

SONIA ANTAKI



RED DOVE

Listen to the Wind

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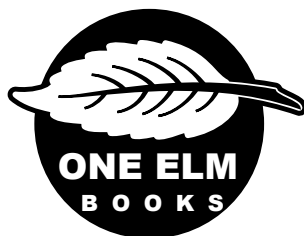


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BY SONIA ANTAKI

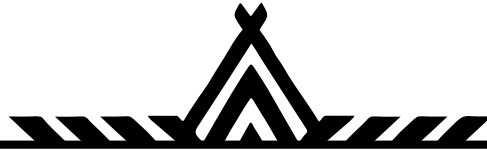
WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY ANDREW BOSLEY





**This is an original story,
Dedicated to my Goddaughter, Lily Spotted Elk, Lakota—
Descendant of the man who led his people at Wounded Knee**





Introduction

I first met Sonia at an event I was hosting for Chief Arvol Looking Horse, (the 19th keeper of the Sacred White Buffalo Calf Pipe). After striking up a friendly conversation, I could see that we were kindred spirits of sorts. Subsequent visits revealed that she was writing a book for young readers about a 13-year old half-Lakota, half-white girl.

Since my own ancestry dates back to include my Great Grandfather, Wiyaka Sakpe (Six Feathers), who rode with Crazy Horse in “The Battle of Little Big Horn”, or as our people refer to as “The Battle of the Greasy Grass”, it seemed only natural that I would help with a few details to make the story more “authentic”, even though it is a work of fiction.

Red Dove, Listen to the Wind is a tale of a mixed-blood girl who struggles to bring her worlds together. It is an entertaining work that shares the Native American experience of a turbulent time in U.S. history with our world today.

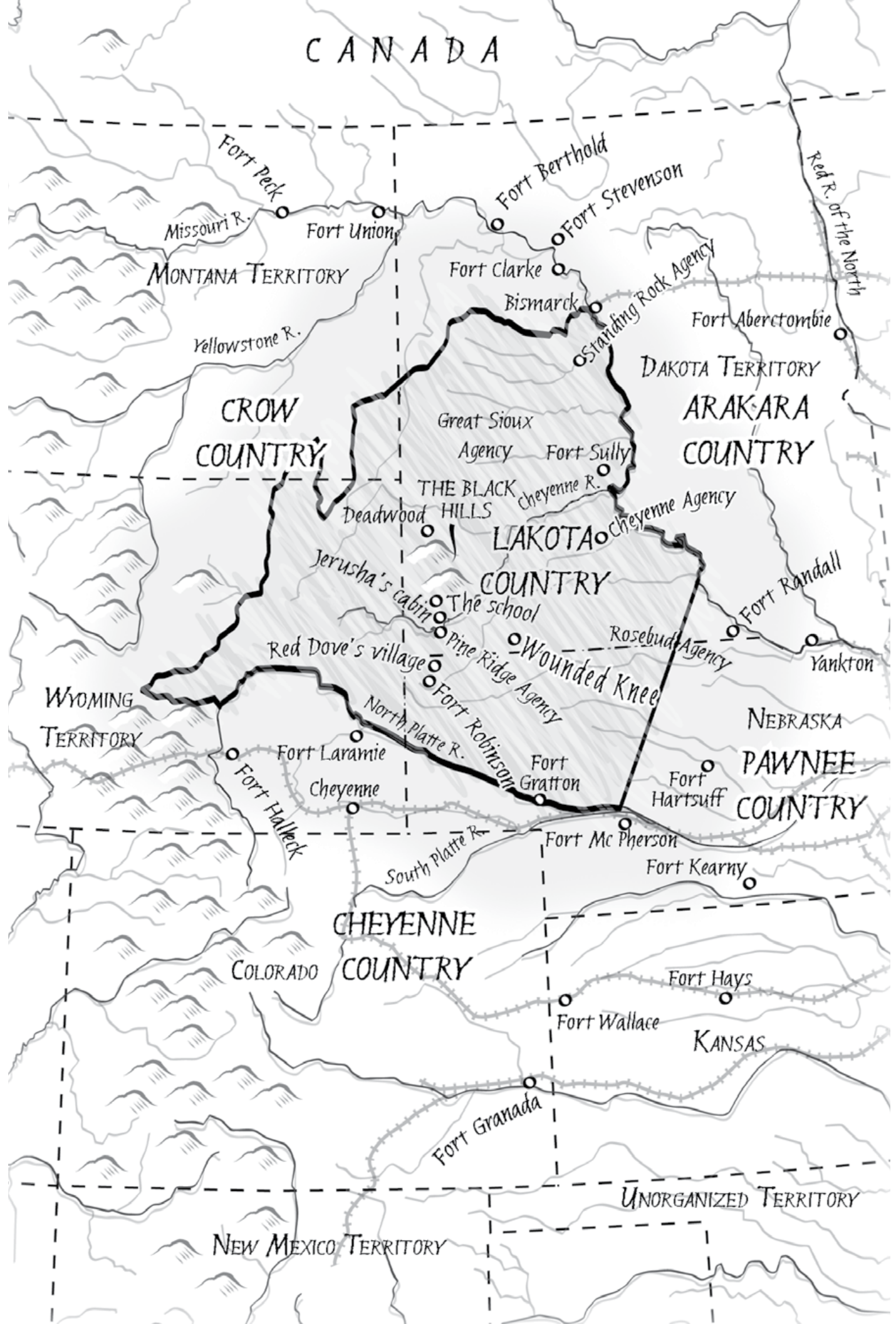
As the story unfolds, you feel the angst of an adolescent girl who has a lust for life, but who is riddled with frustration, curiosity and a little rebellion for good measure—something most young people still experience.

