”

“You’re really a free spirit, aren’t you? Having Willie and Amy around must help, eh?”

“But what if some guy figures out that I’m a phony.”

“If he tells you flat out that you’re pathetic, open yourself up to the novelty of the situation. Have fun. If he tries to hurt you in any way, you know how to put him out of commission.”

“So ... are you going to take your medicine?” Aware of the accelerated beating of her heart and the pulse pounding through her veins, Ankau was reminded of a time when he’d been close to astrally projecting into the form of a sperm whale he called Floppy Flukes. He’d been a basket case.

Kaarina gave him a sly grin. “If that’s what I have to do to become a fully-functioning shaman, then I’ll do everything possible to unveil my true colors.”

* * * *

Suji flew Kaarina up to Juneau, a popular seaport where cruise ships dropped off thousands of passengers eager to try their hand at fishing. Her first destination, after Suji helped her with her costume and make up in her hotel room, was a small noisy bar where a few dozen gay fishermen and loggers hung out in the evenings.

On entering the place, her heart threatened to burst through the bandages tied around her breasts when the bouncer took a second look at her. It appeared to be a reflex action after he got a view of her dangly parts. The nylon bundle in her jockeys might be a bit much, but she was sure he’d seen worse.

At the bar, the bartender’s double take made her feel as if she came across as an in-your-face bizarre apparition. That meant hanging around the bar was out. Glancing around the room, she saw a small unoccupied table on a raised platform, where an old oak piano had been placed. Good choice. From there, she was able to take in the whole scene. The patrons wandered around, played pool or sat at the small tables scattered around the room.

Most of the guys appeared to be comfortable with their relationships. They’d probably found their way out of the closet long ago. Openly affectionate towards each other, they danced, embraced and kissed. Some of the loving gestures were tentative, others were done with an urgency that indicated their visceral attraction had passed the infatuation stage.

A drunken middle-aged fisherman, who wore gray wool pants and a plaid shirt almost identical to her outfit, made an effort to keep her in focus. Judging from his stupid grin, she knew he wasn’t thinking of sharing fish stories with her. Quickly concentrating on the thirtyish pianist who sat down at the piano, she hoped he’d welcome her attention.

Glancing over at her, he gave her no clue as to how he assessed her appearance. No raised eyebrow, no sneer. Not even an amused look. That meant he either had poor eyesight or he’d become blasé about outlandish makeup and clothing.

One of the guys, who danced to the music coming from an ancient jukebox, was part of the Musical Review. His picture was on a nearby wall, and it advertised his talent for impersonating high profile females. Tonight he was dressed as a twenty’s flapper, but

he failed miserably at disguising his masculine body. His dance partner, however, a hairy hunk who had him wrapped in his thick, muscular arms, appeared to be quite happy with his make-believe woman.

Kaarina wondered if that cross-dresser knew that drag performances were rooted in prehistoric times. Shamans had bent genders and created new categories long before stage-gendered actors had tread the boards.

Looking over at her, the pianist winked. "This is your first time in a gay bar isn't it?"

"Is it that obvious?" Her voice came out sounding like her brother's. Not bad considering she'd had so little practice in male voice projection.

"Yeah. You look very nervous. Like someone who's in a flight or fight state of mind."

"Stan Marzden," she said, recalling a name out of a movie. "And you're right, I'm feeling up-tight, but I've made up my mind to socialize more. I'm tired of being a loner." One of Kaarina's hands found her goatee, and as she stroked it, she wondered if any woman could really pull off a role this up-front. "And you're?"

"Barry McKay. And being reclusive is my problem, too. That's why I play piano on the weekends. I'm an accountant during the week."

He wasn't much older than she was. Lots of undisciplined black wavy hair flying around. Androgynous facial characteristics, somewhat like the look she'd aimed for but probably missed by a country mile. Suji had spent a couple of hours on getting her ready for her performance tonight. Her goatee, heavy eyebrows and glasses with black plastic frames were not only meant to fool others, but to help her internalize her role as male.

A couple of men, one Indian, the other a redheaded Scandinavian, had wandered over to the piano and subtly made Barry aware of their interest in him. Their eyes never sought hers.

"I used to live in Seattle," Barry said, when they left, "but working full time and playing in the symphony left me no free time. So here I am." He nodded at his cheat book. "Now, is there anything you'd like me to play? I can fake any tune as long as I have a few of the right chords."

"I sense that you're a composer, too."

His dark brown eyes opened wide. "Amazing! That was my main reason for moving to Juneau. I need more time for writing music."

"Have you finished a composition yet?"

"Yeah. A few. I'll play one of them for you."

After his long fingers had danced over the keys for several bars, the music began to speak to her. A heightened sensitivity to music was one of the shamanic perks. From deep in her gut, she picked up a sad tale about a passion that hadn't been returned. Love denied. Was that another reason why Barry had moved north?

The pain and longing floating in the air awakened a deep sadness in her. The piece rioted in her head and forced her to admit she might've known real love if she hadn't let one horrendous experience keep her frozen in place."

By the time Barry finished playing, she realized she'd finished her drink. Clapping enthusiastically, she stood. "I need to get a refill. I'll be right back."

"Okay. But don't be long."

My God, he didn't seem to mind talking to her. In a place like this, though,

everything had a whole lot of grays between the black and white. Did she care? No. If he turned out to be an alien from another planet, she wouldn't be deterred. In the near future, she'd be commuting to dimensions where a vast range of weird and wonderful spiritual entities held sway.

The inebriated fisherman who'd been ogling her earlier now sat at the bar. His dark eyes danced with amusement when she sat down as far away from him as she could. His smirk indicated that his thoughts about her supposed bent for tawdry sexual adventures had gotten the better of him.

A young guy squeezed in between her and a bearded fisherman sitting next to her. "How about coming down to my fish boat, 'Ocean Quail' later on? A few of us are getting together for a little party. My name's Jack and I'll be over by the pool table if you decide to join us."

Now what was that about? Did a few of the guys want to get a closer look at her underpinnings? Maybe they thought she could satisfy some primal need they hadn't experienced yet. Her lack of fear surprised her. What she felt was confidence in her ability to handle any situation. Her fear of some conniving creep spiking her drink was wearing a little thin.

Later, after Barry announced he was going to take a short break, she couldn't believe that an hour had gone by. He had no memorized script and didn't seem to be least interested in her sexually. He was troubled and stuck in some kind of limbo. "Thanks for spending time with me. I was so sure that coming here was a very bad idea."

"Do you mind telling me why you're in Juneau?"

"I'm taking a break from my job with an automobile insurance company in Anchorage. Starting tomorrow, I plan on sailing down to Oregon." In this strange situation, with her emotions running the gamut from out-of-place to freaked-out, she was amazed at how relaxed she felt in his presence.

"Alone?"

"Yes. I've had my twenty-seven foot Catalina sailboat--circa '81--for five years now. And up to now, I've only been sailing around the Inside Passage."

"That sounds like the adventure of a lifetime. Here's to a safe trip," he said, raising his glass.

Kaarina tapped her glass against his. "Thank you. I can hardly believe I'm finally on my way. It's been a life-long dream."

"Now to change the subject," he said, sitting back and studying her face. "You have some kind of a powerful aura. I picked up on it right away. While I was playing, my fingers became part of the piano. The strings, felt and keys."

"And the universe became your playing field."

"Yeah. That's it exactly. It's as if you were the gatekeeper to a new experience, and you let me in."

"Okay. Okay. Enough with the compliments. As you might've guessed I don't get them very often. More often than not, I get the sand kicked in my face."

"Are you staying on your boat tonight?"

"Yes."

"Stay with me tonight. I just rented this condo with two bedrooms. I'm making this offer because the waterfront might get a little rowdy later on. One of the guys is throwing a going-away party for a wonderful Indian painter, John Inglutalik. A gallery

owner in San Francisco is going to exhibit his paintings. Believe me, the last thing on my mind is sex. I've just been a rotten relationship. Now I need room to breath."

Ankau's words rang in her head. 'When you link up with someone, play it out. Embrace the unknown and loosen up your essential nature.'

So, instead of recoiling from the thought of taking a chance, she was going to go with her intuition. If she read Barry right, his attentiveness was motivated by his fear for her safety. The bad vibes coming from the guy who was dying to find out what she was hiding under her jeans must've made inroads on his sensitive antennae. "Thanks. I think I'll take you up on that."

* * * *

Two hours later, Kaarina sat on a sofa in Barry's clean cozy living room. While he made them a scotch and soda that neither of them needed, she looked around. A grand piano filled half the room, but the rest of the furnishings were basic and utilitarian. Posters of well-known classical musicians covered the walls, and books were placed wherever space was available.

"Here you are," he said, handing her a glass, "a little nightcap."

When he sat down beside her, she gave him a steady look. "I didn't fool anyone in that bar, did I?"

"I don't really know what kind of a look you were going for. But everyone--at least I think everyone--thought you were a woman who would like to make it as a man. One creep was interested in knowing how far you'd gone toward that goal."

"People always have to label me. Why is that? Sure, I'm biologically female. But since I was a kid, my brain tells me otherwise." Her lies were getting more far-out by the minute.

"I'm at a crossroads, too, and I'd like to ask you for some advice." Looking away, he stared down at his hands.

"I don't think I'll be much help. I'm the least street-wise male wannabe in the universe."

"Oh, come on, now. I sensed your innate intelligence right away."

"Okay. Okay. I'm listening." In some elemental way, she identified with this talented musician. He was a performer, and his musical magic repaired broken souls every bit as much as a shaman's skills did.

Barry threw his arms out in a hopeless gesture and slumped back into the sofa cushions. "I fell for a cameraman who worked for a Seattle movie company. We lived together for eight years. Our sex was more like a blood sport. His trouble at work was balanced by raping my sense of self-worth. He'd even had a weird friend of his watch the humiliation he put me through. God, I never thought I'd turn into someone's punching bag, but I did. I even wondered if I enjoyed my misery in some kind of a twisted this-is-all-I-deserve kind of way. When he flew the coop four months ago, I missed him. Missed him!

"I begged him to dump his new victim. Choose me, love me, want me. I left messages like that on his answering machine. It was so damn pitiful. It had taken me a while to become addicted to purgatory. So climbing out of my degrading limbo was tough."

Kaarina gave him a sideways glance. "By running away, you're ignoring your shadows, and they've followed you. But you're no humpty-dumpty. You're in a constant

state of reinventing yourself. So hang in there. When it comes to relationships, you just have to trust your intuition. Any undue aggression on a new friend's part, and you're out of there."

"You had me figured out from the start, didn't you?"

"That a train wreck of a relationship had derailed you big time? That you'd come up here to nurse your wounds?"

"Yeah."

"Come on, Barry. That composition you wrote tore me up. I don't need to be a psychic to know your spirit had been crushed and thrown into the dumpster."

"Any further advice...?"

"I don't have to tell you. You already know, don't you?"

"Yeah," he said, making an effort to raise his chin out of its hiding place in his neck. "Return to Seattle. Cut my working hours in half and make time for composing."

"And fall in love with yourself until you're able to reach out again."

"I have two spirits, and I'd be deliriously happy if I had the freedom to express both of them." In a way, that was true. Shamans traveled in two worlds, the seen and the unseen. Pumped up was the best way to describe the way she felt. Ankau would applaud her performance so far. Too bad she couldn't perform a soul retrieval and reassemble this great guy's shattered self-image.

Barry picked up his glass of scotch and threw it back in one long chug-a-lug before he pushed himself up from the sofa. "Excuse me for a minute. I want to play the piano for you."

If her intuitive powers were in good working order, she'd say he was going to introduce her to the special person he'd buried deep inside himself where no one else could see.

The music was unfamiliar to her, so she was almost sure it was one of his original arrangements. His gifted fingers, the symphony of sound and the vibrating piano constituted a bravado performance. Unlike his other piece that he'd played in the bar, this one held an underlying fierce intensity. To her ears, it was about breaking away from the man who'd degraded him, and she strongly identified with it. She found herself working through some of the horror of being drugged, abused and discarded when she was eighteen.

When the piece was over, Barry folded his arms, fell against the piano and cried. Maybe a complete dismantling of his emotional barricade wasn't to be, but he was making a good start. She'd made progress tonight, too. And, as a promising shamanic intern, she knew Barry was on the way to a full recovery. He'd hopped aboard the streetcar named desire, and it was always in transit.

Chapter Ten

The following weekend, Suji flew Kaarina back up to Juneau. Ankau had a friend who was going to a wedding up there, so he'd suggested she crash it. Suji had worked extra hard on her makeup this time. Her black hair was brushed back and held in place with a band of embroidered leather at the nape of her neck. Bronze tinted self-tanner had her complexion two shades darker, and with artful shadings around her eyes, nose and under her cheekbones, her facial features had a harder, more angular look. So hopefully, she presented a more masculine appearance than she did during her first go-around.

In a hotel banquet room shortly after eight that evening, Kaarina walked into a wedding reception where the festivities were in full swing. Cocktails and champagne were served at the bar while waiters circulated the room with trays of nibbles.

A magician and a psychic loosened up the crowd, and after Kaarina had had a few laughs and a couple of cocktails, she panned the room for a place to sit. Only a vase of red carnations and white roses sat on one of the small tables, so she headed in that direction. As she wove around the tall flower stands overflowing with colorful blossoms, a few young women gave her discreet glances. Whether they could be likened to quick peeks at a native guy resplendent in a rented tuxedo and a gold swirl vest, or to curious looks that kept suppressed giggles under wraps, she had no idea.

When everyone was seated, the crowd dug into their crab cake appetizers. It wasn't long before the friendly hum of conversation and tinkling silverware blended with the George Gershwin and Cole Porter tunes played by a five-piece band.

Jay--his nametag was displayed on his elegant vest--came over to her table with a place setting from another table. A few minutes later, he brought her a bottle of champagne and some hors-d'oeuvres. Not long after that, a meal consisting of baked snails, tossed salad and roast duckling was served.

After dinner, as Kaarina breathed in air heavy with the aroma of the flower arrangements, a dark brunette, about ten years her junior, walked by and gave her a look that said, "Save a dance for me". Reacting like a successful high school experiment, colorful explosions burst to life all over her body.

The party flowed from one level to the next. From the cake cutting, to dancing, to the bouquet toss, to the removal of the garter, to more dancing. After their photo session, the bride and groom threw themselves into the celebration. The bride never stopped dancing, and the groom circulated among the tables and gave everyone a chance to share in his high spirits.

A tuxedo-clad elderly gentleman pranced by with a little girl in his arms. A young man, camcorder in hand, was so intent on following them around, he didn't see a chair that had been pulled out onto the dance floor. Crashing into it, he fell to the floor and landed near her. "Hey, Grandpa, wait up," he said, after he struggled to his feet.

The celebration was the happiest she'd ever attended. The sporadic bursts of laughter that floated around her were highly infectious. When she felt a rush of envy wash over her as she watched the bride and groom soak up the ambiance, it took her by

surprise. The very idea of committing herself to a relationship that might go on for decades had her shaking her head and wondering if she'd momentarily lost her mind. The love of her life was going to be her job. Shamanism was her passionate love. It demanded her total involvement. The wonder, mystery and power of its transformative powers were all the ecstasy she could handle. The more open she was to imaginative vision, the more successful she'd be at her job.

After the toasts, she helped herself to a few of the tiger prawns that Jay brought by. As she dipped a prawn into the sauce, the young attractive brunette who'd eyed her earlier, walked over to her table.

"You've crashed this reception, haven't you?" the young woman asked. Without an invitation, she sat down on the white padded chair across from Kaarina.

Kaarina nodded. "The groom was once a member of my tribe, but I didn't get an invitation, and I'm really pissed-off."

"Then you're like me. We're in a room full of strangers. I'm Maria Rodriguez. The bride was my host sister when I came up here from Ecuador on a rotary exchange five years ago."

"Stan Marzden," Kaarina said, reaching for her hand. Maria spoke with a strong accent--Spanish or Portuguese. Long, thick eyebrows swooped over luminous brown eyes that reflected the light from the candle centerpiece. Her gaze was steady, and she studied Kaarina with an intense concentration. A little unsettling, but strangely flattering.

"Do you mind dancing with me?" Maria asked.

"How can I refuse?" Kaarina replied in her richest, deepest baritone. Why hadn't the young single men in the wedding party asked Maria to dance? Were her exotic looks too intimidating?

The bride's father stood by the bandstand. That probably meant that the next selections would be his choices. So, as Kaarina followed Maria onto the dance floor, she reviewed the male's leading role when it came to ballroom dancing. She'd danced with a girl at her parent's lame twenty-fifth anniversary, and she knew what do with her arms. As for her body, she was sure it would do very well on pure instinct. All it had to do was respond to the music and allow several glasses of champagne to make some major inroads to her brain.

Sure enough, when the music started, foxtrots were to be played during the next set. They were off--step, step, together.

It was when the band seamlessly dove into its second number that she sensed the tension in Maria's body. If her skills in perception were right on target, she'd swear that Maria wasn't enjoying the party. Something or someone had upset her.

After the set was over, Kaarina was about to take Maria back to her table, when the lady grabbed her hand. "I had a very unpleasant experience just before you came in this ballroom tonight. At the table to the right of the bride's table, the owner of the local cannery is seated with his wife. He's an upstanding guy. I met him at the bride's home during that year I was up here. But that guy who's a guest at his table has gone overboard on the booze. And when he staggered over to my table and asked me for a dance, I said no. I told him this was my only chance to spend time with my friends. He didn't believe me. He said I didn't know them any better than I knew him. Which was true.

"He just wouldn't take no for an answer. So, in order to keep his behavior from upsetting the others at my table, I walked over to the mini bar with him. Just like I sensed

he would, Wally--I can't remember his last name--persisted until I told him to get lost. The unattached guys, who'd been glancing my way earlier, could tell that Wally was trouble. So how can I blame them for not rushing over to fill my dance card? So, what do you say? If I stay at your table and we act like old friends...?"

"Sure, I'm flattered." The name 'Wally' had Kaarina on full alert, and she glanced over to check the guy out. Sure enough, it was Wally Benson-Clark. He sat with his back to her, but his sparse dark hair and his formal jacket that outlined an overweight flabby body, left no doubt in her mind about his identity. For Maria's sake, she hoped her cross-dressing was enough of a false front to discourage him from making another scene.

During the band's break, Maria asked her to dance to the swing number the DJ had chosen. They'd just begun to jive when Wally pushed his sizable gut in between them and grabbed Kaarina by the arm. "I want to talk to you outside."

Kaarina pulled away from him. "But I don't want to go outside." Her world shifted. Her legs went weak and her mouth went dry. Cruel, cowardly and brutal to the extreme, this bastard had been a shadow on her soul for far too long. Anger would distort her vision, so she didn't allow fear to control her. This was a time to think and see clearly. "You dyke," Wally hissed, "you're making a fool of Maria. She doesn't realize you're just a weird broad." He yanked at Kaarina's hair. Finding that it was growing out of her head, he pulled off her goatee.

The on-lookers were so shocked, none of them made a move to help her. So this was Kaarina's moment for going-with-her-gut and doing what came naturally without any shamanic intellectualizing. With an adrenaline flow surging through her like melted ore, she brought up her knee and smashed Wally in the groin.

The guy's face went white, and he grunted as he doubled over. "You bitch. What the hell?"

Maria grabbed Kaarina's hand. "Let's get out of here. I've got my purse. I'll get my coat tomorrow."

* * * *

Once they were in Maria's motel room, Kaarina removed her jacket and sat on one of the queen-sized beds. "I don't trust Wally, so I'd like to stay all night. Okay?"

"Thank you. Thank you," Maria said, "That guy's out of his mind."

"Because this room's at the end of the row, it's open on all three sides. As well as the door, Wally can try to make his way through that back patio door or that side window. But I think he'll try the front door first." Kaarina centered her breathing deeply and visualized her rape. She saw Wally's heaving rolls of flabby flesh crushing her body and battering her insides over and over again. In all likelihood, he'd thought she was out cold. Made helpless and totally vulnerable by an unknown drug, he'd taken advantage of her inert body. But she was in full control of her body tonight.

Maria sat up in the other bed. "Let's turn out the lights and if we hear a car or footsteps--"

"If he shows up, I'll take him on. You stay out of the way." All those nights she'd awakened with a start, depressed and dispirited, she was fed up with it. The hold that Wally's assault had on her spirit had to come to an end.

"I can't just sit by."

"I want your promise. No heroics. Believe me, I'm quite capable of handling a guy like him. And there's no use screaming for help. Not only are we too far away from

the office, there are no cars in front of the next three units.”

“Okay. Whatever you say.”

To Kaarina, Maria and Wally were as different as sunshine and darkness. By focusing his perverted power on Maria, Wally was a twisted predator and her new friend was his prey. The wedding reception served as his hunting ground and Maria’s aloofness had stimulated his need to bring her down and aggressively use her body as if it were nothing but an instrument for his own pleasure.

Wally’s feelings toward her, however, were quite different. He was ready to do anything in order to get her out of the way. He’d exposed her as a counterfeit male, and now she was someone to defeat. So this was a time for drawing energy from her years of psychological torment and transferring it into muscle and bone in readiness for battle.

Conjuring up mental pictures of her mythic warriors, she psychically attempted to involve them in the coming confrontation. Their archetypal energy was paramount to the success of her plan. Maga could instill her with even more female strength, and the deities, Freyja, Odhinn and Loki had the power to bring change to whomever they touched. In this case she wanted them to take away Wally’s physical strength and transfer it to her.

Whether meeting up with the man who had caused her to put her shamanic ambitions on hold was a meaningful coincidence, serendipity or predestined needn’t be brought into question. She must be open to and focus on the opportunity Wally had unknowingly offered her. This was a chance to regain those lost fragments of her soul: unresolved feelings and psychic wounds.

About half an hour later, Kaarina heard the creak of tires and then a car door slammed shut.

The tampering with the lock was followed by the clang of the chain as it dropped to the floor. Flicking on the light, Wally glared at Kaarina. “If you don’t get out of here, I’ll take great pleasure in beating you unconscious.”

Maria screamed. “Get out, get out!”

Kaarina grabbed the phone and lunged at him. Evading a blow to his head, he grabbed her weapon and threw it on the floor. Taking her by the shoulders, he shook her savagely. “You’re a witch, aren’t you? And you’ve hypnotized Maria. I just wanted to share a dance and a drink with her for God’s sake.”

When Maria jumped on Wally’s back and pressed her fingers into his eyes, he released Kaarina. Tearing Maria’s hands away from his face, Wally swung around and hit her on the chin with the heel of his hand. Staggering backwards onto the bed, Maria appeared close to passing out.

Kaarina regained the phone and smashed it into the back of Wally’s head.

With a brutal sounding grunt, Wally turned around and grabbed Kaarina around the neck. Choking and gasping for air, she struggled loose from the strangle hold. That’s when a strong mysterious current of enormous strength rushed through her. Deflecting a blow to her stomach, she jammed her elbow into Wally’s kidney. The sound of breaking glass was heard just before the smell of liquor infused the air around her.

Just thinking of him doctoring that bottle of booze and forcing it down Maria’s throat, had her rage surfacing to the boiling point. With all the scorn and contempt she’d saved up for years, she began to slam her fists into his layers of flab.

Aware of the catharsis of mind and body going on inside her head, Kaarina sensed

a good dose of newly acquired insight accompanying each punch and kick that made contact with Wally's malignant presence.

Caught off guard, Kaarina was sent crashing against a bunch of clothes hangers in the closet. Damn. It was time for Odin's Luciferian intervention. He was the entity she was counting on to divest Wally of his strength and transfer it to her.

A jolt of adrenaline had Kaarina quickly regaining her equilibrium. Locking her two hands together, she smashed the spot on Wally's neck where the telephone had made a previous connection.

Wally roared with pain. Reeling back, he slipped on the wet tile floor and arched backwards into the TV. Rearing up, his face a contorted mask, he lurched toward her like some punch-drunk boxer struggling to regain focus. He began to swing one arm blindly while the other one hung lifeless at his side.

Breathless and wet with perspiration, Kaarina continued to throw punches until Wally sank to his knees. Staring down at the pathetic lost soul, she couldn't summon up an ounce of pity.