I read it non-stop, alternating between scolding this precocious youngster and cheering her tenacious search for a place to belong.

Red Dove, Listen to the Wind is a good read for all ages.

—Linda Sixfeathers, Lakota Sioux







Foreword

When Sonia Antaki asked me to consult for *Red Dove, Listen to the Wind*, I agreed, because I knew how important it was to bring this story of traveling between worlds, told through the eyes of a thirteen-year-old girl, to an audience of new readers.

I am Lakota, and my daughter Lily and I are descended from the man who led our people at Wounded Knee. The history books call him Chief Big Foot—Si Tanka—but his true name was Spotted Elk—Unpan Gleska—the name that my daughter and I carry now.

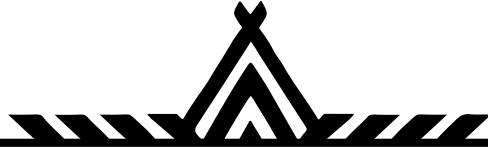
Like many Lakota growing up on South Dakota's Pine Ridge Reservation in the 1970s, my childhood was marked by poverty and loss. I know what it is to attend a school like the one described in the story. I also know what it is to live with the legacy of Wounded Knee.

Red Dove, Listen to the Wind is a work of fiction, but it tells a tale that resonates still, in the hopes that some young reader, boy or girl, will grow up to help right the wrongs that have been visited on our people for far, far too long.

—Calvin Spotted Elk, Lakota







Kantasa Wi

The Moon-of-Ripe-Plums

Dakota Territory—Late Summer, 1890



“**G**irls don’t hunt,” Red Dove’s brother said. “So go away!”

Red Dove pretended not to hear. She pointed to the flock of wild turkeys squawking and squabbling in the meadow below. “We’ll go hungry if you miss again, Walks Alone, so let me try.” She pulled her brother’s ash wood bow out of his hand.

He jerked it back. “I’m not letting you use my arrows,” he said, glaring.

“I don’t need yours. I have my own. Wait here.” Red Dove darted towards the old cottonwood tree. Scrambling up to the knothole, she pulled out her secret treasure: a quiver of arrows.

She raced back but her brother was nowhere in sight. “I told you to wait!” she cried.

Branches clawed her face and tore at the fringe of her deerskin robe as she struggled through the dense chokecherry bushes.

She felt a tap on her shoulder and spun around. Walks Alone put a finger to his lips and pointed to a flock of birds. "Over there. You've frightened them and now they're too far away," he said softly.

Red Dove followed the flight of the big, ungainly birds. She glanced back at their village, nestled in the safety of the Black Hills. It was summer's end; the month called the Moon-of-Ripe-Plums, and cold would be coming soon. Smoke from the cooking fires mingled with the sweet smell of *papa*, the dried venison that would see them through the winter.