Wally dragged himself over to an armchair and pulled himself up. Seated, he stared at Kaarina. "What have you done to me? I feel as powerless as a gaffed salmon. I've been psychically manipulated, haven't I? There's no other answer. So I'm right, you do practice witchcraft. Now withdraw your spell, you bitch."

"You were always weak, you creep. You have to drug women in order to get your rocks off."

"Now what's that supposed to mean?" In an attempt to add emphasis to his words, he managed a weak ineffectual arm gesture.

"To gain power and control over me thirteen years ago, you used a strong tranquilizing drug. You raped me, you son-of-a-bitch. While I was paralyzed, you felt free to rob me of my confidence.

"I raped you?" The way he said 'you' indicated that he must've been out of his mind to choose her as his victim.

"I'm reporting this incident to the company you work for. Maria will back me up. What's wrong with you, anyway? Did you expect me to submit tamely to your unspeakable crime? Now run along and see if your bosses will give you a desk job."

As Kaarina watched him struggle to the door, open it with fumbling hands and stumble into the darkness, her instinctual roots underwent a revision. She'd faced her fear, engaged the black demon and healed her old psychic wound. Shadowy painful thoughts had come into the light and received a new examination. The memory of her body's violation could now fade and unravel. A solemn pledge was in order. Whenever memories of her rape popped into her mind, she'd squash it.

Why had she given so much power to that evil shadowy creature? By interfering with the tried and true rights of a shaman intern, he'd prevented her from proceeding to a higher purpose. Turning her back on her destiny had been done at great mental and physical risk.

Maria embraced her. "My God, you're strong. That part about your rape, was it true? Did he really drug you?"

Kaarina nodded. "While he raped me when I was eighteen, I couldn't move a muscle. It was an inhuman act, and I'd been unable to regain complete confidence in myself."

“If it wasn’t for you, I would’ve been his next victim. He could’ve come here when I was alone.”

“That was a possibility. The guy is sick and delusional. Now try to relax and get some sleep.”

Kaarina took a shower before she jumped onto Maria’s bed and sank her back into a mountain of pillows. “Let’s not give that mixed-up mess another minute of our time. Before we go on our separate ways, I want to learn more about you. I don’t even know what kind of work you do in Ecuador.”

“I’m a herbalist. The plants the shamans use to heal the sick are of great interest to me. I’m doing a lot of traveling around South America right now because I want to get as much information as I can from those shaman healers. They’re a dying breed and because they don’t write anything down, their skills might be lost forever.”

“I’ve read about the renewed interest in ancient shamanic remedies.” Unreal! She knew they had something in common. Healing with herbs was often done in connection with the shamans’ rituals. No wonder everything she yearned to accomplish surfaced in the presence of this woman.

“My life’s work will be to help sick people connect with the earth as a healer. Plant spirit, plant energy. Now, since we’re both a little strung out and unable to sleep, let’s discuss your problem.”

“My problem?”

“You’ve been telling me nothing but lies all evening.”

Kaarina sat bolt upright, and stared at Maria in astonishment. “You’re calling me a liar?” Then she burst out laughing and flopped back down into the cushions. “Okay, I confess. I’m straight. My name’s Kaarina Sajantila, and I work in Seattle as an investigator for a car insurance company.”

“You might work as an investigator, but the sum of your parts adds up to a more all-encompassing job than that.”

Kaarina gave her a poke in the ribs. “You win. I’ll come clean. I’m studying to be a healer specializing in herbs. Over three-quarters of today’s plant-based medicines were previously used by Indian cultures.”

“Now come on, Kaarina, you use more than herbs in your work. I sense that you have some far-reaching powers. The way you smashed Wally into a wobbly mess of jello was proof of that.”

“You’ve been around too many shamans lately.”

“I knew it. You’re a shaman, aren’t you?”

Kaarina, taken aback by Maria’s powerful skill at ‘seeing’ with her instinctual roots, was speechless for a moment. “You’re right, you of the infinite psyche. I’m training to be a shaman.”

“That sure rings true. But there’s something else driving you. You’re trying to come to terms with something personal, aren’t you? Now don’t get evasive. I’ll know if you do.”

“You never quit, do you? I’ll bet you’re one hell of a researcher. Those South American shamans will be more than eager to teach you all about their secret techniques.”

“Your life is under the microscope now. We’ve covered mine.”

“Danger and wildness. I have to be ready to deal with them if I’m ever to find the

interconnectedness that's needed to carry out a shaman's holistic approach.

Unfortunately, like I told you, I was raped when I was a teenager. Instead of asking my mentor to perform my soul retrieval, I fled. Now I'm taking up where I left off...."

"And fear and rage have no place in a job that demands an openness to shamanic journeying."

"Right."

"So. Did it work? By scaring the hell out of Wally, did you work through your problem?"

"The rage is gone. But I still have a way to go. When it comes to death and disease in the community, I know I can handle those situations. The fear of having my body damaged, while I'm outside time and space, is where I'm still having trouble. But, in order to bring back information and heal my clients, I'll have to establish relationships with otherworldly energies who are demonic. So that's what I'm working on now. To get over my last lingering doubts about inducing an ecstatic trance, I have a special teacher in mind."

"And I'll bet that guy will relish the job."

* * * *

"Have you heard the bad news about Jerry's boat?" Warren asked, as he helped Kaarina on board the Black Hawk the following day.

"No. Suji flew me up to Juneau to talk to some of the State Troopers who'd tried to nail Lakitcina last June. We also spent some time in Palmer at the Tsunami Warning Center. They've got some scuba divers studying the source of that tsunami...three miles down on the sea floor." Lies were flying just a little too easily these days, but she wasn't ready to tell Warren about her 'giving up control' exercises.

After entering the galley, Warren waited until Kaarina sat down at the dining nook. "Yesterday," he said, sitting down opposite her, "around two in the morning, Jerry was about two miles out from the Klatala harbor. He was late getting back from picking up our groceries in Millport because of the fog. As you well know, that's the way it is in late summer. As warm air moves over the cold Pacific, sea fog is the result. It was while he plowed through conditions like that, that a seiner smashed into his troller. He was lucky to make it ashore in his dinghy."

"Why didn't the guys in the seiner give them a lift? Did they think Jerry was responsible?"

"Jerry swears that his radar worked just fine. There'd even been an aluminum reflector at the tip of his port main trolling pole. Even in the heavy fog, the guy at the wheel of the seiner would've seen his boat very clearly on his grid. So he figures the crash was no accident."

"My instincts tell me that the guy at the wheel of the seiner was the collaborator in our midst. Or he could've been Lakitcina himself. With that fiendish act, he's put another spin on his sick tactics...using a boat as a weapon."

"Jerry's boat is a total write-off, and the poor bugger doesn't have any insurance. His small military pension is just enough to pay his regular expenses. In order to save up enough money for a down payment on another boat, he's got to get a job. So he's thinking of moving that rundown float house over to Millport. He's not very happy about it though. He loves staying out in the fiord."

"I'll put him on the payroll, then. He can help with the cannery cleanup. Lakitcina

could be hiding in that plant from time to time, so he can join Norm, Willie. They can watch each other's backs.

"I'm sure he'll take you up on your offer. But we'll have to keep a close watch on the remaining boats from now on. Without them, we could be stranded."

"There's Kalervo's gillnetter, Norm's speedboat and this yacht. The helicopter's at our disposal, too. So we still have plenty of transportation."

"Maybe Lakitcina's going to pick them off, one by one."

"Let's not give that madman the power to spoil our swim. So no more talk about our nemesis."

"Well, I'm ready to go. He patted the knife on the belt of his wetsuit. "I'm never without it since that squid tried to drown me. Not to worry, it's probably dead by now or found its way down to the abyssal zone."

"Good. My wetsuit and goggles are in the aft cabin. I won't be long."

As Kaarina got into her wet suit, she hoped this little adventure would lead to a close connection with Warren's body. Up to now, she'd never been able to cast logic and reasoning aside while sharing bodily pleasures with a man. Now that lack-of-trust roadblock had to be smashed. It worked against her when it came to putting her spiritual energy system to work. To gain self-awareness, she had to open herself up to the possibilities and make a leap of confidence.

To lose her fear of letting go, to the extent needed for an underworld journey, she needed to put her life in the hands of her helpers and guiding spirits. By merging her animus, or buried masculine side with Warren's anima, his feminine side, she hoped to break through her lack of trust roadblock.

A shaman's ecstatic trance--although it had nothing to do with sex--was all about giving up control and reaching her higher self in the spirit world. It was much like drinking in the rapture of the moon and the stars and soaking up their radiance.

If today's outcome proved to be a dismal failure, so be it. It wasn't going to change her quest to become a shaman. She really had no choice in the matter. Many events had transpired in her life recently, and they'd all rushed her along into accepting her spiritual imperative. There was no turning back.

Kaarina was slow at getting ready for their swim, so Warren had the yacht well out to sea by the time she got up on deck. Because there was no sign of him, she gathered that the boat was anchored and he was already in the water.

Picking up on movement high above her, she saw falcon. Her eyes remained glued on him until he made his next move. There was one thing she was sure of right at that moment. He was going to kill something.

Soaring into the sky in a circular manner, he must've reached a height of at least eight hundred feet before he let out a screech and made his hundred mile an hour dive. Striking a grouse with his talons, he dropped to the ground with his prey. After dislocating the bird's neck, he severed the body with his notched tooth. Then, with his wings widespread and one of his feet on his prey, he plucked the feathers before enjoying his meal.

The circle of life wasn't always a pretty sight, she muttered under her breath. Until recently, she'd looked on falcon as a majestic bird--beautiful in his way. He mated for life and was a fierce protector of his young. But after he'd invaded her home and made off with her dad's cat, she was forced to look on him with suspicion. As long as

Lakitcina was running loose, falcon was not to be trusted. Just thinking of the terror he could inflict, while under that guy's dark influence, made her shudder. But this was no time to allow her thoughts to stray to the guy who was taking advantage of the village's lack of policing. Over and out.

"Hey, Kaarina"--Warren's faint call came from some distance away--"come on out and play." "Coming," she yelled. Before leaving Klatala at eighteen, she'd often enjoyed putting herself at the mercy of the ocean's inter tidal currents. She'd found it a great way to test her physical endurance. And this was the perfect time of day for that kind of exercise. The afternoon winds had picked up and the ocean swelled even more than it usually did. After diving into the water, she was soon caught up with stroking and treading water at intervals.

"Listen water baby--" Warren said, when she reached him. His words were interrupted when a wave surged up and pushed him under.

When he came up struggling for air, Kaarina nudged his shoulder with her elbow. "You were saying?"

He took her head in his hands and dunked her.

Then it was her turn.

Looking like two seals in their wet suits, they swam over and under each other in what began as a playful game. Kicking legs were frequently brushing, and not always accidentally. Bodies tangled, circled, rolled and reached out. They clung together as the restless waves and the pull of the current, that rushed along just below the surface, carried and tossed them around like swimming pool toys.

"Let's swim closer to the boat," Kaarina said. "The wind, together with the riptides, is making it dangerous out here." Swimming in the ocean could make a body exhausted and entirely drained in very short order and that didn't bode well for what she had in mind when they were back on the boat.

"I'd like to stay out here a little longer. But I won't be too long."

* * * *

Later, after they'd both showered and drank coffee at the galley table, Warren tuned in on several things: the water slapping against the hull of the yacht, the short, terrifying scream of a falcon off in the distance and the sudden disappearance of the dazzling shafts of sunlight through the Venetian blinds. He couldn't deny it. His vision was sharper, his ears were more intensely tuned in and he felt more aware. That terrifying way that giant squid had forced him to deal with his own mortality must've sharpened his senses.

"Now seriously, Kaarina," he said, "isn't there something more I can do to help? It's hard for me to stand by and wait while you go through some kind of an otherworldly apprenticeship. This kind of suspense ... I have no patience for it. Searching and surveillance is what I do best. So please, let me try to pick up Lakitcina's trail."

"Finding the traitor among us. I hope you're still working on that. But you're right. I think it's time we looked at the bigger picture. But, at some point I might have to use some psychic techniques, so keep that in mind. Combining good old police work with some traditional shamanic practices is a sure way to cover all the bases."

"Cutting the cable underneath the tram, wrecking boats and killing cats. Those are criminal acts completely separate from any magical energy system."

"True. Lakitcina probably never went anywhere near those pets, the tram or

Jerry's boat. I think his ally in the village carried out those crimes. But when it comes to interfering with Ankau's fragmented soul, I'm almost sure that Lakitcina's responsible. In the Land of the Dead, as Ankau made an astral shift of consciousness into Swan, Lakitcina ran interference. As a result, Swan was elfshot and locked in a cage. Not only was the bird trapped, but Ankau's vital energy was as well."

"Elves belong in fictional stories. How can you possibly believe that fairy tales can come to life?"

"Shamans discovered elves, trolls and dwarves long before the written word. And some of them are evil demons in the Saami underworld. They've often caused physical and psychological damage to the unwary shaman. When Ankau was somehow tricked into wandering into their territory, they stole part of his wandering spirit. So I have to find it and bring it back to him."

"Talk about a road less traveled."

"And the sooner I start to walk between this and other worlds, the better." Okay, that was enough talk about the job ahead. It was time to proceed with some ground work. As a shaman, she couldn't afford to assess any situation as too far out. Right at this moment, she was ready to grab at any chance to enhance her psychic and spiritual adventures. Jumping to her feet, she replaced her serious expression with a smile, and began her plan of seduction. "I'm starving. How about you?"

"I'm ravenous."

"So what've you got in the fridge?"

"Some asparagus, a tired looking lettuce, a couple of tomatoes and a cucumber."

"Okay. I'll make the salad. The rest is up to you."

Warren quickly got into his chef mode, "Aha, I just remembered. There's an apple, and two carrots in there, too."

While the asparagus steamed, Warren opened a bottle of champagne. "In two weeks, I'll be thirty-three. So I have a little bubbly on hand."

Kaarina took a sip of the champagne he handed her before she began to grate the carrots.

Warren gulped down his drink and poured himself another. Between sips, he took down a bowl and made a paste of some mustard, honey and basil. After putting that mixture aside, he put the spaghetti in a pot of boiling water. "I know you think I thrive on objectivity and analysis to the exclusion of imagination," he said, as he sautéed the scallops. "But myths and dreams aside, it's your own smarts you'll be depending on in the final analysis. As for putting your trust in a wolf, the jury's still out on that one."

"Believe it or not," Kaarina said as she went to the fridge and dug out an apple, tomato, cucumber and the lettuce, "you have a power animal, too. All you have to do is try to remember when a particular animal had a special hold on you. In your youth, did you ever read a story about an animal that left an indelible impression on you? Did you ever feel close to a deer, lion, bear or horse? Or maybe you had a pet rabbit, dog or snake. If you did, think about that animal and try to remember how you felt about it. You can reestablish that relationship by trying to communicate with it."

"I loved a goldfish when I was three, a turtle when I was five, and an Alaskan malamute called Skaha when I was eight."

"Malamutes have the same genetic makeup as Wolf. How long did you have Skaha?"

“Twelve years.”

“So you know all there is to know about that breed.”

“He was a hard dog to train, and I made every mistake in the book. I had no idea he’d cast aside his early training when he became an adolescent. It became a fight of wills.”

“But you won in the end.”

“Let’s say we compromised.” Kaarina was right, he thought wryly. His childhood pet was a part of him, no doubt about that. He’d often felt his presence. It was as if he was watching over him.

“Dogs evolved from wolves millions of years ago. So when you think of Skaha and how smart he was, try to remember who his ancestors were.”

“A farmer, who’d thought Skaha had been killing his chickens, shot him. After that, I’d had a hell of a time getting back into the university routine. I’d lost my best friend, and for a while there, I lost much of my drive to learn.”

The silence hung in there while Kaarina took the bowl of salad over to the table and made some dressing with lemons, olive oil and seasonings. “Come back to earth, Warren. You’ve flown off into the stratosphere.” She knew where his thoughts had gone and that was good. His energy leak had been dammed up, and he was showing every sign of allowing it to flow out of a dark place and into the light. All he had to do now was own his sorrow and embrace his pain.

“Sorry. The past caught up with me for a moment there.” Warren joined her at the table and dug into the salad. “By the time the salad ingredients get from Millport to Klatala, they’re pretty tired-looking, but there’s lots of life in this salad. What kind of magic did you come up with, witchy-woman?”

“A couple of teaspoons of dillweed, a pinch of coriander and some cumin livened it up.”

“Back in the day, it’s a wonder how the Indians got by without an agricultural base. Klatala isn’t exactly known for its open spaces.”

Kaarina reached over and clicked her glass with his. “Au contraire, young man, perennial clover, cranberry, skunk cabbage, crabapple, fern and bracken roots are just some of foods readily available in the mountains. And if Klatala manages to rise from the ashes, I’m going to encourage the villagers to dig up small plots and plant a few vegetables.”

“So you’re planning on staying here?”

“Yeah. That’s if and when Klatala returns to normal. Doing investigative work for an insurance company was interesting enough. But now I want to establish my role as shaman.”

“No trips to the big city?”

“I plan on traveling a little during the winter months. But I won’t stay away for long stretches. The need to learn more about my job is never-ending.”

Warren wondered if she realized what she was going to be up against. The demands on her were bound to overwhelm her at times. And not all the people who returned to Klatala would give credence to her role as shaman. She might be ridiculed and looked on as a hangover from a bygone time. Crazy. Unbalanced. Then there were the dangerous aspects of her job. Giving up conscious control of her body in her trances could be a matter of life and death.

Kaarina helped Warren with the clean up after they finished their scallops and spaghetti. That done, he took her by the hand and led her out onto the deck. “Look at the water. You’d never know from looking at the surface that all manner of craziness took place down there. The giant clams, shrimp, mussels and squid babies that were swept up from the depths--“

“I see that you’ve started to clean up the beach, and that smell of rotting flesh isn’t so bad now. But you’re going to need some help. On Sunday, we’ll get the whole gang out here ... with a back hoe.”

Dressed as she was in shorts, T-shirt and runners, smelling of soap and a delicate perfume, Warren couldn’t keep his eyes off her. That mysticism that was so much a part of her was so damn intriguing. Although it might be wishful thinking on his part, he sensed she was sending out more and more powerful feminine vibes as the day wore on.

He couldn’t put his finger on just when she started to warm things up. It was so subtle at first. Up to now, she’d made him feel that friendship was all she could offer him. Now she gave him hope of a more intimate connection. That dry spell in his love life, was it coming to an end?

Chapter Eleven

Kaarina thought of the two things she had in common with Warren: investigating crimes and nailing Lakitcina and his cohorts. That was it. The sex between them--if all went as planned--would just be research. Warren had no ties to Klatala. At the end of the summer, murders, sexual assault and missing persons cases in the big city would fill his days.

A bond had developed between them as they tried to figure out how to outwit the villagers' common enemy, but she'd made it clear from the start that it was an on-the-job closeness. So steering him into a direction where falling into a sexual fantasy was to be encouraged would be entirely up to her.

Romantic love was out. Wandering off the path that had been set out for her at birth was the last thing on her mind. All she was interested in was fine-tuning her senses. Ecstasy, as it related to Warren and her in the throes of a demanding sexuality could serve as a spirit releaser. If they could make a profound, complex connection with each other's reality, it would act as a doorway to a deep trance.

If Warren was exactly as he appeared to be--a man who avoided commitments--he was just the man to show her that enjoying each other's bodies could be done with trust and respect.

Warren absorbed Kaarina's touch like a desert plant on a rainy day when she moved in closer. Patience was key. He wasn't about to make any hasty assumptions about what she had in mind. When a wave had the deck making a drunken lurch, he tightened his arm around her waist. She hadn't pulled away, so he put his free hand under her chin and gave her face a slow, thorough look. He thought he saw a glimmer of fear skip across her eye, a second later it was gone.

A rush of heat zapped her body when Warren's hand brushed through Kaarina's matted hair, and warned her that there was to be no turning back once his lips made their move.

Finding no resistance as he showered her with some light kisses, Warren held the nape of her neck while he proceeded to deepen them. Ripe and fiery, she responded to them in kind. That was the cue he'd been waiting for. Lifting her up in his arms, he carried her across the deck and into the galley. Then it was up to the salon where he placed her on the sofa.

For Kaarina, this was to be an inner panoramic journey as well as a lesson in trust. While it would be a dreamtime for experiencing the fullness of Warren's ardor, her mind wasn't about to be split off and go wandering.

The outdoorsy, fresh ocean smell of him was the only air she breathed, and when velvety soft warm lips invited her to relax and enjoy, she was ready to party without reservation. When his tongue sent out an invitation to join in a shimmering tango, she had no problem pushing past old barriers and getting in step.

From the tingling hair roots on his head to his curled-up toes, Warren's body was alive with vibrations. The essence of her, the way she allowed pleasure to swamp her, it

was all so unexpected. She had far more depth to her adventurous spirit than he'd ever dared to imagine.

Kaarina's perception of herself now veered toward the sexy and beautiful. To her way of thinking, those delicious elements were an indication that Warren had made a good start. This was not to be Love-Making 101, the course she'd failed a few times in the past. From the way he began this session, she was willing to bet they were going to ace the Master's program.

Slipping off the sofa, she knelt down at Warren's feet and removed his shoes. "Now get on your stomach," she said, as she stood up, "I'm going to loosen up those trouble spots around your shoulders."

Warren assumed the position. "Be gentle," he said facetiously. Straddling his back, Kaarina's hands slid up and down his spine before she got to work on the large muscle groups. The pressure she applied had to be firm and even. Not too soft and not too hard. "There's stress in your neck and shoulders."

"Mmmm," was the male response as the fleshy part of her thumbs flicked back and forth and kneaded his shoulders, collarbone and neck. While she worked on his back, she used small alternate outward strokes, first one side and then the other, as she worked down both sides of his spine.

She knew he was into it. His 'aaaaaaah' response sounded like a man morphing into mush, but she didn't want him to get anywhere near the melting stage.

Warren suddenly rolled over on his back. "That's enough of that, young lady, I'm ready to explode." Sliding out from under her, he stood and swooped her up into his arms.

"But your legs. I never got to your legs. Your left one has all those suction marks."

"You can work on them another time," he said, as he carried her through the galley.

Once she was on the bed in the aft cabin, she quickly got out of her shorts, T-shirt, panties and runners. Warren followed her lead, and then lay down beside her. The delicious sensation of his naked flesh against hers had her gasping. Maintaining an objective frame of mind was no longer possible. Research was the last thing on her mind. That's if she still had one.

Warren couldn't tell if the bed's movements were due to a series of waves hitting the boat, or the headlong pulse of his blood. His fingers skimmed her breasts, and then, feather-light, they traveled over her entire body.

In a sea of liquid warmth and buoyancy, Kaarina felt his tongue, lips and teeth taste, nip and nibble a trail down the full length of her body. If he didn't spend some time with her aching breasts, she was going to scream from tension and raw achiness.

Moments later, as if Warren sensed her intense neediness, he cupped her breasts with his hands. With his lips and tongue, he soon had the nubs springing up and swelling to surprising proportions.

Waves of pleasure radiated through Kaarina's body. Putting her hand over Warren's pounding heart, that was now in sync with hers, she tried to pick up on the mysterious raging current running through his body. Was he experiencing the same kind of elation she was? Was he relishing the smell and taste of her sweat-dampened skin?

Warren's lips continued their assault. They were slip sliding into shadowy places

she'd never considered especially responsive, but they were now. It wasn't until his fingers got busy between her thighs, however, that she gave up all control. Submerged into a sense of almost unbearable anticipation, she abandoned herself to a universal beat. Never had she felt more like a part of nature, the breathing in and out of it.

Feeling lost and adrift when Warren rushed into the galley for a condom, Kaarina held back a need to cry out in frustration. Caught up in a tight vortex of white-hot friction brought on by hard muscle, sensitive hands and soft lips, she wanted nothing to divert her drive to break through that damn 'letting go' barrier.

Moments later, she groaned and shuddered heavily as Warren pushed his hard thick arousal into her body. The friction from his thrusts created such a fire, she knew a meltdown was imminent. In an effort to have him fill her even deeper, she raised her legs and locked him in.