Red Dove and her brother followed the birds until finally, in the patch of trees at the edge of the meadow, they came upon the flock. "There," she whispered.

Walks Alone pointed at the biggest tom in the center, strutting and fanning its tail. He raised his bow, pulled the string and shot.

The hens set up a shriek and rose, flapping, into the air.

"You missed! Why didn't you let me do it?"

Walks Alone threw down his bow and Red Dove lunged to pick it up. Before he could stop her, she fitted an arrow, pulled back and let fly.

It found its mark and the turkey plummeted to earth.

"What did you just do?" Her brother's eyes were round with disbelief.

Pride and wonder mingled in Red Dove's chest. What *did* I just do?

She raced over and stared at the creature before her,

motionless except for the breeze that ruffled its feathers. Then she looked at the bow in her hand and felt a surge of pleasure.

"I've been practicing. With your bow—"

"You took my bow? You're not supposed to hunt. It's not our way."

"Don't tell Mother. She's always so angry with me," Red Dove said, picturing her mother's face when told her rebellious daughter had broken yet another rule.

"Only if you tell me where you got those arrows." Walks Alone pointed to the buckskin quiver. "They look special, like Grandfather's—"

"*I* made them."

"*You* made them? Did he show you how?"

Red Dove felt her brother's envy. "I just watched him while he was working. Nobody saw me. Mother was too busy and you were always so sick." She flinched when she saw his angry face. "Well, you *were*!"

"Be careful what you say to people, Gray Eyes—"

"Don't call me Gray Eyes. I can't help it if my father was white."

Her brother shrugged. "You're right; it's not your fault. But you should know better. You've lived thirteen winters. You're old enough now to respect our ways." He reached down and plucked the longest tail feather from the dead tom. "Here." He pushed it into Red Dove's tightly wound braid. "For your coming-of-age ceremony."

"Thank you, Brother—"

"Don't thank me. Thank the animal."

"*Wopila*," she said, and bowed her head to thank the creature that had given its life.

>> *Wasichu* <<

Red Dove and her brother carried their kill through the forest to the clearing. Walks Alone moved steadily ahead, the bird slung over his shoulder. Red Dove followed until they came to the glistening stream their mother loved.

“We have a surprise!” Red Dove called when she saw their mother sitting on a lichen-covered stone.

Falling Bird smiled at her handsome son. “What have you got there?”

Resentment curled inside Red Dove. Why does she always look at him—and not at me?

Walks Alone threw the bird on the ground and grinned. “A turkey,” he said.

“But I’m the one who brought it down,” Red Dove blurted.

The look of shock on her mother’s face frightened Red Dove. “What? Have I raised you so badly that you do not know your place?” said Falling Bird. “Girls don’t hunt—unless they have to.”

Red Dove bowed her head, filled with sudden shame.

“These things are taught so we can live in balance.”

“Yes, Mother,” Red Dove said. Why is it I can’t ever seem to do things right? Is it because I’m half white?

“Listen,” her brother said and cocked his head. They all heard it then: the clatter of cart wheels and the beat of horses’ hooves. Soon, they saw the source of the sound.

Wasichu! Red Dove thought. White people... sometimes they bring food.

She scrambled towards them, but her mother pulled her back. “Wait here.”

But Red Dove wasn't afraid and her curiosity was stronger than Falling Bird's grasp. She broke away to follow the wagon as it rolled into their village.

A crowd gathered around the two whites who were sitting in the carriage. The few men who remained in the village stood silently by, while anxious mothers held tight to their children.

Red Dove's grandfather crossed the ground towards them. Gray Eagle was thin-boned and short of stature, but his frail body held a power his people knew well. He lifted his head and stared out of age-clouded eyes.

Red Dove's mother wagged a finger and warned her to stay back, but Red Dove edged closer.

A gaunt, leather-faced man in dirty denim and sweat-stained buckskin climbed off the wagon, his battered gray hat pulled low over red-rimmed eyes. I've seen him before, Red Dove thought. He's the one they call Old Tom, the white man who speaks our language. He's *Iyeska*... a traveler between our worlds.

Old Tom said something to the plump, pink-faced woman in the carriage. Her pale blue eyes behind silvery glasses were soft and frightened, and a drop of sweat rolled from under her lacy black headdress. She tugged at a faded gray shawl that kept slipping off her shoulders over the shiny purple dress that clung to her curves.