In the ragged sexual vibrations that Kaarina projected, Warren realized that his partner had forgotten him. There was no way he was going to allow a hot lava flow to turn him into ashes without his partner being aware of the guy she'd driven almost to madness.

"Look into my eyes, Kaarina. Don't disconnect. Stay with me."

Kaarina heard his words from a long way off and she made an effort to focus on him. Finding it impossible, she tuned him out. Arching her back, she slammed her hips into him and attempted to hang onto the edge of fulfillment as long as she could. Slipping away into her own time and space, she suspended her inflamed body in a sublime scorching ecstasy. When her belly was a wildfire blazing out of control like a pleasure-seeking missile, she opened herself up to the oneness of the universe.

* * * *

Ankau's garden of fragrant herbs sparkled, drifted and blended in the early morning breeze. His aura, however, didn't reflect his surroundings. Kaarina had just given him a rundown on her time with Warren. Instead of being on the receiving end of a few Brownie points, her mentor remained silent.

Maybe accenting the specifics would help. "I was stripped of my inhibitions, Paxala, and the lift-off was mind-blowing. I was transported."

Ankau's expression remained flat. "You say you embraced Warren's essence. But I have no sense of a woman absorbing her lover's energy field. If a joining of the minds is absent, it was a mechanical act. Narrow. Restrictive. Your soul should've poured into Warren and been in tune with his potency and his drive to possess."

"I did get inside him in a way. As I said, I picked up on his agonizing restraint." Kaarina couldn't believe she was talking so frankly. But what choice did she have? That was what shamanism was all about. It was a system of beliefs emphasizing intuition and uninhibited feelings.

"You're out of balance and not using the powers of fire, water, earth and air. You're holding back. I don't think you've completely worked through the horrors of your rape. As well, taboos about sex are getting in the way. So ridding your mind of voices from out of the past is crucial. That built-in restraint of yours puts a stranglehold on your sexuality.

"When you were very young, in the process of forming opinions, I believe you were damaged. Your spirit's trapped in a hair shirt designed to suppress your innate ability to give up control. Now you must perceive the world in a new way.

“You must feel a oneness with all things in nature plant, sky and earth. It’s not enough for your muscles, flesh and bone to experience a frenzy of rapture. Riding the wind of passion is far more than that.

Kaarina couldn’t help but feel a little miffed. Ankau’s assessment of her failure at releasing her spirit and allowing it to make a connection with Warren’s sexuality was a slap in the face. To question his way of rating her, however, would be ridiculous. He looked to her for a psychic boost that was strong enough to rev up his body’s immune system.

Attaining the most powerful state of flow in the universe, was it beyond her? Damn it, using Warren as an instrument for getting it right can’t be all that difficult. She’d just have to give it another go.

Brushing his pigtail off his shoulder, Ankau gave her a sympathetic smile. “Now, now, Veleda, don’t look so downhearted. You have much to be proud of. Warren saved Willie and Jerry from being drowned by Giant Squid, and you were able to save Warren from three tons of lethal flesh--”

“Maybe Willie’s right. You’d almost think Lakitcina cast a spell on Giant Squid.”

“Lakitcina’s treading on very dangerous territory if he’s using that giant carnivore to wreak havoc on us. A shaman who’s bent on doling out pain and suffering is punished severely by the spirits. Eventually the harm he brings about will come back to haunt him. Sickness and hardship will be dished out to him in equal measure.”

* * * *

Amy was worried about Willie. As they ate breakfast in the kitchen, his mood was dark. “The way you’ve been getting out of bed in the middle of the night and pacing the floor--I find that worrisome enough. Now you tell me you spent last night in the mountains and in such a rainstorm. What is wrong with you?”

“I left our bed because of my nightmares. In them, giant squid’s arms are drawing me in, closer and closer to its mouth. So I’ve been afraid to go to sleep. Whenever I check on grandfather, his breathing is never good. He risked his life for me, and now he’s missing part of his life’s force. So I’m weighed down with guilt.”

“Your time in the mountains ... it didn’t bring you any peace, did it?”

“No. My idea was to wipe that horrid dream from my memory. But it just added to my problems. About a hundred feet above the reservoir, I lay flat on the ground, and just when I was beginning to feel the healing power of the earth, sky and water, Falcon attacked me. With a loud screech, he dropped out of the sky like a bloody laser beam and clawed at my sou’wester. I smashed at him with a sharp rock and he finally took off. That damn Lakitcina’s got him under his possession. I’m sure of it.”

“Forget about Lakitcina for now. Grandfather is our main concern. Kaarina’s ready to perform a deep trance, and when she’s in the lower world, her helpers will lead her to the place where Swan is caged.”

“I don’t know, Amy. Are you sure Kaarina’s ready?”

“Now, Willie, I know you don’t want to be responsible for another tragedy. But it’s Kaarina’s choice, and she’s depending on you. Your drumming is the best way to induce her trance.

“Believe me. She’s got a lot going for her. I’ve taught her everything I learned from grandfather. Her knowledge of our native heritage and genealogy is excellent.”

“In the underworld, how does she plan on dealing with the evil spirits? If she

can't bargain with them, she'll have to defeat them."

"I'll see to it that she has magically-forged weapons on hand. Grandfather said Swan was elfshot, and an armed troll pushed her into a cage. So, if Kaarina's forced to be a warrior, she's ready. As well, Wolf's power and vigor and the trickery and wit of Raven are hers to call upon. Her ancestors and other friendly spirits will be there, too." Amy wished Willie would stop thinking in such a negative way, but it was perfectly understandable. He was responsible for setting this frightening chain of events in motion. If anything went wrong, it could send him into another tailspin.

"Then there's another problem. Kaarina was made aware of her shamanic calling by a Saami higher power. Won't the mix of Saami and Indian customs cause some confusion--a loss of power?"

"I don't think so. Her father taught her about Saami soul crafts, but she's learned the Indian ways by living them."

"In any case, we better be quick about bumping her into the underworld. Grandfather's health is on a downward slide."

* * * *

Kaarina entered Ankau's bedroom with Amy in tow, and they got right down to work. Amy put all her grandfather's knickknacks into a cardboard box while Kaarina went into the kitchen for a bowl of water and a holder containing a candle. Returning to the bedroom, she put the water on the night table, lit the candle and placed it on the floor.

Ankau opened his eyes slowly and peered up at her. "I'm not myself anymore, Veleda. My energy is slowly leaking away. I feel spacey, and my short-term memory isn't so great anymore."

"If I'm able to reconnect you with your lost soul fragment, you'll still have to work hard at getting well. If you don't think you'll be able to do that, now's the time to tell me. Maybe it's your time to move on." Kaarina had a hard time getting those words out, but they had to be said.

"No, no. Amy's pregnant. As great grandfather to her child, I want to take on the role of teacher."

His voice was weak, but Kaarina believed his determination to live was beyond question. The truth was there behind his eyes.

"Be careful," Ankau said, "For all I know, those evil little spirits, who stole my soul part, might be my own personal demons. Maybe they're trying to tell me I'm too old for exploring other realms."

"Don't worry," Kaarina said, "I'm prepared to do them harm if they give me a bad time. Now, while I prepare myself for my journey, you can mentally absorb the collective goodwill of all the people you have helped in the past. They are here in spirit. You know the drill. Feel your flesh sink into the earth. Relax your bones. Let your muscles go."

Over his body, Kaarina placed a medicine blanket with alternate bands of dyed and undyed cedar bark woven into it. After she scattered Eagle feathers on top of the blanket, she indicated that she was ready to start the healing ceremony.

Willie began to beat on the drum. It was the heartbeat of the cosmos--about two hundred and twenty beats to the minute. After covering her eyes with her free hand, Kaarina shook her rattle in every direction, above her head and down towards the floor.

After she stopped and shook her rattle four times, she did some loud, slow

rattling. Then Amy and Willie joined her in the dancing and as they all chanted her sacred Wolf verse.

Powerful Wolf, ancient and wise
Together and yet apart
I share your mighty power.
Howl at the moon with a joyous heart
Break the stillness and the dark.

The repetitive and lulling nature of the chant and rattle, and the drum's strong, unwavering steady rhythm vibrated through Kaarina's body. Her perception was soon transformed, and the mentality needed to negate her illusions of separateness with the underworld had been reached. She was pure energy, an intermediary between the seen and unseen. She climbed onto the bed beside Ankau, and made sure her shoulders, hips and feet touched his.

Her energy was ready to split off and journey. In tune with her new consciousness, her mind searched for an opening in the earth that would lead to the infernal regions below. She'd seen a movie where a dried up well had been used to enter the nether world. Concentrating hard, she was finally able to visualize that scene.

Light as a feather, she felt herself falling, falling down the well. On reaching the bottom, she saw a long tunnel stretching out in front of her. As she made her way toward the Land of the Dark Lady, she was delighted to find that her feet seldom touched the ground. Once she'd reached the opening, Raven appeared out of the eternal dusk and led her through a barren wasteland to the edge of a lake.

Wolf emerged from the musky cold dampness. Kneeling down beside him, she pushed her face into his fur coat, and telepathically communicated with him. Much to her relief, he'd already done some reconnaissance in the subterranean wilderness. He'd found Swan slumped down in a locked wooden cage, and the frightened bird was barely able to open her eyes or even breathe.

After Wolf and Raven left, Kaarina's keen eyesight enabled her to see an old wooden rowboat partly hidden in the bulrushes. The oars were inside, so she got in and pushed it out into the lake.

The bodies that floated in the lake reflected the dark clouds and the myriad of crows hovering above. In this Land of the Dark Sister, there were both good-hearted and evil spirits. The latter took great delight in torturing the lost entities that now surrounded her. Continually poked and prodded by the ruthless demonic bottom-feeders, the confused weird energy force had a hell of a time reaching their next dimension.

Back off, she warned herself. Focus on the job ahead. Getting too distracted by the eerie resonance coming from the black ooze was done at her peril.

A frightening conglomeration of cattails and reeds choked the water a good thirty feet from the island, and the mess soon took its toll on one of the oars. It broke just below the oarlock and dropped into the swampy growth. Fortunately, the water was shallow, so she was able to touch bottom with the remaining oar and shove the boat a little closer to shore.

Wolf was waiting for her, and he quickly slid a long moss-covered log in her direction. Climbing onto it, she pushed, jostled and leap-frogged her way along the rough

surface till she was out of the deepest part of the sludge.

To make the humming gloominess even more forbidding, a slithering ghostlike shroud of fog blocked out even more light. Lifting soggy feet that weighed a ton now, she was almost totally dependent on Wolf's sense of direction as they pushed their way through the shadowy dense forest. Tamping back the air of dread that the smell of rank, decaying matter evoked, she absorbed the dark mysticism of the place and its potential to help her bring about Ankau's successful soul retrieval.

On reaching the cage where Swan was trapped, Kaarina banged at the lock with a sharply pointed rock. Out of nowhere, a troll appeared. One-eyed, with a rough moss-covered nose and small trees growing out of his head, he began to rant as he pushed himself between her and the cage. For a moment there, she forgot to breath. Playing catch-up, her chest heaved as she greedily breathed in the damp putrid air.

Wolf made a lunge at the strange creature's long bushy tail. The troll, quickly realizing his intent, raised his four fingered hands, and the gate magically opened wide enough for him to squeeze his wrinkled body inside. Wolf smashed into the bars and wound up hurt, dazed and confused.

A dozen elves and dwarves ran out of the woods. One of those elves had shot Swan with his arrow, so she had to avoid the same fate at all costs. Injuries she received here would be duplicated on her body in the Johnson's home, so she had to make sure none of their weapons penetrated her skin.

Fortunately, the arrows of the pale-looking (they lived in deep canyons and were cursed to wander the underworld) elfin archers bounced ineffectually off her armor, so there was no need for her to call up similar weapons. Apparently realizing the futility of their effort, they backed silently into the shadows.

Following their retreat, she was able to give all her attention to the stocky, short-limbed dwarves. Mentally preparing herself for battle, she called on her weaponry spirit to equip her in a manner similar to her enemy's. The stench, a peculiar means of protection emanating from these little warriors, was so strong it formed a visible mist.

Allowing such a small part of their defense system to distract her, however, was foolhardy. Far more potent were the shields, suits of armor, helmets and large double-headed axes. Their short frames put them on a level with her legs, and they'd be hamburger in short order without her metal protectors.

A red-bearded dwarf, whose biceps were unprotected, was being particularly aggressive, so she aimed for his exposed flesh. After receiving a gash from her axe, the fierce little fighter went berserk. He was in such an out-of-control rage, she was able to smash his shield into the woods.

Swinging his axe wildly in the air, the crazed dwarf took off. Not realizing the elves were hiding close by, he accidentally sliced the belt off one of the archers. As the elf's arrows flew around in all directions, Wolf bit into the irate dwarf's arm.

The other five elves, in a lightning quick action, slipped out of the forest, and rushed at Kaarina. When an arrow swished just under her vulnerable armpit, Raven immediately flew into the face of the wily marksman. By pecking on the small fellow's nose, he gave Kaarina a chance to chop away at the ferocious little guy's quiver. With his arrows gone and Raven tormenting him, he decided to take off for the woods.

While Kaarina was engaged in the fight with the elves, the remaining dwarves, flushed with anger, had gained dominant positions. The clanging sound of metal on metal

was soon heard over and over again, but Kaarina managed to fend them off. She was beginning to tire, though, so she hoped Wolf would step in again.

Weak as Swan was, Ankau's spirit aide was able to let out a gut-wrenching sound from her long coiled windpipe. The senseless, brutish Troll had returned to the front of the cage, and he glanced around at the bird without thinking. That's when Wolf moved in quickly and bit off a piece of the troll's tail. Screaming with pain, he fled into the forest.

Wolf's next target was one of the dwarves. He dragged him over to the nearby river and threw him in. Unable to swim, the little warrior quickly drowned. The remaining dwarves, realizing the odds were against them, fled into the darkness.

Swan could barely open her eyes or even breath, so Kaarina knew the bird was in no condition to carry Ankau's soul part back to middle earth. Smashing the lock and freeing her, Kaarina asked her to release Ankau's soul. Once Ankau's spirit form was in her hands, she placed it into the crystal Amy had given her and then into her medicine bag. As soon as Swan was able to struggle onto Raven's back, Ankau's spirit guide was lifted high above the trees.

Instead of taking Kaarina back to the boat, Wolf took her to the bridge that spanned the lake. Hurrying across, she tore her eyes away from the hands of the figures who clung to the pilings. Ankau's energy force was in her hands, so she had to stay focused on the reason for this flight of consciousness.

The desolate field had no landmarks, but Wolf had no trouble directing her through marshes and dense clumps of waste-high ferns. Then it was down the long tunnel. On reaching the bottom of the well, she wrapped her arms around Wolf's neck and clung to him as he flew her up to the top. Raven and his burden followed closely behind.

On awakening on Ankau's bed, Kaarina placed her hands on the old shaman's chest and blew his missing vital energy back into his body. To make sure all the residuals were fully integrated, she worked her rattle around his body. Then she slipped off the bed.

While Kaarina oriented herself, Willie got the cradle Ankau had built for the expected baby and set it beside his grandfather. Then he placed Swan in it and covered her with a soft blanket. "One of your first jobs will be to make Swan well again."

Amy kissed Ankau. "But first you must rest. You know the rules. You've explained them to hundreds of people over the years. After a soul retrieval it takes time to get back into your regular routine."

"I experienced a fantastic rush, a tingling warmth," Ankau said, "and now I'm starting to feel peaceful. That emptiness is gone."

"I'm glad to hear that," Kaarina said. "Amy can give me a daily report on your progress until you're completely out of the woods."

Ankau reached out for Kaarina's hand. "By bringing back my energy leak, I managed to escape death. Believe me, that's not something I take for granted. There was always the chance that you'd wind up as fragmented as I was. Now I want you to know that the physical rigors of the trances won't be part of my shamanic practice anymore. It could very well have been my own personal demons who'd trapped in the abyss between life and death."

"Good. This is the time for you to honor your own health if you want to hang onto your feeling of completion. It'll be my job to challenge Lakitcina, not yours."

“I had to attack evildoers like Lakitcina in the past,” Ankau said, “and I didn’t wait around for them to attack me first. As caretaker of the Taquala Tribe, I had a right to do everything I could to keep my people safe. That’s the way it has to be. Have you finally realized that it’s time for you to take an offensive position?”

“Yes. It won’t be long, now.”

Willie came over to the bed and removed the medicine blanket. “When we find that creep let’s tie him up and hang him over a fire like a roast pig.”

Amy laughed. “No. Let’s tie him up and haul him off to jail. His period of suffering will be longer.”

Ankau bent over the cradle. “Oh, my beautiful Swan. You’re the teacher who tells us to accept ourselves for who we are. When it’s time to make changes, we must embrace them.”

Kaarina kissed Ankau on the forehead. “Repeat your last few words over and over again. From now on you have a new role as keeper of your tribe’s traditions. When you’re feeling better, you can record the myths and legends that only you can recall.”

Chapter Twelve

By the time Kaarina reached the cannery, she was out of breath and soaked to the skin. Rushing to the community store, she found Kalervo in the back office. With his head down on the desk, he appeared to be crying. “What’s going on down here, Kalervo? Who would kill a Wolf’s cub? And who put the walk-in freezer back into operation last night?”

Kalervo’s eyes were puffy and bloodshot. “Honest to God, Kaari, I have no idea. That freezer hasn’t been used since this old cannery quit operations. At a loss as to why it was turned on, I drove the forklift up and down the rows of pallets to check if someone put a load of halibut in there. That’s when I saw that cub on one of pallets. There’s an open wound on its neck that looks like an animal bite, and it’s been stabbed between the eyes.”

Animals don’t wield knives. That means Lakitcina or his accomplice is trying to send us a message.”

“Norm’s in charge of the refrigeration control panels in the engine room. But he’s off on his boat.”

“He’s always missing when there’s trouble in the village.” There was no doubt in Kaarina’s mind who the wolf cub belonged to. This murder was meant to show her how easy it would be to kill her familiar, Wolf, so she telepathically contacted him.

Wolf was at the store in a matter of minutes. Leading him over to the store freezer where his dead cub had been moved from the walk-in freezer, Kaarina opened it.

The first thing Wolf did was sniff at the glove Kalervo had found by the entrance to the plant. Then, standing on two legs, he looked inside the freezer and let out a howl that pierced her soul. Pulling his cub out with his teeth, he dragged him outside. Wolf’s family was waiting for him by the machine shop, and their grief-stricken yips and howls echoed in the mountains.

That was when the Black Hawk came into view, and Warren soon had it docked it in front of the cannery. Striding up to the ever-growing group of mourners, he glanced at the dead wolf cub and then took Kaarina aside.

“What the hell is going on? How did a cub get frozen to death in all this heat?”

“Kalervo found him in the halibut freezer. Someone had turned it down to –20 degrees Fahrenheit last night.”

“How long had the wolf been in there? Have you any idea?”

“Willie and Kalervo worked till six. So the cub must’ve been placed there sometime after that. My God, can you believe it? The marks around his neck indicate that he’d been either caught up in some kind of a trap or mauled by a bear. But it was the stab wound between the eyes that killed him.”

“So you and I have another crime to solve. And we’re going to do it without any more weird journeys into parallel worlds. It’s time we used our police training. Lakitcina’s sunk as low as a guy can go.”

* * * *

Kaarina was outside the dockside boat-building shop when she saw Jerry heading into the harbor with Kalervo's boat. Quickly getting into the forklift nearby, she drove out to the end of the dock. "You're not still killing wolves are you?" she asked, after he dropped down onto the dock.

Jerry didn't look at her as he tied a bow rope to a cleat. Then, throwing up his hands, he gave her a desolate look. "No way. To think I used to trap those animals. They weren't the enemy. I was."

Still emotionally distraught after the cub's funeral that afternoon, Kaarina's voice held a censorious tone. She even found it hard to look at him. "Someone put Wolf's dead cub in the plant freezer. Do you know anything about that?"

His shoulders slumped and he dug his hands into his pockets. "That pup couldn't have been killed by a trap because I've removed them all from the mountain. I also filled in the holes that someone else had dug. That's been my project for the past week. Come to think of it, a grizzly might have killed it. I saw three wolf cubs attacking one of those large brown bears when I was in the mountains. Maybe that's why one of them got a good whack."

"But the bear didn't stab the pup between the eyes and carry him into the cannery." Kaarina had seen the cubs stretching a bear's patience to the limit, too. So she was inclined to believe Jerry told the truth.

"By the way, I've caught enough spring salmon for everyone. I'm going to put them in the store freezer."

"Great. Now before I forget, Suji would like to thank you for cleaning the fish before you freeze them."

"Yeah, that's a habit of mine. As soon as I catch one, I remove the hook with pliers and then whack it over the head. Then I watch as its tail thumps for a few minutes before it gives up the ghost. After that I cut out the gills and dig out the entrails."

"Are you trying to gross me out?"

Jerry laughed. "That's the way it is. We're all in a never-ending search for food."

"But no man harms Wolf. Not if I can help it."

Jerry climbed back onto the boat and handed a bag of groceries over the gunwale to Kaarina. "If you don't mind, you can help me get some of these groceries onto the forklift."

A few minutes later, Kalervo joined them, and Kaarina made her getaway. "After you guys get the fish packed away, come on up to the mansion. Suji's cooked up a smorgasbord of salads and casseroles. Everyone in the village will be there. It's in honor of Wolf's murdered son."

* * * *

"Ankau's health is on the upswing, Warren," Kaarina said, as she sat sipping wine at the booth in the yacht's galley the following day.

"That means you were able to complete some kind of a trance. Right? But that's not way to go when it comes to Lakitcina. It's time to go on the offensive and track the guy to his lair." Warren was determined to put their detective work on fast-forward after Kalervo told him that Kaarina had performed a soul retrieval. By inviting her to dinner, he hoped they'd come up with a sensible plan that involved regular police work.

"I agree. Waiting around for him to make his next move is out. We're on the offensive now."

Warren went over to the wine rack above the fridge and brought over another bottle of wine. “And there’ll be no trances. If you trip out again I’ll get Suji to airlift you to the nearest hospital. So let’s play it straight. Okay? You’re too secretive when you work beyond the veil. Putting your life on the line isn’t necessary. This right of passage you’re going through, I want you to put it to rest for a while. Take a breather and step back. Shedding old skin and being born again or whatever you’re doing, you can work on it at a later date.”

“Shamanism is all about putting my imagination to work. That’s what makes the magic. Every day’s an adventure now that I’ve become comfortable with my flights of consciousness.”

“When you go on your trips, what do you tell your body as you prepare to leave it behind like some rejected vessel? Good-bye for now. See you later?”

“Honestly, Warren! You’re so uptight about the way a shaman lives a life on reality’s magical edge. But the job’s really not that far out. With the chants, drum and rattle to clear my mind, my brain waves are slowly altered. They go through alpha and delta. Then theta waves take me from the material world into the spirit world. It’s much like a deep meditative state. I’m always in control of my physical body.”

“Whatever you’re doing, it’s touch and go as to whether you’ll be sane when you return to the real world.”

“Sure, I might make mistakes when I’m outside ordinary time. But I’m willing to take that chance. We’re not talking about a choice here. Besides, there is one aspect of shamanism that has one great advantage. As I’ve told you before, a shaman has every right to take the law into his or her own hands. Even act as judge and executioner.”

Warren got up from the table and after he put the frozen lasagna in the oven, he began to make a salad. “I was offered a job with the police department a few years ago,” he said, as he opened the fridge and pulled out some tomatoes, “but I’d turned it down because I like to use unorthodox methods while gathering evidence.”

Having her believe that he was ready to work outside normal investigative parameters demanded that he give her a few examples of his procedures.

While Warren took his walk down memory lane, however, he was never sure that he had Kaarina’s absolute attention. Her fascination with his skill at chopping, slicing and dicing appeared to outstrip his tales of derring-do.

Kaarina walked over to the kitchen counter and topped up Warren’s drink. “If you think you’ve worked outside the margins of the law in the past, just wait until we start closing in on Lakitcina. Whatever works, that’ll be our motto.