White women dress so strangely, thought Red Dove. Women in our village would be ashamed to wear tight clothes like that. And her hair is a funny color, almost orange... .

The woman squinted at Old Tom, but did not climb down. Red Dove's grandfather raised his hand in greeting.

The woman said something in a language that Red Dove recognized as English, from what she had learned from her mother and brother, who had lived with the whites.

When the woman had finished, Old Tom began to translate so they all could understand. "It has been decided," he said, "that the Lakota people should learn to live like white men—"

Red Dove's mother gasped.

Would that be terrible? Red Dove wondered.

"There isn't enough food for you here," Old Tom continued. "Summer is over and winter will soon come." He looked back at the woman, took off his grimy hat and wiped his brow. He ran his fingers through the wisps of hair still clinging to his head and mumbled something. The woman nodded and said something more.

Kicking up a clod of dirt, Old Tom put his hat back on. "The U.S. government will give you food if you send your children to the school and live on the reservation like the rest of your people have done... ." He seemed startled by the words the woman was making him say.

Red Dove watched her mother's face. Her mouth was set in a firm line, but tears were pooling in her eyes.

When Old Tom had finished, Gray Eagle raised his head and stared at the *Wasichu* woman. "We are hungry. Our young men are gone and there are no more buffalo. You have killed them all." He stared into the distance. "We have heard about your schools... and what happens there. You want us to live on the reservation and trade our children for food?" He paused and lowered his head. "No."

He nodded at Old Tom, who began translating to the woman. She frowned and said something back.

“This is different,” Old Tom said, echoing her words in Lakota. “The school we are talking about was started by the priests, the ones your leader Red Cloud invited—”

“Red Cloud is *not* our leader. And *we* did not invite them.”

“If you do not let them go,” Old Tom went on, not daring to meet the old man’s eyes, “the soldiers will come. And take them. By force.”

A trickle of fear crept down Red Dove’s spine.

Gray Eagle stared at the woman. She stared back. Neither spoke. Then he raised his hand to signal he was finished and moved closer to the fire. When the smoke had cleared, Grandfather was gone.

The white woman looked frantically around. She shrieked something to Old Tom, but he just shrugged and climbed calmly onto the wagon. Then he flicked the reins and the horses jerked away, jostling the woman’s floppy headdress loose.

She grabbed it just in time as her small, light-colored eyes fell on Red Dove. Now, they were no longer afraid. Now they looked cold, hard, determined. “I’ll be back,” they seemed to say.

>> Even If We All Go Hungry <<

Smoke from the council tent rose in a curl and drifted into the sky as the village waited to hear the fate of their children. At last, Gray Eagle came out. He strode past the fire circle and disappeared inside his own dwelling.

“Stay here,” Red Dove’s mother hissed, but Red Dove pulled away. Something strange was happening and the only

one who could explain it was the *wicasa wakan*, the medicine man, Gray Eagle himself. She pulled up the flap and entered the tent.

"I'm sorry, Grandfather," Red Dove said, "but I have to know. Will the white people really make me leave? I want to stay here."

The furrows on his face deepened. "If things were like they were in the past, you would go to the women for answers. Your aunts would be guiding you—"

"But everything is different now, you say. My aunts are so busy finding food they don't have time for me." She paused and smiled up at him. "That's why I'm asking you."

"*Hau, Takoja*," he said, patting her head and answering yes to his favorite grandchild. Then he sighed. "I know you want to stay here with me, but there may be nothing for you—"

"There is. I want you to teach me to be a healer. Like you."

"It takes a lifetime to be a healer—"

"I can wait."

The old man raised an eyebrow and laughed. "You've never waited for anything in your life." Then he softened his gaze. "Tell me why you want that," he said. "Is it because you want to help others?"

Red Dove nodded. "And I want people to listen to me, and what I have to say... like they do to you."

"Ahhh. Then you must learn to listen—to *them*—"

"I do."

"You do not." Gray Eagle pressed his lips together. "You ask many questions, little Gray Eyes, but when the answers come you do not hear them—"

"Don't call me that!"

“What, Gray Eyes? But your eyes *are* gray. Gray like the dawn—”

“I can’t help being different, Grandfather; you know that!” Red Dove looked at the ashy fire, as if to take courage from the smoke rising from it. “Is that why no one listens to me? Because I am half... *Wasichu*?”