“Like those guys you’ve nailed in the past, Lakitcina’s surveillance-sensitive. But we can’t outwit him by following him around in two different cars like you and your partner did in Seattle. Boats will be our mode of travel. So we’ve got to figure out ways to appear like we’re alone on the water while being in close contact with each other.”

Warren’s mind dwelt on those two words: close contact. It had his train of thought taking a hundred and eighty degree turn. What happened to the Kaarina who’d made love to him here in the yacht just a few days ago? From the way she acted now, an observer would think they had nothing going for them except their hatred of Lakitcina. During her last dangerous shamanic stupor had she lost some of her short-term memory? To get Ankau back in working order had she given up some of her brain cells?

Kaarina returned to the table after Warren placed their salads on the table. “When

we do our investigating in the archipelago,” she said between mouthfuls, “we can use a variety of boats for our fishing, kayaking and hiking. Layering on the clothes for our make-believe sporting life will help, too. They’ll serve as camouflage while we blend in with the tourists.”

Warren had wanted some feedback from her, but now that she was off and running, he felt somehow dissatisfied. Joining her at the table, he picked at his salad as he thought of how starved he was for a recess break. Some time out for play. Damn it. Couldn’t she at least give him a hint that dessert was going to be more than fruit salad and ice cream?

Kaarina waved her fork in the air. “If Lakitcina’s lived in the bush for any length of time, he’s probably skilled at setting up animal traps. So we’ll have to be careful when we’re hiking in the woods.”

“While we’re on the subject of good old-fashioned police work, do you carry a weapon at all times?” Kaarina nodded. “Good. God knows what he’ll be up to next.” Warren watched the faint blush on her cheeks curve down her sculpted neck. But he wasn’t kidding himself for a minute. The excitement of the hunt was the cause of her adrenaline rush, not his manly charms.

“Don’t forget those other allies under his possession. Falcon might still be recuperating from the wounds Willie inflicted, but his bear’s on the prowl and he can be a terrifying opponent.”

“As far as I’m concerned all bears are dangerous creatures. Grizzly, brown or black. Although some people--from a long distance, I might add--believe in a fellowship with that icon of the natural world, I don’t. They’re aggressive buggers. I read about two hikers recently who ran into a grizzly. One of them got away, but the other guy had his insides ripped apart.”

“That’s terrible. What a gruesome way to die. Here in Alaska, we always supply the hikers with some bear spray. It’s foolish to go in the woods without it.”

Later, as they sat on the sofa sipping their coffee, Warren finally found a way to approach the subject that had been on his mind from the time he’d welcomed Kaarina on board. “Now that we’re into teamwork, wouldn’t it be wise to be more open about our sexual attachment here in the village? If Lakitcina thought we were more interested in each other than trying to catch him in the act, he might get careless.”

“No, I don’t think so. Knocking that creep out of dad’s playing field is all I can think about right now, and I want him to know it.”

“Yeah. I guess you’re right.” But all he could think about lately were her husky whispers as she’d robbed him of his sanity last week. When her silken hands had stroked his body, he’d sizzled like bacon over a hot fire. Damn this terrible kind of wanting. Damn the absolute resolve in her tone of voice.

“Getting back to our trip through the archipelago tomorrow. Do you mind docking the Black Hawk by the cannery tonight? I’d like to get an early start.”

“And our first destination will be?” Warren forced his thoughts away from mental images of her naked body. The motor launch was no longer a love boat. It was just another means to get from one place to another.

“Millport. I’m going to rent a kayak and paddle over to Latvala Island. I want to have a talk with Lukwala, Willie’s brother, Lukwala.”

“Is he at the top of your suspect list?”

“No. But he’s on the list. Animal shaman are normally friendly to people who love and care for wild animals. If I run into him, I hope he can see that I’m one of them.” Kaarina wasn’t kidding herself, Lukwala was acting very strange these days. Whether he’d give her the time of day was questionable.

“When I saw you with him on the beach that day, how did he act toward you?”

“Strange. Unbelievably strange. Apart from a flash of animal heat from his dark eyes, his face displayed no look of defiance or aggression, so I didn’t feel threatened. But I was shocked by his appearance.”

“I only got a glimpse of the guy. So I need a description.”

“He’s one of a kind. Dirty, unkempt. Shoulder-length black hair, wispy beard, aquiline nose, strong chin, tall, wiry body, about six feet, two. His clothing is a deerskin with the animal’s head worn like a hood.

* * * *

The next day, as Warren walked by the Millport Community Hall where Kaarina was meeting with the Taquala Tribal council, his mind was on the town itself. Like many other wilderness towns, Millport made for a lively and picturesque view. Small wooden houses marched up into the hills and fishing boats dotted the harbor. Mixed in with the three fast food places were two hotels with bars, and the strip mall consisted of a drugstore, theater, bank, supermarket and a clothing store.

He couldn’t help wondering how long the Indians, Saami and Norwegians would be willing to wait around in this town before they gave up on Klatala. If their roots got planted too deeply, they might be reluctant to move again.

After buying a pair of jeans and a sweat suit, he was off to the supermarket for some ingredients that were never on Jerry’s grocery list. By showing Kaarina that he knew his way around a yacht’s kitchen, it might make an impression. The kind that would get his charismatic, mystical friend in the mood for some intimacy.

Leaving his purchases at the taxi stand, he dropped in for a drink at the hotel next door. Not surprisingly, he ran into Jerry who was picking up the weekly supply of perishable food items. “Hey, Jerry,” he said, as he sat down next to him at the bar, “maybe you can tell me why there are so many people in town. Kaarina and I plan on doing some kayaking today. Sure hope there’s still a couple of kayaks for rent a little later on.”

“You guys sure picked the right day to come over here. The gang that used to live in Klatala is holding a get-together out at the old logging camp. They’re scattered all around the archipelago these days waiting for the all-clear signal from Kaarina. Kristine Joks rounded them up. She’s real enthusiastic about keeping the old gang’s spirits up. But hell, the fact that most of them turned up tells you something.”

“That’s great news. I’m sure Kaarina will get out there as soon as her meeting is over.”

Jerry’s pugnacious face wrinkled up with a wide grin. “Everyone’s eager to get back to Klatala. Working on the Heritage Center, the pier, or taking a job in the fish plant. They’re willing to do anything. What about a park out at the Tenu Fiord? Has anyone come up with that proposal? There are so many hiking trails out there, and one of them leads to the lake. Those three totem poles aren’t in the best of shape, but they’re sure as hell authentic. No one expected them to last over seventy-five years. They should be mulch by now.”

“Sounds like you’re planning to stick around.”

“Well yeah, there’s no place I’d rather be.” Jerry grinned at the bartender, a young Indian whose long black hair was braided into tight plaits. “This is Warren, Andy, he’s the PI who’s out to nail that bastard who’s causing all the trouble over in Klatala.”

Andy smiled broadly and shook Warren’s hand. “I plan on returning to Klatala as soon as you guys get rid of rampaging bastard.”

“It’ll be any day now,” Warren said.

Andy tapped on the bar. “Sure hope so. Now, what’ll you have?”

“A scotch. Straight up.”

After Warren was given his drink, Jerry gave him a nudge. “I gotta get back to the village. I’m trying to clean up that mess out at the fiord.”

Kaarina came into the bar just as Warren started on his second drink. “I found out a little more about Lukwala,” she said, when she joined him. “He’s an animal shaman. Wandering around watching and playing with the animals. That’s what his life’s all about now. His only connection with his past life is some memento of some kind. Without it, he’ll eventually lose all memory of his former life.

“Chief Paliyas also told me that Lukwala’s job would have him moving from island to island. So, just because we saw him on Latvala Island, it doesn’t mean he lives there permanently. He doesn’t have a home. Holes or dens are the most he can hope for when it comes a shelter.”

* * * *

Kaarina felt upbeat as she stood beside Warren on the bridge of the yacht later that day. “That crowd at the old logging camp was of one accord. The moment they hear Lakitcina’s in jail, they’ll all return to Klatala.”

“Yeah. So let’s do our thing. I’ll put down anchor at that little islet everyone calls Kwatna. It’s closest to Latvala Island. Then I’ll take off for Snatali Island where those vacationers have had a number of break-ins.”

By the time Kaarina had gone to the galley and made a few sandwiches, Warren had docked the boat and put their two kayaks in the water. She’d chosen a sleek, silent boat that maneuvered well between the complex group of islands as well as out on the open sea. Giving Warren a wave, she started out for Latvala.

A light rain started up and there was a slight breeze. Three teenagers kept their speedboat well away from her, and off in the distance, a sailboat came into view. If someone on Latvala Island saw the action on the water, she’d appear to be just another vacationer.

It didn’t take long before she realized there was a big difference between spending time in the yacht and paddling a kayak. The former moved on top of the water, but now she felt as if she were in the water. Knowledge of weather changes and the strength of the tides were now crucial to her survival.

A few miles out from Latvala, she tensed up because two seals surfaced about fifteen feet away from her. After torturing her for a good five minutes, she breathed easier when they continued on their way.

She saw no sign of a gillnetter at Charlie Loqua’s place, so she began to circle the island. Half an hour later, as she rounded the northern part of Latvala, she spied a safe anchorage where a small powerboat was moored.

Right after she secured the kayak, it started to rain in earnest, so she put on her

rain gear. Once her backpack was in place, she started out. At the end of the wharf, she stopped and watched a doe and a fawn walk along the stretch of beach between the tidewater mark and the thick forest.

On noting where they turned and made their way back into the woods, she adjusted her backpack and headed for that spot. The ground at the entrance to the animal trail was muddy and there were clear prints made by sneakers, about size eleven.

Rabbits used the trail, too. She knew that because their front feet always landed first, followed by the rear feet that landed ahead. Bear tracks were distinctive, too. The same side of its body was put in motion as he made his way down the trail.

She couldn't help chuckling quietly as she examined a broken branch. For a city insurance investigator who trapped criminals in Seattle, she saw some similarities in her job descriptions. Being aware of her total surroundings at all times was a must in this wildlife rich neck-of-the-woods, too. To get totally caught up in the study of the landscape beneath her feet was done at her peril.

Like doe and fawn, as they walked jauntily in front of her, she gained strength from the untamed greenery around her. Here again, soaking in the unthreatening aura could only be done while her other senses reached out for signs of dark hidden forces.

The path soon ended and the fawn and doe quickly darted into the brush and disappeared. High shrubbery surrounded her, and she soon found it impossible to continue tracking them. That probably meant that she was the victim of a ploy. This was Lukwala's way of leading her away from his hideout.

Barely able to make out the faint outline of a human footprint on a smooth area of moist squishy ground under a tree, she guessed that Lukwala had removed his sneakers. Walking softly in order to keep from scarring the earth, the sly devil hoped she'd lose his trail. A short time later, she did.

On the lookout for any signs of wear and tear on the landscape, like signs of broken shrubbery, she got lucky. A pushdown hinted at a hastily made passageway, and then fresh scat, its size, shape and consistency indicating that it was from a deer, had her on full alert. Making her way into the thick, dense and sometimes prickly foliage, that rose up to five to ten feet on both sides of her, she continued to watch for broken branches, twigs and leaves.

Her slicker and jeans were now torn and her sneakers were a soggy shade of green. To make conditions even more miserable, the fading light that had managed to find its way through the trees disappeared altogether. Dark and misty as it was, she was still able to see some rocks that had been recently rolled over. When they led her to some fresh animal tracks that were all on top of each other, she knew she was closing in on the elusive animal shaman.

On seeing an opening through a stand of cedar trees up ahead, she stopped. Peering through some branches, she caught a glimpse of Lukwala's head. In the hopes of catching him off guard, she got down on her hands and knees and crept closer.

Chapter Thirteen

Finally able to get a fairly good view of the clearing, Kaarina saw Lukwala sitting on a fallen log. A deer and mountain goat were on his left side and a cougar and a golden eagle were a little to his right. A large green plastic bag, with an opening for his face, protected the deerskin on his body and head. His muddy feet and mud-encrusted arms, however, were exposed to the rain that drifted through the spruce branches above his head.

The reason the animals hadn't picked up on her presence was easy to understand. Her body odor was no longer threatening. Smelling of cedar, animal scat and covered in mud, her scent blended in with the plant and animal life of the rainforest.

"Lukwala," she said, standing up and making an effort to keep her voice calm, "you purposely sent me on a wild goose chase, didn't you? I made a special trip to see you, and you treat me like the enemy."

Guarded eyebrows were raised. "Why shouldn't I? When you saw me on the beach the other day, you acted as if I had snakes growing out of my ears."

"Well, look at you," she said, sitting down beside him, "you're a mess. Have you seen yourself in a mirror lately? I thought you'd gone mad. How was I to know you'd become an animal shaman?"

"Raven told me you've got Wolf and him as guiding spirits. You're lucky. Those two work well together. I know you haven't finished your internship yet, but once you do, watch out for that demon shaman. His behavior is totally at odds with shamans' moral beliefs."

"I gathered that from the way he treated you. By psychically attacking you when your mind was open, ready to perform a trance, he revealed how unscrupulous he could be. And, as you probably know, he's a Saami shaman, and like your Indian shamans, he'll be punished. He has demons of his own . . . a personal malevolent symbolic construct that he's hammered out for himself step by step."

"But beware. He's practicing both shamanism and possession. And another thing, before I left Klatala he was bashing the hell out of that drum of his. So maybe it's not working for him in some way. If his assistant doesn't get the right cadence, his visionary experiences in a deep trance could suffer. Maybe his personal demons are on his case already. Without their support, he could drive himself to the point of mental and physical exhaustion in his effort to create psychic changes. Especially shape shifting. This I know all too well."

"But there's always a chance that his accomplice might get those drumbeats just right. That's why I feel so strongly about getting the drum away from him."

"Do you plan on killing him?"

"Killing his spirit by locking him up might prove just as effective." Kaarina got up to go. "So, you are happy?"

"I find my calling very rewarding, and I keep myself aware of my past life by hanging on to these binoculars." Pulling up his plastic bag covering, he showed her where

they were tied to the strip of leather around his waist. “That’s why I had time to put on my sneakers and lead you through a maze that led nowhere. I saw you when you were about twenty minutes away from Island.”

“Well you almost got rid of me. I was close to giving up”

“Your skill as a tracker. It amazed the hell out of me.”

“Tracking down car thieves in the big city probably has something to do with that. But, like you, I was brought up in Klatala. My back yard was the wilderness, and I escaped to it whenever I was troubled.” It was pleasant talking to this excommunicated shaman. In their youth, they’d played together. When they were teenagers, they’d even danced together.

Kaarina glanced around at the animal menagerie. “You’ve obviously passed all the prerequisites for an animal shaman, and in such a short time. I have great rapport with these creatures, too. And you must know that. Otherwise you wouldn’t be talking to me.”

“You’re right on both counts. I now have creature sight and I can forecast approximate weather patterns and rockslide dangers. I even know the places where predators hunt.

“Rat is never paralyzed with fright when he and snake are in my presence. Predator and prey alike are loving and peaceful when they gather around me. It’s here among them that I feel most at home. So I don’t look on my new job as any kind of penance. This is the work I was probably meant to do all along.”

“That bond you have with the animals can be used to help your tribe. Until Lakitcina is exposed, they’ll never return to their Klatala homes. So I’m asking you to be true to your higher self and help me put an end to that animal-killer’s evil agenda.”

“Sure. I’ll ask my friends to act as informants, and I’ll help you any way I can. But that demon has the wisdom of the ancient visionaries. I was no match for Lakitcina as my relatives have already told you. Just think about it. Our brains dwarf the intelligence of the most complex computers, and that evil Saami shaman’s been working on all barrels up to now.”

While they talked, a raccoon, pheasant and rabbit joined the man who now radiated harmony and peace. Because she knew he was able to communicate with them telepathically, she hoped he’d use them as scouts. With hundreds of animals on the lookout for Lakitcina, the odds of finding out where he was hiding were in her favor. Eagle, who’d just joined them, could prove to be especially helpful.

Hiking back to her kayak, Kaarina couldn’t get her mind off Lakitcina. He’d used his shamanic talent to destroy Lukwala’s career, so it wasn’t too far fetched to assume that he’d try to wipe her out in a shaman-to-shaman showdown.

If that came about, they’d meet on an astral plain where the ancients had the Lower World well marked out. Her former combatants, a vengeful troll, harmful elves and grudging dwarves might hunt her down again and use every form of torment available to them. Created of maggots by the gods, they could easily trap her in the Lower World. If they harmed her in any way, she’d experience not only mental and emotional trauma on the earthly realm, but physical injuries, too.

They weren’t the only beings she might encounter. Destructive stupid giants and hags, who excelled at archery, dwelt there, too. That meant she had to go into that shadowy realm well armed, with body armor and magically-forged weapons.

Although she felt proud of her ability to put thought into action and have her mind

travel freely in the underworld, she had another big hurdle to overcome. To become a fully functioning shaman and triumph over Lakitcina, she'd have to accomplish the ultimate power of a shaman: shape shifting.

That particular mystique took on all kinds of forms. The practice she was concerned with was where her astral spirit left her body and entered into that of her power animal. Mentally becoming one with Wolf was essential. Being tuned into his intelligence as well as her own would give her a tremendous advantage. To say nothing of the empowerment and physical energy she'd gain. Lakitcina's cruelty and psychological terrorism were accelerating. Not wanting to take weeks of valuable time wandering around the archipelago, shape shifting was the way to go.

* * * *

Back at the yacht where it was docked at Kwatna Island, Warren stood on the deck and listened as Kaarina told him about her adventurous afternoon. He knew his report wouldn't be half as interesting, but she'd want to hear it.

"I couldn't believe it," he said, "like you said, over twenty families on Snatali had their cabins broken into. A motorcycle, generators, Coleman stoves, radios, clocks, sleeping bags and tents were just some of the stolen stuff. All the thefts took place during early spring when the holiday getaways were empty. So I figure Lakitcina had started to prepare for his Klatala assault at least three months ago."

"That means he lived around the archipelago at one time. How else would he know the Snatali cabins were only used during the summer?"

"You're probably right. He told me that he came from Saamiland, but he must've had full knowledge of the geography around here, and he speaks English without an accent.

"He must have some money stashed away, if his plan is to buy dad's land at a reduced price. Not paying for the stuff he needs might be done for reasons of anonymity. If he bought large items like appliances, generators or a boat, the seller might've asked for a name and address."

"Yeah, you could be right. Anyway, one guy had his speedboat stolen, and another guy's barge went missing. So Lakitcina had the means for moving the stolen stuff. And he'd be crazy to stay on Snatali."

"I don't think he's got a hideout on Latvala, either. Lukwala hates his guts. He reigns supreme there, and his animal followers would tell him if Lakitcina was living in their midst."

"Do you have any idea why he wants to get hold of Sajantila land?"

"Maybe he thinks that Klatala will benefit from the oil and gas developments nearby. Then there are the archaeological artifacts. He could always sell them to private collectors. Who knows?"

Right after Warren dropped Kaarina off at the Klatala dock, he contacted Suji by phone. Before Kaarina had a chance to reach the mansion, he wanted to try to convince him that good old-fashioned police work was the best way to go about finding Lakitcina's hideout. Suji wasn't too enthusiastic at first because he'd already spent many hours in the air with Clay, but he finally relented.

Capturing Lakitcina was Warren's total focus, and he had to do it before Kaarina risked her life in some underworld void where devilish entities saw her body double as easy prey. The only clue he had about the criminal's whereabouts was the recent report

Jerry had relayed to him by radiotelephone. While the grocery gofer was fuelling up at Millport during his last trip, the guy who ran the oil dock told him that someone had siphoned diesel fuel from his holding tanks.

* * * *

From the sky, ten miles north of Millport, Warren and Suji studied the heavily forested terrain on the Mutlaki Mountains. Finding nothing that looked like a makeshift hideout, Warren decided to do some scouting on the ground.

Shortly after Suji dropped him off half way up the mile-high mountain, he realized that when it came to closing in on the elusive shaman, he didn't have much going for him. He normally went on a job equipped with a description of the suspect. In this case, he'd only be able to finger the guy if he wore a green and black mask.

Attiuk Island was another tourist haven, and that proved to be another frustrating aspect of the hunt. Checking out tents and recreational vehicles took time. Then there were the motorcycles whizzing up and down the trail. Any one of the riders could be Lakitcina.

During the first part of his hike, the air was fragrant with the smell of wet conifers drying in the sun. Above the timberline, however, barren cliffs rose up ahead of him. That's when Warren decided to rest and eat one of his sandwiches. As he ate, he watched a couple of hikers descend the steep rocky slope. When they saw him, they headed his way. By the look on their faces and their animated exchanges, he gathered that something had peaked their interest.

Rafe, the young man, introduced himself, as he brushed back a thick shock of brown hair. "You wouldn't believe what we came across near the top of that cliff ... a cave! And someone lives there."

"Sharon," the young dark-haired woman said, reaching for his hand. "It was incredible. Raising the height of that cave must've taken such a lot of time and effort. I'll bet it was nothing but a narrow tunnel to start with."

Rafe raised his arm. "It's about six feet high, five feet wide and it goes back about ten feet."

Warren experienced an adrenaline rush that shot through his veins like molten lava. Trying not to reveal how intensely interested he was in their remarks, he went into his poker-face mode. "That cave dweller must be one tough energetic soul."

"And the place is fully furnished," Sharon continued, "it's got all the comforts of home. There's a large rocky outcropping just below it, so we checked that out, too. It's like a huge patio overlooking the whole island."

"That means the guy likes solitary confinement," Warren said, maintaining his nonchalant manner. "So I guess it's best to keep his strange vacation home a secret."

"Yeah. Maybe you're right," Rafe said, "but there's always a chance that somebody else will come across it. The trail that winds up from the other side of the mountain is a rough route with lots of switchbacks, but it's definitely in use."

Sharon nodded in agreement. "That guy would've had no trouble hauling his stuff up there. The motorcycle side car we saw at the entrance must've done yeoman service."

As Warren watched the couple make their way down the mountain, he knew damn well they wouldn't keep their mouths shut. They had no idea there was a warrant out for the arrest of a thief who'd broken into dozens of cabins over on Snatali Island, but that was about to change. Until the police got involved, the mysterious cave dweller will

probably be celebrated for his ingenuity.

An hour later, after Warren paid a young motorcyclist to give him a lift, he was at the small Millport Airport where Suji had left the helicopter. Once he was able to contact him at a restaurant in town, they were on their way to the top of Mutlaki.

Rafe was right. Just below the cave was a large, flat rock surface where Suji was able to land the chopper.

“Wow,” Suji said, once they were inside the bunker, “Lakitcina’s strength and determination is over-the-top.”

Besides a cot, sleeping bag, generator, propane tank, radio, small stove, Warren recognized ceremonial objects. They were the kind he’d seen on display at the Klatala villagers’ get-together. “Here’s Lakitcina’s drum,” he said, “and it’s in good shape despite the punishment he gave it.”

Suji examined it carefully. “Kaarina’s been eager to get hold of it. These painted symbols will mean something to her. Especially this one depicting a reindeer and sleigh.”

“Yeah. She’s often spoken about that painting on the cannery wall.”

Reaching into a niche in the rock wall, Suji pulled out a cardboard box. “Here are some of the guy’s other ceremonial objects. A rattle, candle, feathers and a flute. And this costume looks exactly like the one Kaarina’s great grandfather wears in his portrait. So Lakitcina really is a Saami shaman. One that uses his power to kill instead of cure.”

“When it comes to accusing him of murder, where’s the evidence? Proving he’s responsible for those thefts in Snatali isn’t going to be easy, either. The vacationers will be gone in a few weeks, and not one of them can give a description of the guy.”

Suji shrugged. “So Kaarina will have to wipe him out by using the shamans’ laws.”

“My God, there has to be another way. Meeting that bugger when her life’s energy has traveled to a third dimension is so damn risky.”

“But it’s the only way to go. The Millport sheriff’s first step will be to contact the State Troopers, but they can’t afford to spend any more time on this case. During the months of May and June two troopers worked full time on investigating the pet killings. Now that rotor dislodging has their attention. They think it was a case of premeditated murder, but they have no proof.”

As they lugged Lakitcina’s shamanic paraphernalia down to the makeshift helipad, Warren was more determined than ever to track the guy down, tie him up and take him off to jail.