The old man smiled and placed his hand gently on top of her head. “You are different, but not just because your father was white.” He removed his hand and turned away. “And some day you will see that as a gift,” he said quietly. “You will be special—”

“Special? How?”

“You will be *Iyeska*—”

“An interpreter, like Old Tom? I want to be like you.”

“I am *Iyeska*, as you will be also. And more. You will have the gift of understanding, of what is behind the words that people speak. You will travel between worlds—”

“What worlds, Grandfather? The world of the whites, the *Wasichu*?”

“Worlds you cannot yet imagine,” he whispered. “You will travel between them, explain them to others and bring them together.”

Red Dove wanted to shout at him. Nothing was making any sense. She stared at his hunched figure and dared to ask the question that had plagued her since the white people came. “So, will you send me away?”

Gray Eagle turned. “Only if you want to go, Granddaughter.” He placed his hand on her shoulder and she felt its reassuring weight. “We will not make you. Even if it means we go hungry.” He tilted her face up towards his.

“Remember, we are the last of a free people.”

Red Dove breathed a sigh and felt the knot inside her begin to loosen. She nodded.

Gray Eagle smiled and pointed at the flap of the tepee. “Now go. And be the child you still are—”

“I’m not a child, Grandfather—you know that. I’m almost a woman. I’ll have my coming-of-age soon—”

“Perhaps.”

Perhaps? Why do you say that?”

The old man didn’t answer.

The relief that Red Dove had felt disappeared.

“Now go and tell Falling Bird that her children will not leave,” Gray Eagle murmured, “even if we all go hungry.”

“But Grandfather—” Red Dove began, knowing that he was not going to answer. He sat in his customary pose, legs crossed, eyes closed, listening to something—just not to her.

So Red Dove did as she was told. She pulled up the flap and crawled outside into the late-summer day.

There’s just so much I don’t understand.

>> All You Need to Know <<

Red Dove returned to her tepee and found Falling Bird squatting inside with her back to the opening. Her shoulders were shaking.

“Mother?”

There was no answer.

“Mother?” Red Dove inched closer.

Her mother turned to look at her, eyes glistening with tears. Strands of silver ran through her hair—more than Red Dove remembered.

When did she get so old? Red Dove wondered. But what I have to say will cheer her up. “Grandfather says we won’t have to go to the school,” she said.

“*Washte*. Good,” Falling Bird said, as a smile lifted the corners of her mouth.

“But we will be hungry—”

“*Han*. Yes, we will. But we can trade our beadwork for food. And Walks Alone can hunt.”

Red Dove longed to tell Falling Bird that she was the real hunter in the family—but didn’t. She’ll only be mad at me again.

“Maybe the person who used to leave food outside our lodge will come back,” Falling Bird said.

“Do you know who it was?”

Her mother shook her head.

“Do you think it was my father?”

“*Hiya*, no!” Falling Bird said. “Do not speak of him!”

“But why? You’ve never told me what happened.” Red Dove tried to sound calm. “You said we lived with him when I was little, and then he left. Did you do something...,” Red Dove knew she should stop, but couldn’t. She asked the question she had wanted so long to ask. “To make him go away?”

Her mother didn’t look at her. Instead, she rose slowly, pulled up the flap and left the tent.

Red Dove poked her head through the opening. “Mother?” she called.

“Follow me.”

So Red Dove did, past the fire circle and cluster of tepees, across the grassy meadow, and towards the patch of

cottonwood trees that fringed the little stream.

My mother's quiet place, Red Dove thought, as fear sparked through her. Why is she bringing me here?

"Sit," Falling Bird ordered. "It is time you learned the truth. About your father." Her shoulders slumped, light drained from her eyes, and the lines in her face were etched deep by the brightness of morning. "He left because he didn't care. He betrayed us. And left us to starve—"

"Then why were you with him, if he was so terrible?"

"Ah," her mother sighed. "How can I explain it? He was kind at first. I thought he loved me... us—"

"Did *you* love him?"

"*Han*. But something happened. He changed. He was *Wasichu*, so he didn't keep his promise—"

"Why not?"

"He deserted us." Falling Bird searched her daughter's face. "And I don't want him to hurt us anymore. Do you understand that?"