* * * *

Kaarina had just finished dinner with Suji and Warren. Much to her chagrin, their ideas for putting an end to Lakitcina couldn’t be more different. On hearing the buzzer announcing that someone wanted the cable car sent down to the base of the hill, she excused herself and got up from the table. A few moments later, she welcomed Amy.

“After you phoned,” Amy blurted out, “and told me about the greatest news yet, I couldn’t wait. I just had to know what Warren and Suji found out about Lakitcina.”

Kaarina waited until Amy was seated at the dining table. “Like I told you, they found Lakitcina’s hideout and his drum”--after taking it from Suji, she placed it in front of Amy--“and this Saami drum is a gift to world culture. These instruments can be used as compasses, foretelling the future, forecasting the weather and on and on. The drum’s magical qualities are so powerful they were once burned as instruments of evil.”

Kaarina handed the drum and the horn hammer over to Amy. "Pine root and calf-skin reindeer hide stretched over a wooden bowl, that's what it's made of. And the pictures on the leather tell many stories. These claws that decorate the rim come from every kind of animal native to Saamiland. These nine lines on the drum represent the sun, moon and the animals that can either hurt the shaman's enemies or bring luck to deserving people."

Amy struck the drum with the hammer and then shrugged. "Do you think this drum will give you some kind of an edge?"

Kaarina ran her hands over the leather. "Yes. See how it's decorated and painted with symbols? Each one has a special meaning to a Saami shaman. As you well know, I'm on pretty shaky ground when it comes to shape shifting. But with Willie beating this Saami drum, I'm now determined to give it a try."

Amy clapped her hands. "Oh, Kaari, that's great!"

"Okay," Warren said, "if this drum is so different from any other, why was Lakitcina bashing it as if it were the devil himself?"

"I have no idea," Kaarina said, as she put her ear to the drum and wondered if it really had the magic of speech as the ancients believed.

Warren let out an exasperated sigh and his face radiated intense irritation. "Damn it, Kaarina, you'll be risking your life if you fool around with spirit-games while you're in dreamland. According to you, Lakitcina interfered with Lukwala's trances. The devil's psychotic, and God only knows what he'll do to you when you're mind's open to psychic impressions."

Kaarina mentally commended him for trying to understand what went on in the nether world. Instead of turning a deaf ear, he must be tuning in on her explanations. "But I'll have Wolf and Raven's abilities in combination with mine."

"Now that we've got his drum," Warren continued, "we're in control. We can change the rules. We're trained in police work, and we can track him down. There's no need for entering altered states of consciousness."

Kaarina nodded. "I'm not excluding good old fashioned detective work. We may have to resort to it in the end." Any more talk about shamanic practices was out. What Warren deserved was a little praise for his efforts today. "Finding that cave high above the rock face. What a stroke of luck that was."

Warren's shoulders became noticeably more relaxed. "A couple of young hikers couldn't wait to tell me about the hideout. So they've relayed their exciting discovery to a few other people by now. The police, too. It'll probably be front page news in the Millport paper tomorrow."

Suji plunged right in. "Now that Lakitcina knows his cave's been discovered, he'll take off for another island. If he's lucky, he'll be able to sneak back up to his cave in the middle of the night and haul away some of his stolen loot." Suji got up then and went over to the cabinet where a bottle of champagne sat in a bucket of ice. "Warren and I should be toasted for making the first major step toward wiping out the enemy."

Kaarina chuckled at Suji's untypical bravado. Normally uncomfortable if he was complimented, he uncovered a few of his protective layers in order to allow some well-deserved kudos to be directed in Warren's direction.

* * * *

Back at the yacht that night, Warren ran up the metal ladder leading to the bridge.

Once there, he sat in the captain's chair. Dropping his head down onto the wheel, he let out an audible groan. Kaarina's decision to risk her life by shape shifting into the body of a wolf scared the hell out of him.

Sleeping was out of the question. He had to stop Lakitcina in his tracks before she went ahead with her crazy plan. Even if the Millport police had been up to the hideout already, they weren't going to stay up there during the night. That meant Lakitcina had time to make a few trips to his cave and move some of his stolen stuff.

So he was going to do the sane, logical thing. By using his gun, he'd be able to handcuff Lakitcina, duct tape his feet, throw him in his sidecar and haul him to the Millport police station.

Starting up the twin engines, Warren cast off. He planned on making a short stop at Millport. Following that, he'd head to the Mutlaki Mountains. His first job was to get hold of one of the motorcycles in front of a rental shop in Millport. His bolt cutters should be strong enough to cut through the chains that were used to prevent theft.

The Black Hawk pulled through the water at a cruising speed of fifteen knots. The steady thrum of the motors in combination with the job of steering usually put Warren in a calm state of mind. But not tonight.

Once he was well away from shore, he pushed the throttle forward to eighteen knots, and the yacht rushed ahead. Speed was what he was after. The sooner he got to Millport, the better. Kaarina was on fast-forward, and he had to outrun her.

The surf became choppier. Waves rushed at the yacht forcing Warren to ride into weighty heaving swells. The rhythmic rise and fall of his waterworld soon had him thinking of nothing except avoiding the reefs off to port.

When he reached Millport, he tied the boat to the dock and headed for the rental shop. Thankfully, no one was around and in a matter of minutes he had a motorcycle free of its chains. Getting it onto the yacht was no problem. Years ago, Kaarina's dad had made a ramp for running heavy materials on and off the Black Hawk.

On his way to the north end of the island, the wind was still gale force, so he stayed close to land. After docking at a makeshift wharf twenty minutes later, he was on his way up the mountain.

It wasn't an easy motorcycle ride. To avoid broken rock, dead branches and potholes, he had to drive slowly. The stream that followed the trail as it made frequent switchbacks came close to intersecting it at times. So muddy conditions had the bike sliding off into the bushes a few times.

A little rattled by his near-collision with a deer, he wondered what problem he'd run into next. Ten minutes later, he had his answer. A mound of debris--rocks, large cedar tree branches and windfalls of every shape and size--blocked his chance for making any further progress. Getting off his bike, he pushed his way through the thick brush and circled back onto the road.

The sound of undergrowth being churned up had Warren ready to put all his police training into play. Leaning the motorcycle against a tree, he stood stock-still and aimed his flashlight in the direction of the sound. The shadowy depths of the forest revealed nothing, but he heard some heavy breathing and his imagination ran wild. Was he giving credence to such bizarre wizardry as a possessed bear? Yes, he was. If it was a bear that was acting out of instinct, it would've either attacked him by now, or gone on its way.

Chapter Fourteen

Boots slogging in mud and a quick sharp crack were heard before an arm went around Warren's throat. Jamming his elbow into his attacker's gut, he swung around and aimed his flashlight at his assailant. One of Lakitcina's eyes was bloodshot and weeping badly, and a thick unkempt growth of red hair sprung out from his head like a devilish circle of fire from behind a green and black mask.

Warren reached out to rip off the mask, and the bugger knocked his flashlight out of his hand. Almost as if it was an automatic reflex, Warren kicked him hard in the kneecap.

"Damn you," Lakitcina howled, as he crouched down in the undergrowth, "why can't you mind your own business? I know you stole my drum. It's a sacred relic. At least eight or nine centuries old. Besides, this quarrel between Kaarina and me has nothing to do with you. You're a tourist for God sake. Go do your damn scuba diving in another part of the archipelago."

"Put on these handcuffs," Warren said, as he threw them down in front of the whining jerk. Removing his gun from its holster, he aimed it at the vile shaman. "I'll shoot you if you try anything funny." Surprised at how easily the guy's leg crumbled, he remembered Kaarina mentioning his limp. Kneeling down, he picked up his flashlight while Lakitcina continued his rant.

Caught totally off guard when a large bird landed on his head and began to claw at his eyes, Warren struck at it with his gun. That off-guard moment was all Lakitcina needed. He grabbed Warren by the legs, and he fell into the mud with a splat. That was when the thug got control of the gun and threw it into the thick undergrowth. From the way Lakitcina struggled to his feet, it was obvious that the blow to his knee worsened the condition of his gimpy leg. As if Warren was no longer any threat to him, the pompous S.O.B. rambled on about how weak Ankau was, and how easy it had been to enter his energy field. He also bragged about psychically tricking Ankau into walking into a trap where underworld demons ensnared him.

Warren was in a no-win situation. That damn falcon would attack him if he lunged at the guy, and if the weirdo's bear suddenly appeared and was ordered to finish him off, it would be the perfect crime. No one would suspect the thieving bushman had anything to do with it. Here in the mountains, this thug wrote his own rules.

Lakitcina threw the handcuffs into the mud. "Now get down off this mountain and tell Kaarina I'll meet her in the underworld where she rescued Swan. Tomorrow night, at nine."

As Warren rode back down the mountain, his heart hammered painfully in his chest. His way of doing things had failed, so now everything he'd tried to prevent was set in motion. The woman he'd tried to protect was now forced to flex her psychic muscles in a so-called alternate reality.

Why couldn't Kaarina see there were other strategies to consider? Tripping out into a chaotic void and psychically poisoning herself was madness. To confront this

delusional man while in such a susceptible state would be grueling and hazardous.

* * * *

In the Johnson's kitchen early the next day, Kaarina joined Amy and Ankau for a planning session. "I sure hope the village informant isn't aware of my plan to journey to Lakitcina's hideout. I'm counting on confronting him as he packs some of his stuff over to another island."

Ankau sat down beside Amy. Looking across at Kaarina, he slicked back his long white hair with his thin fingers. Although there was a weariness about him, his hand had been steady when he'd poured coffee into their mugs earlier. "We're the only ones who know about it, Veleda, so things should go according to plan."

"Well then." Kaarina said, "I guess my main worry is about the Saami drum. In my heart and mind are the myths and legends of both the Taquala tribe and my Saami ancestors. By mixing cultures, it might cancel out the drum's magic."

"Don't worry," Amy said, patting her hand, "Grandfather's drum worked for you. You didn't get elfshot or trollshot. As well as going well armed, you know I'll make sure no harm comes to you. At the least sign of trouble, I'll snap you back to consciousness."

Kaarina sipped on her coffee and when she leaned forward she kept her hands wrapped around the mug. "If only we knew who was helping Lakitcina. That was a job Warren offered to take on. But he has no clues as yet."

"Speak of the devil," Amy said, "Warren just stepped onto the back porch, and he looks like he's been to hell and back."

Kaarina ran to welcome him. "Come on in," she said, opening the screen door, "you look beat."

"Yeah, I haven't been to bed yet. Like a jackass, I went off half-cocked last night. I thought I could catch Lakitcina while he was busy transferring some of his stolen stuff, but he caught me." He sat next to Kaarina, dropped his elbows on the table, and rested his head in his hands. "Damn it. I had every intention of cuffing that devil and taking him into Millport."

Kaarina gave him a hefty nudge. "Talk about an uneven battlefield. You sure know how to pick one."

Warren, with weariness outlined around his eyes and mouth, raised his head. "Just when I thought I had him nailed, his falcon dug its talons into my head. It came so close to my eyes, I had no choice but to hit it with my gun--"

Kaarina groaned. "And that's when the creep got the upper hand."

"Yeah. He grabbed me by the legs, and I was down for the count. After he threw my gun into the bushes, he gave me a message to deliver."

"And the message is?" Kaarina's heart skipped a beat and she felt a prickly heat wrap itself around her.

Running his hands through his unruly mop of long black hair, Warren looked at her with red-rimmed eyes full of uncertainty.

"Warren!" Kaarina said, unable to hide her impatience, "Forces you don't fully understand, may be the only way to nail this rat." On the one hand, she had to admire him for trying to put their enemy out of commission. On the other, she resented his over-protectiveness.

"Okay"--Warren shifted his gaze from Ankau to Amy and back to Kaarina--"he'll meet you in the lower world, tomorrow night, at nine. No weapons, and just one power

animal.”

Kaarina’s stomach lurched and her head spun. “But that’s crazy. The Land of Shades is an endless labyrinth.”

Warren shrugged. “He didn’t think you’d have any trouble finding him. He said you’d already willed yourself to where Anka’s spirit was taken prisoner. That’s where he’ll be waiting.”

“That means he was back in the weeds directing those little underworld devils when they attacked me.”

Warren pushed his seat back. “No. He made no mention of being there when you rescued Anka’s swan. He just talked about a spell he’d put on Anka when he was going into his last trance--”

“What?” Anka said in a voice shaking with emotion. “He admitted that he interfered with my trance?”

Kaarina leaned close to Warren. Her face was no more than a few inches away from his. “Please, Warren, we need to know if we’ve been right about just how much power this guy has.” She spoke in a hushed tone with all the urgency she could muster.

Warren massaged his forehead with his fingers. “I’m not sure if I remember his words exactly--”

“Try,” Kaarina said, “if he’s able to get into the lodge, we’ll perform my trance somewhere else.”

Warren looked over at Anka. “He’d railed on about directing you to those underworld demons when you tried to get some information about Willie’s whereabouts. He was hiding in your attic and when he heard the drum music, he came downstairs. When you were well into your trance, he yanked you out of your body and cast a spell on you.”

Anka nodded, and turned to Kaarina. “Whenever my psychic eye is open, there’s a point of contact when someone with an aggressive agenda like Lakitcina’s can take over my trance.”

Warren continued to direct his words to Anka. “From what I remember, he said he was able to take over your wandering mind and keep it under his control while he let the drum music work for him. Acting as your inner voice, he led you to those little devils that are always on the prowl for lost souls. Now that’s all I can remember. Hope it’s enough.”

Kaarina gave him a pat on the back. “It’s enough.” In spite of Warren’s unease for anything that hinted at mystic powers, his ingrained investigative talents hadn’t allowed him to tune out Lakitcina’s words. “Can you believe it, Anka, you were at that creep’s mercy during your last trance.”

Amy grabbed her grandfather’s hand. “Doing that trance without me. Think of the pain it’s caused you.”

Anka turned to her. “Now don’t you start. The blame game is over.”

“Okay. Okay. But no more trances. Okay?”

Anka smiled over at Kaarina. “No need to. My pupil is ready to take over my job.”

“Thank you for that, Anka,” Kaarina said, “I sure hope I don’t disappoint you.”

The silence hung in there and Kaarina was about to fill in the lull when Anka, an inner peace passing across his face, smiled at Warren. “You have taken a great load off

my shoulders. To end my career with my powers still in tact. To know my own personal demons haven't ganged up on me. That's such a good thing."

Kaarina's face was flushed and her eyes held Ankau's. "It just proves that Lukwala's suspicions were bang on. His soul retrievals were wrecked in the same way."

Ankau's face suddenly took on a pensive look. "But Lakitcina's demons. Let's think about them. As a spiteful metaphysical creation of his own making, they're bound to turn on him sooner or later."

"If I have my way," Kaarina blurted out, "it'll be sooner. Confronting him in the underworld is the only way to go."

Amy reached for Kaarina's hand. "That guy's word isn't worth much. You may be walking into a trap."

"But that's the chance I have to take." Kaarina hadn't wanted her voice to sound edgy, but it had.

* * * *

By the time Kaarina left the Johnson Lodge, it was a little past nine in the evening. The wind blowing off the river that ran alongside the boardwalk was brisk, but it wasn't the weather that had her experiencing a sense of chilling discomfort.

Her psychic connection to Wolf was strong. He knew she was going to make an attempt at shape shifting tomorrow, but she sensed no projection of his aura. With Willie beating the Saami drum and her "giving up control" issues a thing of the past, all she needed now was Wolf's affirmation that he'd be there for her.

Aiming her flashlight into the undergrowth close to the main bunkhouse on the chance he was waiting for her there, she caught sight of a few bones. Leaning over the railing that ran alongside the walkway, she looked down on one of the old archaeological sites. A sickening lurch in her stomach had her mind unable to function for a moment. The native's communal gravesite had been desecrated. Broken bits of wood and dozens of bones were thrown around like pieces of garbage, and the foul deed must've been done during the last few hours.

Amy and Indre would be furious. They'd spent hours arranging the ancestral remains in bundles and flexed positions as depicted by the student excavators. Kalervo and Willie had planned on shoveling the dirt back tomorrow.

Kaarina took in a deep breath, and made her hatred for Lakitcina work for her. He not only lacked respect for the living, he dishonored the dead, too. Instead of shrinking from thoughts of their showdown, she turned it into strength and power. If she were to be the victor tomorrow, her state of mind must remain as positive as it was at this moment.

Fifteen minutes later, she was at the small cable car barn. There was Wolf. His magnetic essence reached out to her, and she gazed into eyes that reflected a focused intensity.

"Tomorrow I'll need your help in reading the environment of the Land of Shades," she said. "The evil shaman may have powers stronger than mine, so your courage, intelligence and muscled might will be sorely tested."

Wolf let out a deep, low sound so primal, she was shocked into a semi-trance. Both moving and authoritative, it expressed the most powerful aspects of his primitive instincts. The barriers between the dimensions, impassable to ordinary mortals, were but insubstantial mists to Wolf.

Focusing her attention on the job at hand, she ran her hands over Wolf's body.

Once her spiritual energy slipped inside him, she'd be seeing, touching, hearing, and smelling whatever or whomever he came in contact with. Some senses would be incredibly sharp, others would be much like her own.

If Lakitcina's energy field entered the body of a larger, more menacing animal, she knew Wolf wouldn't be intimidated. His fearlessness and strength were legendary. His breed kept the population of elk, moose and deer in check.

* * * *

Ankau was just putting on his Wolf pelt when Kaarina walked into the living room of the vacant house the following evening, "When it comes to performing trances, the less furniture the better."

"Yes, Amy told me. And the chances of Lakitcina finding a place to hide in here and taking over my trance are pretty slim."

Ankau yanked on his silvery horseshoe of a mustache. "This will be the big test, Veleda. Are you ready to share Wolf's shape as well as his consciousness?"

Kaarina smiled. "Wolf and I had a meeting of the minds last night and I'm more confident than ever about giving shape shifting a try."

Amy had everything in place. Her stick, rattle, dozens of eagle feathers as well as the Saami drum and a bowl of water were on the coffee table. Quickly adding her knife with three edges to its blade and some stones that were good luck charms, Kaarina indicated she was ready to begin her trance.

There'd been dark clouds skittering above the tiny settlement all day, and now there was the rumble of thunder off in the distance. A downpour followed. It came in violent blinding sheets, and a howling, ripping wind picked up speed as it dashed in from the ocean. Massive tree trunks swayed, and the shallow-rooted ones crashed to the ground.

From deep within Kaarina's Saami soul an ancient instinct surfaced. The forces within her that demanded predictability and safety no longer ruled. The fear that her fragmented spirit might get lost in the nether realm was banished from her psyche.

Willie started to beat the drum about two hundred and twenty beats per minute. In the sacred circle around a candle, Kaarina power danced and chanted Wolf's praises until she reached the doorway of the heart: the moment when the human and spirit world intersected.

Physically relaxed, she lay down on the floor. Her spirit body was now ready to confront Lakitcina in the underworld while her physical body was in the hands of Amy, Willie and Ankau.

The free fall down the well into the darkness below reminded her of the dive she'd taken for Ankau's soul retrieval. The ground in the tunnel was covered with a soggy undergrowth of wet rotten branches, gnarled roots, crumbling rock and squishy moss, so she was glad her feet never touched the ground.

When she reached the opening, she looked out on the desolate world of eternal dusk. Locked in as she was in a foggy mist, she could only see a small part of the rugged field that stretched out into eternity. Although the underworld's ever-shifting balance seemed to emit the humming vibrations of the entire universe, it represented but an infinitesimal fraction.

Lakitcina had chosen to meet her where she'd rescued Ankau's soul part. Unlike some shamans who were able to will themselves to a place they'd already visited, that

kind of projection was beyond her power. So she had to make her way to the lake the same way as before. Raising herself, she glided like an ice skater above undergrowth that was far more thick and treacherous than she remembered. Reaching up like skeletal arms, the gnarled cottonwoods were a particularly hazardous trap.

On reaching the boat, her heart began to beat in time with a vast sea of lost souls. The open-mouthed spirits undulating in the black ooze were blind to her presence. To their sorrowful-looking eyes, she was merely a shadow. As she rowed toward the island on the opposite shore, she couldn't help but wonder what prevented these tormented beings from passing to higher realms. It wasn't wise to dwell on such mysteries. To do so, would only drive her insane.

While she was busy getting out of the boat, and then pulling it further up onto the beach, she made the island her only focus. The scenery here had changed dramatically. Two towering rock cliffs rose up and enclosed the forest like immovable bookends. So the small shafts of light that filtered through the sparse evergreens were of little use to the dried-up stunted bushes.

Thick clouds hung low and a chill in the air had her shivering, but the shifting grayness didn't dampen her spirit. In the grip of fierce determination, she straightened her shoulders and thought of Wolf's most admirable aspects. For a limited time and purpose tonight, she planned to combine her skills with the talents he put to use in the wild. Physical strength, loyalty and mutual trust.

As if he was aware of her thoughts, Wolf appeared out of the gloom. His eyes glowed from an inner power, and gave off their own light in the deepening shadows. So now it was time for her spirit to slip inside his body and have their two souls work as one as they combined two states of being.

The air was palpable as she concentrated on Wolf's energy field. Moving around him, she studied him from every angle. Totally relaxed, she envisioned herself sinking into his body as she telepathically asked him if she could share his shape and essence while retaining her own intelligence. His eyes held hers without flinching, indicating that she had his permission.

Kaarina made her intention as explicit as she could as she embarked on this all-important transformation. Straightforward. Exact. Breath in. Hold it. Breath out. One, two, three. Images were blurry as her sense of self threatened to dissolve as the deepest levels of her being became immersed in Wolf's savage nature.

Summoning all of her will, Kaarina regained her mental equilibrium and immediately began to experience things from the beast's perspective as well as her own. She'd anticipated the raising of her powers of vision, smell and hearing to an almost painful intensity. The way immensely powerful urges of hunger and sexuality overrode her civilized instincts, however, momentarily stunned her.

Her consciousness soon came into perfect focus behind Wolf's blazing eyes. The vital currents of her spirit body were now synchronized to Wolf's breathing. Her heart beat with his. She shivered as her lower body seemed to fuse with the animal's powerful hindquarters, and her own puny physical powers were mightily amplified by a complex and alien (but also somehow familiar) system of nerves, sinew and muscle.

Wolf studied his surroundings, and then, as he trod along a well-worn path, Kaarina, her astral power immeasurably enhanced by her convergence, was caught up in the rhythm of his intimate symbiotic movements. Being in tune with his environment was

crucial for his survival, and she began to see the landscape in a different way. Her sense of smell was inextricably involved with her emotions, and it came in several tones and layers. Fear was the strongest scent. She sensed it in the doe leading her two fawns down to a small lake.

When they arrived at the prearranged meeting place, they were greeted with a malevolent snarl coming from the forest's edge. Wolf turned and found himself face to face with Lakitcina's Wolf, a slavering and snarling horror, its course and shaggy coat matted with decaying gore. Kaarina felt Wolf's hackles rise and his muscles bunch with tension. She experienced a dark thrill when Wolf issued forth a hoarse and terrible sound that was meant to instill mortal fear in every fiber of his opponent's body. The reverberations went through her like a primal call of the wild.

Utterly unintimidated by Wolf's terrifying call of the wild, the enemy bristled with feral fury. Saliva dripped down from the sides of his mouth and his teeth were bared. She knew, instinctively, that this beast was not a member of the Wolf collective. As a vicious loner with a savage nature, he was no ordinary alpha male. Why Lakitcina had chosen to merge with his form was easily understandable. His psychic power was bound to be enormous inside such a fierce animal spirit. In any case, her guiding spirit was not deterred. When those evil red laser beam eyes scrutinized him, he bravely retaliated by adopting a threatening stance of his own.

As the two bristling beasts squared off, the air of this otherworldly place fairly crackled with ectoplasmic waves of pure, animal fury. Kaarina felt a joyous surge of irrepressible bloodlust as Wolf hurled himself at his foe in a violent frenzy of snapping fangs and ripping claws. The beasts rolled and whirled and leapt like insane, shaggy demons in the gloom. Hysterical yelps and snarls rent the weirdly colorless sky.

Quickly as it began, the battle came to an abrupt end with the appearance of Lukwala. The two great wolves immediately disengaged like pet dogs cowed by the presence of an angry human master. Lakitcina's wolf slunk after Lukwala as he strode, without a word, back into the woods.

Kaarina collected all the thought forms she'd brought to bear when she'd merged with Wolf, and then she took all the power from those former projections. It was like brushing words from a chalkboard and rewriting her former astral image.

When Lakitcina stepped out of the forest, the bushman was limping badly and wearing an eye patch. He wasn't wearing a mask, but his unkempt red beard and sideburns were almost equally effective at hiding his features.

Kaarina was dismayed at Wolf's docility. She'd counted on him to create a force field that the wretched shaman couldn't break through. The guy had knifed his cub for God's sake. The creep wasn't even subjected to her power animal's fixed stare. What was Wolf going to do next? Put his tail between his legs and roll over? Lukwala must be in the shadows making sure his influence was still felt. That was only possible explanation.

It suddenly hit Kaarina: the source of Lakitcina's wounds! He must've been merged with giant squid when she stabbed its eye, and when Warren hacked off the club on its tentacle! "You rotten bastard. You'd projected into giant squid and tried to drown Warren and Willie. You were probably trying to capsize Jerry's boat as well."

"Duh. I could shape change long before you learned the technique. Besides, I was just going to give them a good scare."

"You're lying. You wanted to kill them."

“Whatever. Anyway, when that giant squid from the benthic waste got caught in the waters off Klatala, it gave me the opportunity to spend some time with him. My whole life, I’ve been obsessed with that mysterious sea monster. There is no other creature in the ocean about which so little is known, or to which so much lore and myth, so much fear and hatred has been attached by sea people. I communed with squid in my dreams before I ever set eyes on him. We had many interesting adventures together.”

At this point, he ripped open his cloak to reveal the fantastic livid image of a giant squid tattooed across his barrel chest. He appeared to be lost in concentration for a moment, and then Kaarina was sure she saw the tangle of corpse-hued tentacles actually writhing over his ribs and shoulder blades.

Lakitcina laughed almost merrily at Kaarina’s look of shock and disgust. “Yes, I identify with this poor, misbegotten creature. We are kindred spirits. Don’t even try to understand. Our bonding is far beyond your limited understanding, you puny, meddling witch.”

“You’re the meddler. All this misery and death you’ve caused ... there’s a payback. Your punishment will be more severe than your crimes.”

Lakitcina’s eyes narrowed menacingly. “Like you can prove I’ve done anything wrong. I’m just trying to get what’s rightfully mine. And I’m getting fed up with this cat and mouse game.”

“Who are you anyway?”

The big bushman chuckled nastily, and gave an exaggerated bow. “Reidar Sajantila, at your service, cousin. You and I share the same great grandfather, Gunvald Sajantila. He left Klatala to his son, Olaf. And he handed it down to his sons, Joosef and Mikal. But Joosef got greedy and he had my father killed.”

“Don’t be absurd. My father’s no killer.”

Reidar glowered at her. “But he is. And the sooner Joosef tells you the truth, the better. For him to let you put your life on the line for him is contemptible. I want you to hire a lawyer and get your father to sign over that half of his real estate that belongs to my father. Then we’ll negotiate a price for the other half of Klatala. After that, all will be forgiven, and no harm will come to any of the remaining villagers.” With that, he turned and limped into the woods.

Chapter Fifteen

Kaarina answered the front door of the mansion and pulled Warren into the living room. "I'm so glad you came right over. Although I could've told you about my confrontation with Lakitcina on the telephone--"

"I had to bring you this logbook," he said, plopping down on the sofa overlooking the harbor. "But let's talk about it after I hear your news." He put a large leather bound book on the coffee table and turned to her. "Okay, I'm listening."

Kaarina sat down beside him. "Can you believe it? While I was in astral form, I succeeded in uniting my spirit with Wolf's."

"A major breakthrough for you. Congratulations!"

"Lakitcina's energy was transformed into a ferocious wolf and they were ready to rip us apart. What a battle! I was scared and elated all at the same time."

Warren moved closer to her. "Tell me exactly what happened."

"My God, Warren, with my spirit merged with Wolf's I experienced everything he did. There was excruciating pain as the other wolf tore into us. But overwhelming everything was the sheer joy of the battle. We were rolling and jumping every which way through the rocks and the undergrowth.

"I felt possessed of an unbelievable speed and grace, propelled by this incredible, ferocious energy. I knew all the tricks and tactics he did, and I exulted with him with every wound we inflicted on the enemy. I also felt every bite and slash ... the blood leaking through his ... our fur. It was terrifying, exhilarating. Totally out of control, we were just barely able to withstand the assault.

"It all took place in a matter of minutes before Lukwala appeared. When he's around, the animals are all at peace with one another. Willie had been worried sick about my safety, so he'd asked his brother to use his power over Ankau's spirit guide, Swan. She was the one who led Lukwala to where she'd been kidnapped. So Willie's my hero. By making peace with his brother, he saved my life.

"But my God! That fight! Those moments were the most intense of my life. I wish I could describe it better. I wish you...." her voice trailed off.

There was a fierce light in Kaarina's eyes that Warren had never seen before. Wolf was still in there somewhere. Suddenly aware of his white-knuckled hands clenching the arms of the kitchen chair. Mentally willing himself to cool it, he loosened his grip.

Suji rushed in to welcome Warren. "I was hiking in the mountain when I heard the trolley car," he said, breathlessly. "I'll get you two some coffee."

"Does Suji know?" asked Warren, once his host was out of earshot.

"I told him everything." There it was again, her nagging suspicion that Suji was acting out of character. Hiking in the mountains? No way. Bears were his nemesis. Was he the traitor? In 1942, her dad had once made the mistake of going over Ankau's head and informing the powers to be that a little Japanese boy should be with his parents in the Minidoka Relocation Center in Idaho. Ankau, who'd taken care of Suji until he was nine,

would've never mentioned it to Suji, but someone else in the village might have. If that were true, would that wound still be festering? My God, Suji moved into the mansion twenty years ago, and until ill health had her dad moving to Seattle, they'd been the best of friends.

Suji quickly reappeared with the coffee. He fixed Warren with a deeply worried look. "Maybe you can talk some sense into my crazy Kaari Yaki. She won't listen to me. And I don't want to hear about her frightening underworld confrontation one more time. My God, she had her wandering spirit inside a wolf, and she's going to do it again! So forgive me, I'm going out back and work on the chopper."

Perfectly understandable," Warren said. "I'll see you later."

Kaarina heard the back door slam, but she wasn't sure just what was pissing Suji off. Fear of her safety or Lakitcina's?

Warren turned to Kaarina. "I agree with Suji. Do you really have to risk your life again? Whatever happens to the body of your double in the depths happens to your body here on earth, right?"

Kaarina nodded. "Both my astral and corporeal forms breathe in time with the drumbeat. What happens to one will automatically influence the other. But the Johnsons are there to make sure that no harm comes to my physical body from enemies in this realm of existence. They can't always help me in the astral."

"That's my point." Warren shook his head like a man trying to get rid of cobwebs. At times like this, he didn't know what to make of her. He wondered if maybe normalcy really was just an illusion. When he was around Kaarina, he had a hard time accepting who she was. What she'd always be. He knew deep down, however, that it was useless to try and dissuade her from the perilous task she had taken upon herself. "Here's to you and your luck in not getting dismembered." With his coffee mug, Warren toasted her victory, while trying to convey an attitude of confidence and joviality he didn't feel. He felt it even less when his eyes finally registered the dark stains just barely detectible on her black shirt.

Kaarina correctly interpreted his look of alarm. "Suji already bandaged me up. Don't worry, they're just scratches. Luckily, there's not always an exact correspondence between astral wounds and those inflicted on my corporeal body.

"But that isn't always the case. For some reason, Lakitcina experienced the worst possible effects while he shared giant squid's body in astral form. The damage we inflicted to giant squid's eye and leg, or rather tentacle, he got the full brunt of them."

Warren now experienced his own inner battle between the desire to encourage this brave young woman in her dangerous enterprise, and the desire to talk her out of it before she got seriously hurt. Instead, his wish to hear more about her deep trance won over. "Now, did Lakitcina give you any information about himself? Why he's raising hell around here?"

"I found out that he's my cousin, Reidar Sajantila. Can you believe that? My cousin! He claims that my dad killed his dad, Mikal, because he wanted to own the Klatala Fish Cannery outright. He wants Joosef to sign over his dad's half of the Klatala Real Estate and then he wants to buy out my dad's half."

"I can't believe it! That murderous, scheming sonofabitch is a blood relative of yours! And this logbook must belong to his dad, Mikal Sajantila," he said, picking it up. "It was in a little watertight safe in the outlying region of the seiner I've been exploring."

“But how?”

Warren grinned sheepishly. “I’ve always been good at picking locks. I guess there’s a safecracker in the Kyinauk gene pool back in the day. Anyway, it’s extremely useful in my line of work.

“I’d just started to read some of the entries when you phoned. This guy wrote reams of information about the weather and the flora and fauna along the coast. Then there are the anecdotes about his family, great fishing areas and the fishermen he met in the towns where he’d delivered his fish.”

Kaarina kissed him on the cheek. “Thank you. Thank you.” Taking the logbook from him, she held it to her chest for a moment. Once she’d flipped through a few pages, she gave Warren a quizzical look. “What made you so interested in this particular seiner? It’s been under the water for over thirty-two years according to the date on this page. Amy told me about its steel-hull construction, and the fact that you were able to recognize the type of fishing gear used at that time.”

“The anchor I put in the mess hall was covered in anemones but in fairly good shape. Then there was the compass you were so intrigued with. So I thought I’d take another look. And like I told you, I came across a safe some distance away from the wreck, and I hauled it up to the yacht. The logbook was the only thing inside.”

Kaarina flipped through a few pages. “This is going to take some time to read,” she said, placing it back on the coffee table. “So right now, I want to tell you about the drum you found in Arvo’s cave.” She went over to the bookshelf where she’d put the drum after her successful trance last night. “As heartbeat of the cosmos,” she said, taking her seat again and placing the drum on her lap, “it can’t be overrated. Spirit voice and spirit ears, it’s the connector between a shaman and the universe. This is an ancient one, probably made eight or nine centuries ago, as Lakitcina told you. So it’s amazing that it survived. Without it, I don’t think I would’ve been capable of shape shifting last night.

“In the seventeenth century, the courts of the day decided that these Saami drums were instruments of the devil. The powers-to-be believed they had lethal qualities capable of causing storms and diseases in far off places. So most of the Saami drums were burned along with their owners. One this old is very rare indeed.

“Reidar maintains that when my great grandfather, Gunvald, died, he gave his drum to our grandfather, Olaf, for safekeeping. When Olaf died, he gave the drum to Mikal, Reidar’s dad. That’s how Reidar got his hands on it. But he doesn’t have any right to it. Apart from the sleigh and reindeer that prove it’s a Saami drum, the drawings also show that it’s to be handed down to the first female Sajantila who’s destined to walk the shaman’s path.”

Kaarina reached for the drum and pointed to a picture that showed a drum in the hands of a stick figure that had a triangle representing a skirt. “This is clearly a depiction of a female figure and this stick man, who hands her the drum, is unmistakably of the opposite gender. His large male organ is clearly shown.”

“So Reidar must’ve got hold of another Saami drum. Otherwise he wouldn’t have been able to project his astral image into his wolf.”

Gazing at the drums membranes, Warren sensed that an ancient time and the weird world of the unknown had come together in a powerful statement. The stick figures drawn on the skin made it very clear as to who was to be the next owner. Something else was becoming clearer by the moment, too. He’d picked up on Kaarina’s warmth towards

him.

Was it out of gratefulness? Then again, danger had a way of bringing on an adrenaline rush. Getting all hot and bothered might be her way of making a momentary escape from thinking about the perilous gamble she'd be taking by engaging in another showdown with Reidar. Whatever it was, he decided to hold back on a need to reach out and touch. During the past week the urge to pull her close as they'd walked along the boardwalk or enjoyed a quiet drink together had been overwhelming at times. She, on the other hand, had remained cool and detached.

Were his perspectives really all that different from hers? According to her, a shaman experienced total oblivion and allowed his or her mind to travel freely. That certainly described his flaky condition during the past week. He'd given his imagination free rein to wander wherever it had a mind to--especially in his dreams--and it came up with some blissful mind-blowing scenarios starring Kaarina and him.

Kaarina could feel Warren's sexual vitality reaching out to her, and it had her recalling her first practice session with him. His hands and lips had transported her much like the strong rhythmic beat of the shaman's drum as it guided her into a dreamlike trance and released the endorphins necessary to bring about pure rapture. Percussion. Impact. Her heartbeat had collided with his, and she'd been blown away into an alternate universe. Following that experience, she'd found that her multidimensional awareness had improved enough to give shape-shifting a try.

Instead of accepting every aspect of his nature, however, she had to admit that Ankau was right. She'd held back. The emotional intensity of the forces that came into play had had her fearful of being overpowered by his maleness. This time around, she was determined to make Warren's inner core the total focus of her universe. By taking herself a step further, she was going to open herself up to her widest extent.

While thinking about holding her close and absorbing her heat, Warren found himself wondering what her thoughts were about their relationship. Her nature was so secretive, and she had so many complex shifting dynamics to her makeup. He'd read that most women mate psychologically as well as physically and were highly sensitive to a shared intimacy. But Kaarina didn't seem to put any long-lasting emotional content into their sexual bonding.

Pulling himself up short, he realized he was doing it again. It was none of his business how she viewed their time together. Their worlds were growing further and further apart in greater and greater leaps and bounds as summer neared its end. She was caught up in wearing the many hats of the traditional shaman and, unlike him, she had no intention of returning to her job in Seattle.

He'd worked hard to acquire a reputation as a credible investigator. To walk away from it now wasn't in the cards. So there you had it: the inevitable parting of the way.

When Kaarina shifted on the sofa, the fog-shrouded light coming in from the windows gave her features a soft glow. She gazed into his eyes and touched his shoulder. Then, lifting her arm, she released the leather band that held her hair in place and shook her head. Dark silky strands found their way over one of her eyes, and in the depth of the exposed eye Warren detected an elemental hunger. On some level of awareness, he knew she wasn't about to slip into a place where he couldn't follow.

Don't think so damn much, he warned himself. The lady wanted to be carried off into a euphoric landscape. He did, too. To be at her mercy. To be tortured by her

electrifying touches. To be so transported by her heated flesh he'd experience what she called an altered state of consciousness. How great was that?

He quickly cancelled out all thoughts of whys and wherefores. If she was about to give him a gift, by God he was more than ready to accept it. Trying not to think of her escape route once the loving was over, he was eager to get into the moment. Whatever her reason--maybe she didn't even know it herself--he was going to absorb those vibes she was sending out. If he read them with any kind of accuracy, she was ready to experience moves he'd neglected to show her during their first sensual encounter on the Black Hawk. It was then, like a tidal pull, Kaarina's magical aura washed over him and sent out a clear invitation. "Do you want me to seduce you?" he asked. "Is that the plan?"

"Or I could seduce you. What do you think?"

"Let's take turns. You step in whenever you feel the tempo I've set is too fast or too slow." In his ears, as he leaned over to kiss her, was the hungry seagulls' cries and the wind in the trees. The world outside was breathing in tune with him. Inhale. Exhale.

Instant recall was Kaarina's response. Warren's expertise in the art of French kissing was flawless. Once the tip of his tongue had coaxed hers into action, the teasing and fluttering began. A dancing duel was soon underway, and that's when everything was out of focus except for pure sensation.

Warren took her unrestrained kisses as permission to take the loving a step further. So some clothing removal was in order. After he'd taken off his shorts and safari shirt, he watched her slip out of her dress. Drawing her down to the sofa, his hands trailed down to her belly and back up again. Then his tongue followed the same path. The mystery of her. It was so much a part of why he found her so fascinating. He craved to mold her body against his. "Let's make use of that upstairs' queen bed you assigned to me the first day we met."

"Sounds good to me." What was going on here, he wondered as they drifted up the stairs to the second floor. Did he care? Wasn't this the crazy, no-strings-attached kind of sex he was after?

Kaarina's shamanic intuitiveness had picked up on a loss of life energy in Warren's general makeup. Some kind of an emotional barrier or psychic wound had him seeking out a lonely existence for four months of the year. Once they were on the bed naked, she made it clear that she was to take the lead. In a slow unhurried manner, she invaded his mouth and then nudged him onto his back. The strength of her desire to awaken every pore in his body was so strong, it was dizzying. But she was careful not to rush along at too fast a pace. If she did, he'd be forced to take over.

Last week, massaging had stimulated him as they'd worked in unison with their energies. But today, she had to go deeper. Fortunately, he'd chosen the bedroom where Amy and she practiced her trances. Leaning over to a bedside table, she opened a drawer and took out the small CD player they used in their sessions. Turning it on with the sound on low, a steady drumbeat was heard. Through the rhythm, cadence and frequency of the drumming, she hoped Warren would ride along with her.

"What's with the drum? Am I going to experience a sensation that might be too far out for a straight-laced PI?"

"The drumbeat is the heartbeat of the universe. So try and get in sync with it. And don't worry, your mind won't take flight. At least not for a while. Right now I want you to do some inner traveling. Now relax, and see what transpires."

“Whatever you do, don’t have me traveling into a desolate eternity. It’ll scare the hell out of me.”

“No problem there. This is to be a radiant-sex-energy massaging. And there’ll be no solitary tripping-out. On this journey I’m going to get so close to you, you won’t know where you start and I begin.”

“Be gentle.”

“I’m a trained professional, for God sake. I know my way around your hard and soft parts...when to press firmly and when to have my hands barely there.”

“Okay. Okay. I’ll be brave.”

What she was about to do was low-level shamanic work. There was a fragment of this guy’s consciousness that had split off. It was as if the silver cord that connected his body to his soul was in need of reattachment. Taking ownership, that’s what it was all about. If he had had an unpleasant traumatic experience, he must bring it out in the light where he can keep his eye on it. Pushing it into the shadows only made it all the more powerful.

The idea was to encourage Warren to keep himself in a creative mode, not a victimized one. Hopefully, by helping him get into direct contact with his dark shadow, he’d be forced to deal with it. If successful, his soul retrieval would serve as a gift. It would be her way of rewarding him for joining her in another ‘letting go’ exercise.

During her first sexual romp, she’d used hand lotion for the massage she’d given him, but it had been absorbed far too quickly. This time, she was going to use a special massaging oil. The idea was to rub and knead muscle, not skin. Tickling was to be avoided at all costs.

His shoulders, neck, back and legs were no problem, but after she’d finished working on his calves, she paused for a moment. As she squeezed more lubricant on her hands, she looked down at his feet. If she didn’t massage them firmly, she’d wreck the mood she’d so diligently achieved so far. Focus, focus, focus.

Once she’d achieved success in that area, she allowed her senses of touch, smell and taste to come in to play. With her mouth, tongue, lips and fingers, she tested his bones and muscles, assessed his heart and pulse rates and inhaled his scent. Like a shaman returning a life force back to her patient, she cupped her hands and blew lightly into the top of his head, and then into other parts of his body.

The rest was up to Warren. His job was to allow the healing carried along on her breath to fill every corner of his body. If he was able to push it out to the stressful aura surrounding him like a cocoon, he might be able to reconnect with his missing soul essence.

Magic, that was the only way Warren described what was happening to him. Kaarina was in his blood. Every breath he exhaled came out sounded as if he were calling her name. She’d relaxed him to the point where he felt transported. Hypnotized. For far too long, he’d felt as though he wasn’t fully present. But how could he be whole when he wasn’t at peace with himself?

A heartbreaking incident that happened three years ago had had a part of him frozen in time. Normally, whenever the terrible accident surfaced, he was able to smother the painful memory. Moments ago however, pushing it back into his subconscious wasn’t possible. He’d had no choice but to take it out and examine it. Once he allowed himself to do a little bloodletting, he’d felt a tremendous sense of relief.

When Warren lifted Kaarina's body and placed her on her back, it was done with such ease, she marveled at his controlled strength. His breathing was ragged and his body was throbbing and pulsating to a primitive beat, but his thoughts were still on pleasing her.

Very gently, Warren cradled his body into Kaarina's, touching every part of her as he settled himself over her body. Kaarina could tell from the look in his eyes that he was mad with desire for her. His arousal must be painful and screaming for release, but his mind still ran the show. She rewarded his amazing control by giving herself permission to release her body into his care.

Desperately trying to focus on anything but the need to satisfy his hunger, Warren made an attempt at analyzing the new improved more exciting lover whose body pulsed with pleasure beneath him. When he'd made love to her before, he knew she'd held back a secret part of herself. That wasn't his perception now. The change in her was dramatic. Totally unwound, it was as if she'd burst through a defense system that was no longer required.

When a torturous spiral spread through his loins, Warren took a moment to sheath himself with the condom he'd discretely taken from a drawer in the galley. His try at establishing a slow rhythm, however, proved to be too agonizing for him. His hard aching flesh wasn't going to obey his commands much longer. Sensing that Kaarina throbbed for him right down to her feminine core, he increased the friction, and spilled himself into her velvety softness.

Vaguely aware that the drumming had come to an end, Warren held on to Kaarina. Tears he didn't want her to see slid down his cheeks, and he experienced another release. A release that finally set him free of the guilt that had tortured him for far too long.

Kaarina was ecstatic. She'd been so tightly glued to Warren, she'd found it impossible to know or care what her lips were up to and where his hands had wandered. Shape shifting it wasn't, but the psychic force they'd created kept her joined to Warren long after she'd blasted off into another reality. She'd given herself over to Warren, body and soul, and trust was now thoroughly integrated into the fabric of the partnership.

Warren woke up when the phone rang. Kaarina sat bolt upright and grabbed it. On putting the phone down, she scowled at him. "That was Amy. I've got to get over to the Johnson's. Lukwala just contacted Willie at the fish plant and told him that Reidar is hiding out on Snatali Island."

Avoiding his eyes, Kaarina slipped out of bed and began to gather up her clothes.

The sensual heat that had built up in Warren's lower belly, as he waited for Kaarina to hang up, gradually simmered down. After walking over to the other side of the bed, he placed his fingers beneath her chin and lifted her face.

Squirming under his steady gaze, Kaarina held her bunched-up clothes in front of her body. "Please try to understand. I never meant to sleep for so long."

"Maybe getting into bed with me was a mistake, too."

"No way. I had a reason for taking advantage--" Holding a hand over her mouth, she gave him a sheepish look. "Oops."

"You were taking advantage of me? I knew you were up to something." Those words from any of his lady friends in the past would've been laughable. Not when they came out of Kaarina's mouth. The way she related to him had too many twist and turns

Color rapidly flowed into her face. "I should've been honest with you. I'm sure you wouldn't have taken offense if I had."

"Well I won't know that till you explain yourself."

"I've never been able to let go. You know, give up control and throw myself heart and soul into the lovemaking. So Ankau thought I should open up and get acquainted with all aspects of my sexuality. He doesn't hold out much hope for my ability to shape shift if I can't do that."

"So making love was just for experimental reasons?"

"There was more to it than that. And you know it."

"No, there wasn't. Our first roll in the hay was non-relation sex. And so was our last performance." As he headed for the bathroom, it finally dawned on him that he'd been leading with all his senses, while Kaarina had only been on a fact-finding mission.

Damn it anyway. The best sex he'd ever had was all about helping Kaarina to get her shape shifting up to scratch. He'd been a stand-in for a wolf for God sake. Getting emotionally attached to him wasn't on her agenda. The lady lived in two separate worlds. He'd known that from the start. So walking away wasn't an option.

He had to admit, however, that she wasn't the only one to benefit from their merging. By casting a spell on his psyche, old garbage he'd tamped down deep into his subconscious had risen to the surface. Refusing to go back in hiding, he'd been forced to come to terms with a tragic accident that had had him in a tailspin for far too long. Dark memories had been brought up into the light, and his broken spirit was finally putting itself back together again.

Two of the four guys who worked for him in Seattle were chunky ex-policemen. Due to their penchant for junk food while on long stakeouts, they'd packed on the pounds. So trying to act invisible didn't come easily for them. Consequently, once the person they were following got a good look at them, he or she was on guard.