Red Dove saw the pain in her mother's eyes. It was too much.

"You don't remember anything of him, do you?"

Do I? Maybe. "But why did he change?" she dared to ask.

"White people change. We do not."

But I'm half white, so what does that mean for me?

Falling Bird slapped her knee and rose abruptly. "So now I've told you all you need to know."

The bright prairie morning was thick with the scent of sweet grass and sage as Red Dove watched her mother walk away. She shook her head to clear it, filled as it was with memories just out of reach. "Wait," she called softly, sensing

Falling Bird was already too far away to hear. “You haven’t really told me anything!”

>> We’re Going to the Fort <<

“Get up, daughter.”

Red Dove opened her eyes. The first light of dawn was visible below the flap of the tent, but sleep was sweet and she didn’t want to wake.

Her mother pulled a worn woolen blanket around her shoulders. “We’re going to the fort today to trade with the *Wasichu*.”

All summer long they had beaded moccasins and pouches to exchange for the flour, sugar, coffee, and oil they needed, and with a hard winter approaching, it was more important than ever that they make a good trade.

The fort was a dangerous place, everyone said, filled with treacherous *Wasichu*, but Red Dove looked forward to the sights.

She braided her hair carefully, making sure that the two long plaits fell neatly behind her ears. She pulled her bead necklace over her head and slung the roomy *parfleche* bag across her chest. Her robe was missing a few of the precious quills that decorated the bodice and her leggings and moccasins were worn thin in patches. In spite of that, she was proud to wear her deerskin. She tugged her blanket around her shoulders. “I’m ready,” she called.

“I want to give you something first.” In Falling Bird’s hand was a beaded amulet in the shape of a turtle. “This is your *opahte*. It holds the cord that connected me to you when you were born. I’ve been keeping it for you.”

Red Dove picked up the little bag by its leather thong and

studied the bright blue and yellow beadwork. "It's beautiful," she whispered.

"It's been watching over you all these years. I was going to give it to you at your coming-of-age ceremony." Her mother reached for the little object. "So here, let me." Stepping behind Red Dove, she pushed aside her daughter's thick black braids and circled her slender neck with the thong. Then she tied it securely in back. "Don't let anything happen to it," she whispered, as she turned Red Dove gently and smiled into her face. "Now go and tell your brother that we are leaving. *Wana*. Now."

"Is he coming with us?"

Falling Bird shook her head.

"But why? We need him to carry, don't we?"

"Carrying is woman's work. And he's still too weak. "

"Not any more, he isn't," Red Dove began.

"Show respect, daughter. *Hoka*. Let's go."

I *do*, thought Red Dove, as the tenderness she felt dissolved in the thin morning air. I just wish other people would show some respect for me.

>> We Do Not Eat the Fruit <<

Scents of wood smoke, sweetgrass and sage filled the crisp morning air as Red Dove and Falling Bird set off down the hill and onto the grassy plain. They carried roomy *parfleche* bags, one stuffed with their precious beadwork, the other empty, waiting to be filled at the fort.

"Why is this women's work?" Red Dove asked.

"What?" Her mother swatted at a bee buzzing around her.

"The bags will be heavy when they're full. Shouldn't

Walks Alone help us?”

“Men don’t carry. And he’s still sick.”

He’s been sick ever since he came back from the white man’s school, Red Dove thought. “I wish we had a pony to ride,” she muttered instead.

“I do too, but we don’t, so stop talking about it.”

“What will they give us in trade?”

Her mother stopped and swung the stiff *parfleche* bags from one shoulder to the other. “I told you. Flour, sugar, lard maybe,” she said with a sigh.

“To make fry bread? I’ll help you cook it.”

“You’d better, since you like eating it so much,” Falling Bird said with a faint smile.

Red Dove, pleased to see her mother happy, felt her spirits lighten. She watched the sun climb overhead as they started across the grassy meadow. Distant bluffs, pink and purple in the morning light, began to fade and the early chill blended into the heat of noon.

Now she was thirsty. “Water,” she whispered, through parching lips.

Falling Bird stopped and thrust the bulging skin towards her. “Here,” she said.

Red Dove took a gulp.

“Slow down. Leave some for the way back. There won’t be any in the *Wasichu* town—”

“*Wasichu* don’t have water?”