Not so when it was his female employee, detail-oriented Gail Simpson, was the one doing the tailing. Few people suspected a female PI. It was also true of his other employee, Jim Bradshaw, for entirely different reasons. With no distinguishing facial features and so ordinary an appearance people seldom took note of him, he was also great at tailing suspects.

Unfortunately, Gail was given the assignment because Jim had to organize his mother's funeral. She was subsequently shot and killed while on a stakeout in the hotel where the cheating husband had had his assignation.

His client, Jessy Woodson, a feisty middle-aged woman, who'd never met Gail because Jim had been his first choice, had decided to do a little surveillance work on her own. Because there'd been a close resemblance between Gail and the woman at the top of Jessy's hit list, she'd mistakenly shot her.

Since then, his mind couldn't let go of the "what ifs" that loomed so large at times, he couldn't think clearly. If he'd chosen one of the other guys for the job, or insisted that Gail had backup, she'd still be alive today.

If he had to come up with an explanation as to why he was finally able to start forgiving himself, he'd be hard pressed to do so. All he knew was that Kaarina had gotten to the heart of his problem in ways that went beyond all understanding, and he was beginning to feel like his old self again.

Kaarina's magic had not only healed his damaged soul, she'd saved him from

drowning, too. Mutual respect and a love for the grandeur of the Inside Passage were also factors that had crafted those ties that bound them together. To let his male arrogance override truth and common sense was so damn immature. Shallow, even.

Chapter Sixteen

Kaarina was in spirit form when she reached the Klatala Harbor. The sun was in the east, not sinking in the west, so she knew she was in a time warp. Raven was there, and he already knew the purpose of this Middle World trip. She approached him and brought everything she knew about him into play. Both hero and villain to the natives, he wielded a strong hold on their psyche. Inspirer of awe and terror one minute, he could be a comedian the next.

His blue-black satiny fingered wings, heavy bill, wedge-shaped tail, shaggy throat hackles and raggedy fluffed-up breast translated well into myth and legend. It was his gleaming eyes with their unknown depths, however, that she was going to use as a doorway to his soul. By gazing into them, she hoped to tap into his fearless spirit.

This was to be a transfer of her essence. She didn't want to control him. In her effort to make psychic contact, Saami images and symbols swirled wildly in an ever-shifting balance of light and dark. Her heightened intuition became greater than ever as an inner cosmic force took over her wandering spirit.

Every aspect of her surroundings was incorporated in her spirit as she passed from shad into the light. Then, moments after she visualized the wind lifting her up and flying her over the mountains, she sensed that Raven invited her in. She was in a free fall—falling, falling, falling. When the sensation passed, she felt compressed and warm.

Raven gathered strength from his upper arm and breast, flapped his light, airy wings and soared effortlessly into the heavens. The horizon opened up and beckoned her. With a lightness of being that was breathtaking, she was able to focus on the mountain peaks ahead with binocular vision.

The ocean swept away, and the vastness of the big picture had her wondering if she was hallucinating or experiencing one of her ordinary dreams. But no, she felt the vibrations from the rhythmic sounds of the Saami drum. Much like tuning into a radio station, the constant steady rhythm had transformed her mind into her deepest state of consciousness.

Before Raven perched on a sun-bleached log on the Snatali beach, he banked low enough for Kaarina to see the texture of every large bush, tree, hill and path on the island. No wonder he was often a character in Indian legends, he was magic personified. And now, to have tapped into his supernatural spirit, what an honor!

Kaarina collected all the thought projections she'd formulated when merging with her spirit aide and then took away their power. Free of Raven's consciousness, shape and essence, she waited for Wolf. She canceled out the rustling sounds of the wind in the trees and the movement and chattering of the animals. With Raven close by, she was able to calm the disharmony pulsating in her spirit, and review the purpose of her journey while she waited for Wolf.

Underworld, Overworld and Middle World journeys were all induced while she was in a deep trance. Journeying shamanically to a place that existed in ordinary reality, however, was not a classic out-of-body experience. She'd not only be seeing a spiritual

aspect of the corrupt shaman, he might be doing something in another time period. If his powers were strong enough to detect her presence, it would be highly unlikely that he'd remember it. She was counting on that quirk of a Middle World journey. Otherwise, he'd take off for another island.

Shamans of old performed Middle World trances when they wanted to find out information like the location of migratory reindeer herds. For her, it would be a fact-finding mission. Once she knew where Reidar was hiding, Suji could fly Warren over here, and he could make the arrest. In the logbook was the information needed to prove that her dad didn't kill Mikal. Once Reidar read his dad's confession about embezzling money from the cannery accounts, he'd know he didn't have a chance in hell of taking over Klatala.

The Snatali vacationers, who were still here, could claim the stuff that Reidar had stolen, thereby implicating him in the other thefts. Would Reidar then confess to premeditated murder in ordinary reality and the use of consciousness-changing techniques to carry out his other crimes? No. So it was highly unlikely that the punishment would fit the crime. In any case, Warren deserved a chance at following his law enforcement credo.

There was a break in the thick salmon berry bushes and Wolf appeared. Elusive as a shadow, he had the instinctive knowledge to know when the timing was just right. He came up to Kaarina, and telepathically informed her that he knew where Reidar was holed up.

The forest was dense around the old logging road that Wolf had chosen. Dead branches, roots that reached up and grabbed at her ankles and deep muddied ruts slowed them down, but they were in no hurry. With the smell of Reidar's glove in his memory bank, she had no doubts about her spirit aide's ability to lead her to her enemy.

Three planes thundered across the sky. The Air Force base near Anchorage was putting on an air show. The only problem was it had taken place yesterday morning. In real time, it would be close to eight-thirty in the evening of the following day.

Wolf neared a small cabin a short way up a hill and then he broke into a run. "Wolf, come here. Wolf, Wolf," she yelled. Suddenly realizing that Reidar would be spurred into action when he heard her, she saved her energy. She'd counted on having more control over Wolf. Fear took over, and her heart thumped in her chest as she raced after him. Things were going terribly awry. He was in hot pursuit of his son's murderer, not the guy she wanted to take into custody. Whatever wounds he inflicted on the guy would be reflected on his corporeal body wherever that was.

Wolf knew this was a scouting expedition. What was wrong with him? Then she remembered. Spirits in the Middle World often lacked power. Wolf was a confused entity lacking the wisdom to distinguish between ordinary reality and a parallel world. His blood ran hot and his natural instincts had taken over.

By the time she caught up to him, he was standing on two feet at the base of a huge Douglas Fir tree. His front claws scratched at the trunk, his lips were peeled back and his eyes looked skyward. He'd apparently grabbed at a rope ladder that was just now disappearing among the branches high above.

Reidar's words came down loud and clear. "Stealing my drum is not the way of a shaman. You've betrayed your calling so now you have a shadow on your soul."

"You had that Saami drum for months. All you did was bang on it as if it were the

devil himself.” For him to intimate that he was worthy of being a member of such an honorable profession had bile lurching upwards into her throat. She almost choked on it. “You’re a dangerous man, Reidar. You used your power to do great harm. So you must be put away for your own good.”

Falcon appeared out of nowhere, and flew at Raven, but before he had a chance to use his claws, Raven slipped his leg hold into the handlebars of Reidar’s motorcycle. Then the clever trickster quickly secured the handlebar against a tree trunk. Falcon was trapped.

The waiting motorcycle was an indication that this was a special tree. She was almost sure that Reidar had constructed some kind of a hideout high above. The rope ladder was further proof.

Wolf let out a primal sound that affected Kaarina in a very strange way. The world stood still and seconds became hours. “You are not to kill Reidar. He’ll be punished by his own kind.”

When Raven squawked at Wolf, he slowly came out of his attack mode. A moment’s hesitation, and he came to Kaarina much like an animal whose hunt was botched. Shaking the tree’s wetness from his fur, he headed down the deeply rutted dirt road toward the ocean.

Following another flight over the ocean with Raven, Kaarina once again erased the script she’d developed for her shape shift. By undrawing that outline, she was soon free of Raven’s body.

Amy, Willie and Ankau were there to welcome her when she awakened from her death-like sleep. Sitting up, she leaned against the wall while she slowly oriented herself.

Amy plopped down beside her. “Did you find Reidar?”

“Yes. I’ll draw you a map. He sensed my presence, but it’s highly unlikely that he’ll remember talking to me. He could be in either of two places, an empty cabin or a treehouse.”

Willie grabbed one of the paper bags they’d used to carry some of the sacred articles and ripped off a piece. “I’ll phone Suji and tell him to get the chopper ready,” he said, as he handed Kaarina the paper. “We’ve got a few hours before it gets a little dark. And a chopper landing on Snatali shouldn’t alarm him. Many of the summer people are chartering flights south these days.”

Kaarina continued to work on her map assignment. “Amy and I will head back to the mansion with you. And when you bring Reidar back, I’ll present him with some facts that will force him to accept the reality of his situation. By the time he’s read his father’s confession, his dream of taking over Klatala will be no more than the hallucinations of a mental patient.”

* * * *

Willie came flying into the kitchen after Suji landed the whirlybird on the pad at the back of the mansion. “Sorry we’re late, but Reidar wouldn’t leave his treehouse. He said a wolf had him trapped up there for two days. What a nut case! There was no sign of any wolf.”

Suji pushed Reidar through the door and backed him into a chair. “Now sit down and shut up about your damn motorcycle. It probably wasn’t yours anyway. Whoever took it, probably owned it.”

Reidar glared up at Kaarina. “This is all your doing, isn’t it? That damn wolf, you

had him terrorizing me. I haven't eaten for two days."

"Stop whining," Kaarina said, "I've got something to show you." Once everyone was seated at the refectory table she put the ship's logbook between Reidar and her and in her pocket she had her tape recorder turned on. If the rat had a mind to be long-winded, no one was going to interrupt him.

"In this record book," Kaarina began, "Mikal confessed that Joosef had every right to throw him out of Klatala. Your dad's partnership in the Klatala Fish Company was wiped out because he'd stolen millions during the years he was the company's head accountant. Siphoning off the fish cannery's profits to an offshore bank became his ongoing project. Petty theft at first, so the missing money was hardly noticeable. But over a period of five years, he'd become more and more brazen. And then one year when profits had been exceptionally high and the employees' dividends were low, Joosef accused him of fraud."

Reidar, with a face as red as his hair, slapped the table with the flat of his hand. "But that was no reason for Joosef to kill my parents."

Kaarina fought back an urge to reach across the table and pull his red hair out by the roots. "Joosef didn't kill them. The two brothers were estranged when you were born. Your dad went down with his ship because his reputation was ruined beyond repair. Your mother died in childbirth the same night."

Kaarina set the logbook aside, after Reidar read his dad's confession, and replaced it with the account books Joosef had kept after the cannery closed. "I've looked over these company accounts and the discrepancies are obvious. So, as far as your father having any rights to Klatala, forget it."

The two vertical lines between Suji's eyebrows deepened, and he glared at the cowering Reidar. "Joosef was guilty of protecting your dad, not killing him. Once he'd checked into his brother's creative accounting, he should've taken him to court."

Once Reidar was given time to check out some of the withdrawal of the large sums of money Kaarina had highlighted, she tapped on the Saami drum that sat in the middle of the table. "According to the information I got on the Internet, a kindergarten child could read the stories on this drum. The artwork clearly depicts that the first female Sajantila to show that she's capable of walking the path of the shaman is the one who can claim it. It's a magic drum, and it can't be passed down to anyone else. It's to be burned after I die."

"Those drawings are open to interpretation—"

"No, they're not. I've got proof of ownership. I could've never shape shifted without its accompaniment. And by the way you bashed it as if demons resided—"

"Okay. Okay," Reidar said, shoving the drum to the far end of the table. "You can have it. It didn't always work for me."

Kaarina pushed the logbook back in front of Reidar and turned to a page where she'd placed a bookmark. "In your dad's last entry, he wrote about your mother, Bergitte, giving birth to you during a fierce storm at sea. While huge waves battered the boat, you came into the world a month earlier than planned. It had been a difficult labor, and your mother died shortly after.

"While your dad's crew abandoned ship, Mikal wrote down a full confession of his sorry life. He planned on going down with his ship, so he'd put you into his brother-in-law, Erland Raattamaa's care.

“So I’m curious. How the devil did you manage to grow into a shaman bent on murder and revenge?”

Reidar exhaled noisily and threw up his hands. “Erland and his wife, Hulga, never got any breaks in life. While their other relatives inherited the fortunes made in the gold fields, they’d inherited a few reindeer. Tired of living on a subsistence level near Ketchikan, they returned to Saamiland when I was around fifteen.

“When they realized I had a shamanic gene, they’d asked a practicing Saami shaman to take me under his wing. For the past seven years I’ve been shaman to a few hundred Saami people in a small village north of Finland. But I got fed up with the job. The humility, the selflessness of the job.

“Saami women are so damn strong and powerful. They threatened to wreck my reputation if I didn’t stop abusing my power. I was just advertising my skills in the local paper, but they insisted that word of mouth is all I could count on.”

“For God sake, Reidar,” Kaarina said, “tell us why you turned Klatala into a ghost town.”

“I wanted to be rich like some of my relatives. My aunt and uncle are very old now, and I wanted them to experience the good life. I figured if those college kids could accidentally dig up gold nuggets from some of their archaeological sites, Klatala was the perfect place for an open pit gold mine.

“Late last spring, when no one noticed two hikers spending a few days in the mountains, I paid a geologist to make an initial estimate of the size and value of the gold on the mountains.

“I knew the cost of the feasibility studies could be astronomical and finding a company willing to pay for the explorations might take years. But after I found out it would be worthwhile to develop, I got really fired up.” He pulled out a pile of papers he’d tucked inside the pocket at the side of his cargo pants, and threw them on the table. “You guys can get rich, too. Just have a look at the work I’ve done.”

Kaarina glanced at the analysis sheets, drawings and photographs of the Kagona Mountain. “That’s all we need around here, a cyanide leach open pit gold mine that’ll blow the top off the mountains. It’ll operate for about ten years, and we’ll be left with poor air and water quality ... damaged fish and wildlife. And nobody would make any money except the guys who shell out the big bucks. There’s no trained labor force to draw on around here.”

Reidar rolled up his papers. “I have a sizeable amount to invest--”

“Where did that money come from? You said you were poor.”

“A miracle happened a few months ago. A woman named Astrid Mortensen died in Seattle, and her lawyer wrote and informed me that I was her sole beneficiary. He’d also enclosed a letter that Astrid had written shortly before she died. In it, I was told about the two million dollars my dad gave her thirty-two years ago. It’s a surprising amount of money now.”

Kaarina flipped to a page in the logbook where she’d turned down the corner. “Your dad wrote about Astrid. She was a Seattle restaurant owner, and he’d put her in charge of getting his stolen loot into an offshore bank account. The money was in her name from the start. She probably didn’t use it because the tax people would’ve checked into a windfall like that.”

Reidar gave a resigned shrug and hunched forward. “My dad cheated on my

mom, me and Joosef. And now I have to pay for his crimes.”

“Boo hoo,” Suji snapped. “What I want to know is how you knew when Lukwala and Ankau were ready to perform trances.”

Reidar slapped the logbook and his blue eyes narrowed. “Arvo. Who else? Last spring I told him that Indre was cheating on him. That I’d seen her on Kalervo’s boat several times. Arvo didn’t believe me at first. He said he’d never seen me around Klatala. But after I’d told him the reasons why I had no choice but to sneak around in the dead of night like his wife, I got his attention.

“Anyway, he was more than eager to help me get control of the village after I told him that developing an open pit mine on the mountain was in the cards.”

Kaarina glared at him. “I still don’t understand how Arvo was able to fill you in on my team’s every move this summer.”

“Working in the Turtle Shell alongside Amy and Indre, all he had to do was listen to their prattle.”

“And Arvo wasn’t just an informant, was he? You had him doing some of your dirty work, didn’t you?”

“As for those unfortunate cats, Arvo killed most of them. I had falcon under my spell when he snatched the ones that weren’t allowed out of the house. And who do you think sprayed red paint over Willie’s murals?”

Kaarina couldn’t help but wonder if this sad excuse for a human had been beamed down from a far off planet after he’d contaminated their air. “By interfering with Lukwala’s soul retrievals, you caused a man’s death. And, if Swan had been killed by those underworld demons of yours, Ankau could’ve died, too. And what about Wolf’s dead cub and the desecrated gravesite? Did your bear have anything to do with those crimes?”

“That old grizzly was no spirit aide of mine. He gave that mischievous little wolf cub a good whack without any urging from me. All I did was put the little buggler out of its misery by stabbing it and putting it in the cooler. And I was the one who opened those burial boxes and threw a few old bones around. Arvo and his bones--the guy was obsessed with them. I had to get his attention somehow. No wonder his wife looked elsewhere for attention.”

Willie jumped up from his seat at the end of the table and came over to Reidar. After sitting down beside him, he banged him over the head with his fist. “Giant squid nearly drowned Warren and he sure scared the hell out of me. What kind of a weirdo are you? Choosing that bizarre life form as one of your familiars ... it just proves how completely whacko you are.”

“Look at me. Those wounds you guys inflicted on squid ... my body double got them, too. After Warren hacked away at the club of suckers at the end of squid’s tentacle, my right foot was affected. All I can do is drag it. Stumbling and bumbling along, in need of a cane--”

Willie let out an animal-like growl and hit Reidar on the side of his forehead. “Too bad you weren’t inside your precious falcon when I whacked him on the head with a rock. It might’ve knocked some sense into you.”

Reidar held his arms over his head. “Damn it, my left eye’s gone blind and it’s giving me a giant migraine. Take it easy.”

Willie took in a deep pulsating breath. “Where in the hell were you hanging out

when you were doing your dirty work in Klatala?"

"No one ever noticed my powerboat. Those small fiords around here kept it under wraps. But mostly I stayed in the cannery ... the offices and the grocery store. I found lots of food, a sofa to sleep on. Then there were the times I camped out in the mountains." Reidar gasped for breath after Willie thrust his elbow into his side. "Hey, save a few blows for Arvo. He was the one at the wheel of the seiner that rammed Jerry's boat. His brother, Claes, was fishing around here, so he joined him on his boat. And when Claes and his crew slept in after a night of drinking, Arvo took over the wheel. And he was the one who tampered with the cable car, not me. Little did he know that Kaarina could've been killed because of Norm's neglect."

Suji's dark eyes appeared to be processing some heavy-duty loathing and indignation. "The Millport police are looking for you as we speak, and we're turning you over to them. Once those summer people on Snatali give evidence against you, you'll be put away for quite a while."

Amy hadn't moved during Reidar's confession. So, when she began choking back sobs, everyone turned her way. "It's all my fault. Me and my big mouth. I'm so sorry, Kaarina. I shouldn't have told Indre what you guys were planning to do." Dropping her head onto the table, she cried uncontrollably.

Kaarina put her arm around her shoulder. "Don't feel badly, Amy. We all thought Arvo was one of the team."

Reidar struggled to his feet and reached over for the logbook.

Kaarina quickly picked it up. "I'm giving this piece of evidence to the best lawyer in Seattle. That money you inherited belongs to dad's employees."

Willie slapped duct tape over Reidar's mouth and then taped his hands and feet together. "Warren and I have already been attacked by that possessed falcon, so that bird's a goner if his claws come anywhere near us again."

Fighting back panic after no one answered the phone at the Turtle Shell or the Maki bungalow, Kaarina threw up her hands. "Arvo must've suspected that Reidar would finger him, so he's on the run."

Suji reached for the phone. "I'm getting Warren, Kalervo, Norm and Jerry to help us search for him. Indre's in danger."

"Great," Kaarina said, "Then Willie, Amy and I'll map out the areas to be searched. We can break into groups."

* * * *

At three in the morning, Kaarina woke up on one of the tables in the Turtle Shell. Looking around and seeing no one, she jumped to the floor and rushed toward the door. There was a note taped to it. 'No sign of the Makis. Suji's going to feed us, and then we plan on crashing at the mansion. Warren'

Quickly leaving the building, Kaarina glanced down toward the moonlit docking area. Taking a quick intake of breath, she froze when she saw a shadowy figure making his or her way down to the floats in the harbor. Whoever it was appeared to be dragging what looked like a fishnet. The bits of lead made a scraping sound as they hit the planks on the ramp.

The floodlights came on then, and they beamed down on Arvo. The net he dragged appeared to be wrapped around a body. Oh, no. Had Arvo killed Indre?

Swiftly making her way down toward the wharf, Kaarina shoved back her rage

and contempt for the man everyone had trusted. This was no time for hate to make her reckless.

Energy flowed into her body as she called on her shamanic teachings. Breathing in slowly and deeply, she purged herself of any thoughts other than those involved in getting close to Arvo before he became aware of her. Over the past few months, the trusted lab technician had become just as maniacal as Reidar. He'd let a diabolical nutcase manipulate him to the point where he'd lost all sense of right and wrong.

Patting the sheath that held her knife, she got down on her stomach and crawled along toward the docking area like a crab in the sand. Thankful that she wore a dark T-shirt, she kept well out of sight until she reached the elongated row of sawhorses where a few old fishnets hung. From that position, she watched Arvo carefully. The way he frequently tripped on the netting and his uncoordinated gait indicated that he was drunk.

Arvo dropped the net beside the Black Hawk, and the sound of the lead sinkers reverberated along the pier. He then clambered awkwardly aboard the cruiser.

Reflecting the millions of stars and the moon overhead, the ocean glittered with sapphire and emeralds. The perfect place for the perfect murder. By the time the net rotted and the body rose to the surface, it would be unrecognizable.

If Indre was conscious--and Kaarina was almost sure she was the one tangled in that mess of ropes--the fearsome sickness in the poor woman's stomach would have her retching. With her brain torn apart by sheer terror, each breath she took would be more like a shudder.

While Arvo worked at hotwiring the boat, Kaarina slipped into the water. Staying under the pier, she swam close to the motor launch. Because Arvo would have to put the ramp down in order to haul Indre's body onto the boat, she came up with a plan.

Swimming back and forth in an effort to avoid turning into a frozen halibut, she thought about her range of powers. One of them included the right to kill her tribe's enemies. And when it came to wrecking the natural order of things around Klatala, Arvo had done it on a grand scale. Forcing a confession out of him, however, would be the better choice. If Indre were still alive she should be allowed to accuse him of trying to kill her and have him tried for attempted murder in the courts.

Shortly after she heard the boat's motor start up, she heard the thump of the ramp as it was put in place. Swimming below it, she reached up with both hands, grabbed Arvo's ankle and hauled him down into the water.

Pushing his head under water before he had a chance to take a deep breath, she brought her knee up and smashed him in the stomach. When he hit her neck with his elbow, water filled her throat. Using the full weight of her body, she was able to break free of him and struggle to the surface.

On surfacing, Arvo was knocked out when he smashed into one of the pilings, and the foam-covered waves of the incoming tide quickly submerged him.

During her first dive, there was no sign of him. No longer under the pier where the water was calmer, the incoming tide ripped at her clothes and slapped at her skin. She still managed to find the energy to fling herself back down under the restless surf.

Not able to see him on the second dive, she was sure he'd drowned, his body thrown off by a riptide and sucked out to the ocean. Her plan had been to render him so weak from lack of oxygen, he would've made a full confession of his crimes. Now he'd never be forced to suffer the consequences of his relentless evil.

Kaarina's lengthy time in the ocean wasn't the only cause of her uncontrollable shivering. Walking in the shallow water, now up to her knees in a heavy accumulation of kelp, the fear that Indre had been killed cancelled out the warmth of the night air.

Racing down the wharf, she knelt down to inspect the net and its contents. Sure enough, Arvo had used the ruined piece of gillnet that Kalervo had left in the cannery loft. Finding a steady pulse in Indre's neck, Kaarina breathed easier. My God, she was still alive. Arvo had planned to throw her into the ocean knowing full well that the lead sinkers would keep her body from floating to the surface.

Seconds later, Kaarina stared into a face distorted with pain, and her heart overflowed with compassion.

Indre's bloodshot eyes registered astonishment. Then relief. "Kaarina ... my God ... am I glad to see you. Arvo was going to drown me." Her eyes darted around as if to make sure her husband wasn't nearby. "When you phoned and said Suji and Willie were bringing in that evil shaman, Arvo blew a gasket. He went completely berserk."

Indre's words were coming out in stops and starts. "He'd been drinking all night, and when he thought you guys had called off the search for us, he dragged me down to the cannery. He knew about Kalervo and ... and he was going to make sure I'd never leave him. After he knocked me out, he must've taken my clothes off before he wrapped me up in this fishnet."

"Sh, sh, sh. everything's all right. Now try to stay still while I untangle this mess."

The lights beaming down on them from the dock floodlight revealed the lacerations on Indre's face and body. Fearful that the lead sinkers and netting might do even more damage to her skin, Kaarina was forced to work slowly. When Indre was finally free, she was relieved to see that she could stand up without support.

Indre wrapped her arms around her body. "You killed him, didn't you?"

"No. He hit his head against one of the pilings. I tried to save him, but I couldn't."

"That's just as well. There was really no way out for him and he knew it. Before he dragged me into the mountains, he told me he was guilty of many of the crimes around here."

After Indre stretched her arms and then her legs, she clung to Kaarina. "I'm so cold. I'm beginning to wonder if I'll ever thaw out."

"Come on. Let's break into Warren's galley and find you some blankets. Then I'll get out his First Aid Kit and try to patch you up. After that, Kalervo will take you over to the Millport Hospital."

Chapter Seventeen

Two weeks later, Kaarina was almost sick with anticipation as she waited for the ferry to maneuver into place at the dock. On catching a glimpse of her dad in a wheelchair looking gaunt and tired, her spirits sagged like a punctured balloon. Poor health was propelling him onward to his next destination.

Once her mother, Inga, pushed the wheelchair down the gangplank, Kaarina grabbed her and kissed her. Bending down, she gave her dad a kiss. Bloodshot eyes, sunken cheeks, white stubble on a sagging chin and a cap of cropped white hair combined to give his face the look of a desperately sick man.

Joosef smiled up at her. "We're finally here, Kaari. Damn it, I missed the place." He lowered his face when the tears flowed.

His voice was so weak Kaarina barely heard him over the sound of the waves, the squawking seagulls searching for the tiny scraps of tsunami leftovers on the beach. The voices coming from the end of the dock added to the din. Over two hundred people had turned out to show their respect for their leader.

Kaarina walked beside her mother, as she pushed the wheelchair over the newly constructed surface of the broad-planked fishing pier. Stretching out a half mile over the deep water, the construction workers had worked feverishly in order to have it completed before Joosef arrived. The boardwalks had been repaired, too, so wheeling him around the village wouldn't be a problem whenever he was ready for a tour.

"Your dad could hardly wait to get here," Inga whispered. "It seemed to take forever before his doctor gave him the go-ahead. Clay's death hit him hard. He had another minor heart attack--a terrible setback." Because her mother had always kept her hair blond and her skin well protected from the weather, her sixty years of living had yet to catch up with her. She'd traveled the world, but when Joosef had his first heart attack, she'd been happy to clip the wings of her independent spirit. Loyal and devoted during the past five years, while his health spiraled downward, she'd stuck to him like glue.

Joosef was soon acknowledging a wave of a hand here, a blown kiss there, as well as dozens of welcoming remarks. Then the clapping began, softly at first, and then it grew louder and louder.

After her mother nudged Kaarina with her elbow, indicating Joosef was emotionally spent, she quickly steered the wheelchair through the throng. When they reached the tram barn, Kaarina pushed the wheelchair into the little train. By removing the two seats in the back and building a movable ramp, Norm had made it wheelchair accessible.

Joosef let out a deep sigh that was heard over the hum of the wheels. "I love the view from this little car. The way the ocean stretches out forever. It's so unknowing in its depths. It's like the universe. We never know what lies beyond.

* * * *

Kaarina had a chance to talk to her mother after lunch when Joosef had fallen into a fitful sleep. They sat on the sofa in front of the bay window that overlooked the village.

In each other's company, they felt free to give in to their terrible sense of loss.

Inga had Kaarina's hand in a vice-like hold. "I missed five years of Clay's life while he was up here. He was only thirty-eight. So young. Mikal's greed and deception has brought so much grief and shame to your dad's door." Anger dwelt deep inside her eyes and the makeup on her thick black lashes ran down her face. She swiped at her tears with shaky fingers. "When the State Troopers informed us that the helicopter's rotors had been tampered with ... we knew that Reidar had killed him ... his own cousin ... how bizarre is that?"

"Believe me, Mom. Reidar is bound to suffer painful consequences for his criminal acts. Whatever a shaman puts into the universe, it will come back to him. That's the way of the shaman."

"I'm so sorry, Kaari. Your dad and I were skeptical about your aboriginal spiritual beliefs. Now we fully acknowledge the power you inherited from Maga. By using your inherited gift and putting your life on the line, Joosef was able to find some peace."

"How's dad doing, Mom? He seems so frail."

Her mother looked down at hands that were in a battle with each other. "He had a minor stroke when he heard that Clay was dead, and weakened dramatically. But he contemplates death without fear. To him, it's just one stage of his life coming to an end. He believes he's had many past lives, and there are many more to come. But his health may improve now that he's in the swim of things. That flow of strength from his mind keeps him going. That Heritage Center ... he'll make sure he's around for that. I'm not sure that I should give you the news before he does--"

"Go ahead, I won't tell."

"He's decided that the mansion will make a great Heritage Center."

"Great. Once Dad gives us the go-ahead, everyone will make it a top priority. We can start our move into the millwright's home tomorrow."

"That'll be your house. Ankau has asked Joosef and me to move into the lodge, and I couldn't be happier. It's a communal lodge, and I'll always have someone to help me lift your dad and help him with his bathing. Norm and Suji can drop in on him any time. And Ankau can spend time with him now that he's retired."

When Joosef joined them an hour later, her mother got up. "You two have a lot to say to one another, so I'll make myself scarce."

Kaarina moved her dad's wheelchair closer to the sofa. "It's great to see you back in your old stomping ground, Dad. But you never really left it, did you? You always knew what was going on up here during the past five years."

"Norm. He kept me in the know."

"But he shouldn't have. He knew how sick you were."

"We've been friends for forty years. So there was no way he could've kept me in the dark. But there's so much going on around here. Maybe he missed out on a few things."

"So you know I'm now a fully-fledged shaman?"

"Sure do. Norm had a talk with Ankau. He knew you'd covered the course... right of inheritance, near-death-experience. I knew about your two-month coma, too. Your mother told me about it when my health appeared to be on an upswing. Now tell me what you experienced when you allowed incarnate spirits to permeate your mind. Shape shifting is the way I look at death. It's just another shift. By believing in parallel worlds,

Clay's death has been a little easier for me to deal with. He came up to Klatala as a favor to me. Left the university job he loved and tried to bring peace to the little village. He didn't even like living here--"

Kaarina interrupted his train of thought. "I thought you wanted to hear about my out-of-body travels."

"I do. I do. Death is not far off. So I'm shutting down my analytical thinking as I approach 'Ground Zero'."

"Way to go, Dad. It's much like the shamans inducing an altered state of consciousness in preparation for traveling to the underworld, the middle world and the overworld."

"Now I want to hear it all. Tell me how you outwitted that killer."

From her confrontation with Reidar's wolf in the underworld to Reidar's try at getting giant squid to kill her, she had his rapt attention. Hanging on to her every word, his sick eyes loomed larger and brighter. "That's it, Dad. That's how I spent my summer vacation."

And now that our population is back up, tell me how they're all going to keep busy."

Kaarina laughed. "Your determination to keep and spread the money here in the Klatala has put all the villagers in your debt, Dad. The local fishermen are fishing exclusively for us and the other canneries in the archipelago."

"And the tourist potential looks good, too. We've got a dugout canoe touring company ready to go. And, because people want to experience things as well as look at exhibits, we've got hands-on activity. There are stations where people can weave baskets and do some stone carving. And then there's the workshop for totem-pole carving as well as a few artist studios."

"How about the Heritage Center?"

"We've got everything ready. But where will it be built?" Her mother had told her about her dad's idea, but she wanted to hear him talk about his brain-wave.

"We'll use the mansion."

"But Dad," Kaarina said, "the cable car is outdated, dangerous and so labor-intensive."

"I knew it was wrong of my dad to build his mansion up here. I guess he thought height gave a suggestion of power. I've already got a couple of engineers signed up. Next week they'll start construction on a more solid mode of transport. One that tourists will be eager to ride."

"As for hauling up the artifacts from the Turtle Shell, I think we should use the chopper. It can pick up a ton of stuff in one fell swoop."

Indre, Amy and Willie want to be in charge of that project. I've put them in charge of hiring extra staff. Kalervo, Amy's new husband--"

"I think we should give them some kind of a celebration. What do you think?"

"What about a reception here before we empty the place of furniture? Suji can be in charge of refreshments."

"Great idea. Suji, now there's a loyal friend. But I wasn't loyal. When he was a baby, I wanted him out of the village. Sad eh? A baby!"

"Now let's not go looking into old garbage. Suji's building a heliport and a new home, and he's happy as a clam."

“What about Kalervo? Is he still fishing? I don’t think he ever enjoyed the life on the sea.”

“He hated it. He’s teamed up with Jerry and taken over the old cannery. That heritage site is now ready for your inspection. And Norm’s happy about your decision to make him manager of the new cannery. So the team that helped me nail Reidar are all gainfully employed.”

“Now, my brave shaman, I want to meditate about your travels to non-ordinary realities. The comfort I get from your experiences ... you have no idea.” His voice was ragged, and each of his words tore through Kaarina’s insides like rough sandpaper. When he shook out a pill from a small vial and placed it under his tongue, she could no longer push back the tears.

“Then I’ll take a walk down to the bay and check out Warren. That reminds me, he wants to buy your motor launch.”

“Won’t you need it?”

“I’m going to buy Norm’s motorboat. He and Jerry bought Kalervo’s combination troller and gillnetter, and they plan on turning it into a yacht.”

“Well then, tell Warren to come up with a fair price.”

“You must meet him, Dad.”

“Yeah. Norm told me that he found Mikal’s logbook. Those underwater explorations of his, they sure paid off, didn’t they?”

“Now Dad, is there anything you don’t know about?”

“Yeah. Norm told me that Warren usually heads back to Seattle when the rainy season’s upon us. But he hasn’t. So ... what’ve you done to him?”

“What’s he done to me is more like it. I’m crazy about him, but every time I talk about my new life as a shaman, he backs away.”

“Surely two people trained in law enforcement can push their differences aside. He has his kind of power and you have yours.”

“Okay, I get your drift.”

“Now I need a rest, and you have chores to do.”

* * * *

Kaarina found Suji out back inspecting the whirlybird’s tires. “Hey there. What do you think about giving Kalervo and Indre a wedding reception here in the mansion?”

“And you want me to cater it?”

“Right.”

“Then I’m your man. There’s so much to choose from in the company store these days. And once I get Indre and Amy to help me round up some fall flowers, send out invitations and set up the tables, we should be ready in three days.”

“By way of thanks, I’ve got some good news for you. Mom wants to furnish your new home with that antique furniture you’ve been polishing for the past thirty years. She’s no longer treating ancient furniture like precious children. You get first choice.”

Suji slid to the ground and dropped his head onto his bent knees. “I don’t deserve anything. It’s all my fault.”

Kaarina knelt down beside him. “What’s your fault?”

“Reidar would never have come to Klatala if it wasn’t for my interference. Mikal’s wife, Bergitte, was my girl friend before she broke my heart and married Mikal.”

“Yeah, I heard there was a lot of tongue wagging around here in the early sixties.”

Her mother had told her about Suji's doomed love affair. Bergitte's racist parents had done everything they could to break them up.

"Bergitte's sister, Hulga, is married to Erland Raattamaa, the guy Mikal put in charge of Bergitte's baby. I met Hulga in Ketchikan when I went to Bergitte's memorial service.

"Anyway, Hulga said she'd keep in touch with me, but the only time I heard from her was when she'd moved back to Saamiland fifteen years later. She'd informed me of her change of address, and told me that Bergitte's son was in good health."

Suji's gaze was penetrating and he held it for far too long, but Kaarina remained silent. She'd seen the card with the Raattamaa's change of address, and she'd thought Suji had something to hide.

"So, when Mikal's mistress, Astrid Mortensen, died and left a bequest to Reidar, I was able to give her lawyer information as to Hulga Raattamaa's whereabouts. But Hell, I didn't know it was stolen money or how big a stash it was. And I also didn't know that Reidar would use it to come to Klatala and start up his reign of terror."

"Whoa there, Suji. You haven't done anything wrong. Reidar and that money were bound to find a way to get together. That lawyer would've hired someone to track him down. But damn it anyway. You've now dumped some guilt onto my shoulders."

"Aha." Suji's mouth was a grim line and his eyes had narrowed to slits. "You've been saying bad things about me."

"Thinking not saying. There were a couple of times when I doubted your loyalty. When I came across a change of address card with a 1987 postmark, I was curious. It was from the Raattamaas and addressed to you, and I was sure you were up to something. I was twelve then, and we'd spent such a lot of time together. But I couldn't remember you mentioning that you knew someone in Saamiland.

"Another time, when Warren had straightened up the office desk in the cannery, he came across a Seattle lawyer's business card. On the back was your name and under it were the words 'in re to Mortensen will'. That lawyer had opened his office just a few months ago, and you'd never mentioned anyone by the name of Mortensen. What was I to think?"

"Kaari Yaki, how could you mistrust me? I'm the one who tried to keep you on the straight and narrow when you were a wild teenager. I've been a solid citizen. Ask anybody."

"Shut up, Suji. I've eased your conscience. How about some squid pro quo?"

"Aha, a Freudian Slip. Are you equating me with that slippery giant squid?"

Kaarina laughed. "No, no, no. Big difference. Just one of you is a bottom-dwelling scum sucker. The other one inspires fantastic tales." She made a run for it.

* * * *

Kaarina found no sign of Warren when she reached the cleaned-up beachfront at Klatala Bay. The Black Hawk was at anchor, so she climbed on board. Picking up the key where Warren left it under the fire extinguisher, she went inside to put on her wet suit. Following that, she untied her old rowboat and went in search of Wanda. While kayaking in the archipelago, she was glad her hyperactive spirit helper hadn't showed up. She'd been in no mood for a dunking while searching for signs of Reidar's hideout. Now she was desperate to know if the porpoise was still alive.

Kaarina was well out of the bay when her boat began to sink. Turning, she saw

giant squid's tentacle wrapped around the motor. Quickly grabbing her knife, she tried to cut through the large saw-toothed graspers on the tentacle club like Warren had done, but it wasn't working. What she needed was an axe.

The creature's powerful grasp continued to suck the boat underwater, so she got out and began to swim to shore. In a lightning move, the giant squid had its other tentacle wrapped around her life jacket. The harder she tried to free herself, the tighter its grip. Kaarina yelled and screamed obscenities as the monster held her high above the surface waters.

Out of nowhere, there was Wanda. Kaarina felt a jolt when her seven hundred pound body, with the sheer force of her muscle, crashed into the nightmarish serpent. In seconds, the tentacle that had encircled the boat grasped Wanda's stocky body and held her fast.

The rowboat rose to the surface. Although it was upside down, Kaarina--no longer held high--was able to grab onto it. No longer being jerked around, she was able to focus on the squid's eye. It was as if Reidar's fragmented soul had taken on a distinctive face and it was radiating from that huge orb. Concentrating on that image, she coalesced all her psychic powers into a powerful whole. It was unmistakable. Reidar had projected his alter ego into that tentacled squid demon. He must've been allowed out on bail, and in order to shape shift he would've needed Arvo on the drum. That meant Arvo hadn't drowned.

She watched with sickening horror as the squid's arms with their sharp hooks and suctioning grapplers came into play as Wanda's head was pushed into the center of what looked like a writhing nest of serpents. Now butted up against the squid's slimy head, a powerful razor-sharp horny-toothed beak ripped off chunks of Wanda's flesh and its arms shoved it down its throat.

Although much of the Wanda's whistles, groans and clicks were at a frequency beyond the range of human hearing, Kaarina knew she must've called for help. So where was the pod she traveled with? Why hadn't they come to her rescue? Wanda normally came up for air every two minutes and she'd already been down for five.

Wanda was drowned and half-eaten when Kaarina heard the sound of giant squid's arch enemy, sperm whale. Turning, she saw part of its dark, brownish gray body above the water. Inside his huge block of a head was a chamber filled with five hundred gallons of oil, and its sonar pings sounded much like a pile driver. Could she imagine a more welcome sound? Not on your life.

Instantly, both Wanda and Kaarina were free and the ink-squirting monster, with lightning speed, threw its hook-laden tentacle clubs out thirty feet or so and struck the whale with tremendous force. Quickly wrapping its snaky appendages around the whale's head in a chokehold, it began to wrestle its enemy as it brought him in closer and closer.

As Wanda floated away--a corpse that would serve as food and keep the wheel of life in motion--Kaarina didn't move. She was awestruck.

The whale's high-frequency sounds changed abruptly and Kaarina heard an even more high intensity focused burst, somewhat like a sonic boom. The mottled squid appeared to be frozen in place. Stunned by the aftershocks, Kaarina watched as the whale, using its lower jaw in a pincerlike maneuver, plucked the squid out of the water and sucked it into his mouth much like a huge vacuum cleaner. The cephalopod and Reidar's wandering spirit were swallowed whole.

As Kaarina swam toward shore, the whale came close enough for her to see its dimpled grey skin and white lips. The hub-capped sized suction marks were unmistakable proof that a giant squid had made a serious attempt to strangle him in previous battles.

When he twisted to see her, she saw his characteristic male keel. There was no doubt in her mind that she was in the company of Ankau's guardian spirit, Floppy Flukes.

Slowing down for a moment, Floppy Flukes looked at her with his left eye. It was as if he sensed they had something in common. To her surprise, he swam sideways until he was parallel with her. About ten feet separated them as they swam together, eye to eye, for about three or four minutes. Then he headed out to sea.

Cursing giant squid under her breath, Kaarina wondered what good that cannibal, like the deranged shaman who was using his power for evil, was in the realm of things. He wasn't even edible. Bitter ammonia kept it at near-neutral buoyancy, so it probably tasted like urine.

But the butt-ugly monster didn't ask to be thrown up to the surface, she admonished herself. A tsunami had set everything out of whack. All that mysterious intelligent creature wanted was a life in the deepest darkest depths of the ocean and two thousand pounds of fish per week.

Like her cousin Reidar, she was implicated in Wanda's cruel death. Nearing the end of her life span, the speed-loving bow-rider had tried to save Kaarina from a giant squid. Because of her bravery--apart from a body covered in bruises and a possible eardrum rupture--she'd survived in tact.

My God, she thought as she floated on her back, she'd been a witness to a clash of the titans. A sixty-ton whale and the one-ton mystery of the deep had performed their fight to the death on the surface waters instead of four thousand feet down in the icy-cold depths.

* * * *

Warren's employees had banded together and bought his detective agency, and he'd used that money to buy the Black Hawk. As he sat on the deck looking out at the ocean, he thought of how his perception had changed during the past few months. No longer frozen in a time warp, he looked ahead with a fresh eye.

He was getting more and more into Kaarina's dancing with wolves philosophy. Instead of thinking a shaman's beliefs were fictional--stolen from the pages of a child's storybook--he now believed it was the other way around. Fairy tales were rooted in the centuries-old experiences of the shamans and their myths and fables, more often than not, had happy endings.

Sure, his PI business had a solid reputation. Lawyers had hired his team when it came to getting evidence against criminals who managed to hoodwink hardened police detectives. Rewarding as that was, it wasn't as good as life could get.

This world around the archipelago had captured his imagination for years now. The deep power of the forests, mountains and sea had the frenetic world of the big city fading to black. So living up here for four months of the year wasn't going to work for him anymore. Maybe a lifetime wouldn't be enough, either. In that case, maybe the shaman he'd fallen for could arrange for them to hang around for as long as they wanted.

Then there she was, the woman who'd awakened him from a long sleep. Rushing down the wharf to meet her, he was eager to hear about what happened at Reidar and Arvo's trial that morning in Juneau.

Kaarina grabbed his hand and they sat down on the dock. "I was going to phone you when I got back from Juneau an hour ago, but I wanted to tell you in person."

"The jury couldn't have been out long."

"Just a couple of hours. Reidar had jumped bail when he made that try at getting giant squid to drown me, so he had a year added on to his four-year sentence. They got Arvo on attempted murder. Indre and I made sure of that. He'll be out of circulation for fifteen years."

"Why did Arvo get together with Reidar again? I thought he hated the guy for squealing on him."

"That money that Reidar's dad had stolen, he'd handed half of it over to Arvo. He was desperate. He couldn't have induced that shape shift into giant squid without Arvo beating the drum. Poor Arvo, he had no idea that he'd been given stolen loot and it would soon be in the hands of the lawyers."

"By killing me, they thought they still have a chance at making it rich with open-pit gold mining. Dad didn't count. They had him dead of heart failure in a couple of years."

"Reidar looked terrible at the trial. Gaunt and skeletal, he was hooked up to an oxygen tank. Giant squid died in sperm whale's belly with Reidar's vital essence inside him. So he's doomed. There'll be no soul retrieval for that murderer. Those messages from his brain to his limbs will go unanswered, and he'll experience a waning of his sexual strength."

"That Sperm whale arriving just in time to save you from being eaten by that monster. What unbelievable luck!"

"Not really luck. I just found out that it was a planned rescue. Jerry was over at Millport when Reidar escaped from jail. And when he caught sight of Arvo down at the docks, he knew they were up to something. So he phoned the Johnsons immediately. That's when Amy and Willie reluctantly helped Ankau induce his last trance. Ankau was sure Reidar planned to merge astrally into giant squid's body. He had no idea that it was me that Reidar planned to kill. He just wanted that evil bugger out of circulation. So, for the last time, he'd made a successful astral projection into Sperm Whale's body."

"That's incredible! Was Ankau harmed in any way?"

"No. Much to Amy's surprise. But there'll be no more magical flights for my old mentor. I'm going to take over his job."

"No surprise. Congratulations. You've certainly earned the honor."

"Thank you. But now I've got something else on my mind."

"I'm all ears." He lied. It wasn't his ears that had her full attention. A rush of memories had surfaced. Indulgences like heart-stopping kisses and touches that had left him unable to breathe had taken place in that nearby motor launch. Reacquainting himself with those sensations was what he had on his mind. So he hoped this was to be a short chat.

"I'm going to make you an offer. This village has two important job openings. I've filled the medical position, and the law enforcement job is yours for the asking."

"I'll accept the job as policeman if you fill the empty position in my heart. It's been vacant for some time. I have another proposal to make, too. Norm tells me the guys in the machine shop have rounded up some spare engine parts the ferry is sorely in need of. In a couple of hours, it's making an unscheduled stop in Klatala before it heads for

Juneau.

“So we still have time to get on board. The captain can marry us, and when we reach Juneau we can make a stopover. But there’ll be no tripping out in the mountains. A honeymoon suite will be our one and only destination. ”

“Sounds good to me. I’ll phone mom and tell her to pack my bags for a honeymoon trip. Then I’ll get the yacht underway while you pack.”

The nonchalant way Kaarina said ‘sounds good to me’ didn’t fool Warren. Her body was flooded with heat just like his. A blush had scalded her face. He knew instinctively that she thought an old-fashioned happily-ever-after union would add another fascinating dimension to her mystical calling.

He wasn’t kidding himself, though. Some of her jobs as shaman would always have him on tenterhooks. Thankfully, low-level work, where she used herbs and hands-on healing, were to be her main concerns. As for her soul-retrievals, he was going to make himself scarce whenever one of those performances were in progress.

Not to worry. There were the perks. He’d be called into service to keep her ‘giving-up-control’ capabilities finely tuned. And those flights he’d take her on would be far more thrilling than any of her shadow-catching ventures.

When it came to tapping into the universe, he was no slouch at opening up secret energy portals. He had an unlimited supply of sensual moves related to imaging, shifting and merging. Before their exercise was over, she’d be crashing through dimensions unheard of in her philosophy.

The End