“Of course they do.” Her mother’s face turned serious. “Just not for us.”

“We would share, wouldn’t we?”

“Yes,” said Falling Bird. “But they don’t think and feel as

we do.”

“Why not?”

Falling Bird stopped dead. “Would you please stop asking me so many questions?”

Disappointed, Red Dove went silent.

By now her stomach hurt, a reminder that she hadn’t eaten since the sun was high the day before. There, up ahead, was a low bush covered with shiny purple fruit.

Plums. Her mouth watered as she imagined how good one would taste. “Look.”

Her mother’s anger was swift. “That is the Dead Man’s Plum Bush—”

“The one Grandfather talks about in his stories?”

“The same. You know we do not eat the fruit,” said Falling Bird.

Red Dove stared at the ripe, juicy plums left rotting on the ground, insects swarming above them. “Those bees aren’t afraid—”

“Enough.” Her mother wheeled around and glared at her.

“But they *aren’t* afraid,” insisted Red Dove, as she watched the creatures feasting on the sticky pulp, “so why should I be?”

She looked at her mother shuffling ahead, too far away to hear. She listened to the sounds all around: the scrape of moccasins against the sandy soil, the growl in her belly that rumbled and churned, and the drone of bees as they devoured the delicious fruit that she was forbidden to touch.

>> Soldiers <<

Red Dove followed her mother along the well-worn path,

dawdling until a row of flat-roofed log buildings came into view.

Everything here is sharp and angular, she observed, not like the rounded, comfortable dwellings in our village.

Her heart beat faster and she closed the gap. "Is that it?"

"*Han*. That's where the soldiers live. You know what happened there, don't you?"

Red Dove remembered what her grandfather had told them. This was where the soldiers had imprisoned Dull Knife and his people before sending them back to the reservation, where they would sicken and die of disease and starvation and where the soldiers shot them down when they tried to escape—men, women, and children alike.

Red Dove felt a sudden chill. It was just past midday, but the sun had vanished behind a cloud and in its place was thick, dark shadow. The light had changed so swiftly that for a moment it was hard to see.

Their ghosts must still be here. Do the soldiers know that?

She didn't have long to think about it. She turned a corner and saw a mass of people, crowded into the center of a square, more than she had ever seen in her life.

They look like women from my village... but different somehow.

Instead of deerskin, they wore frayed calico with blankets pulled over their shoulders. Their faces were dull and vacant, their bodies hunched. Then she saw a girl, about her age, whose eyes were drained of life.

"What's wrong with her, Mother?"

"Come," ordered Falling Bird, pulling her towards the low, straight-lined buildings on the other side of the square.

“But why are they here?”

“Getting food from the *Wasichu*—”

“Like we are?”

“No.” Her mother stopped abruptly. “*We* have things the *Wasichu* want that we can trade,” she said. “*They* are here to beg. We do not. No more questions,” she warned.

They reached the far end of the courtyard and saw a cluster of blue-coated soldiers playing cards, laughing, shouting, and banging metal cups. Odd, screechy music came from inside the bunkhouse.

Red Dove felt her mother’s hand tighten around her own. She’s afraid, she thought. Then she saw why.

“Hey!” a soldier with greasy yellow hair and a black eyepatch called. “Whatcha got? Lemme see.”

Red Dove understood the few words of English, but it was his scowl that told her he wasn’t friendly. She watched him walk towards them and felt the blood freeze in her veins.

Falling Bird kept walking.

“Lemme see whatcha got, I said.”

“*Inahnio*,” her mother said, urging her to hurry. They rushed past the soldier’s one glaring eye and up onto the wood-plank sidewalk.

“Indians” muttered the man.

A tawny-faced boy in a blue uniform, his arms around a scruffy yellow dog, knelt in the dirt, watching them.

“Sic ’em, Spirit,” the man yelled.

The boy wrapped his arms tighter around the squirming animal. “No!” he shouted as the dog wriggled free.

Falling Bird looked wildly around, searching for a place to hide. She pulled Red Dove behind a pillar.

But the mongrel wasn't after them. Leaping and snarling, it went for the one-eyed man.

"Whaaa?!" shouted the man as the dog locked its jaw around his leg. He pulled out his gun.

"Don't, Jake!" The boy raced over and hauled the animal away.

A soldier with snow-white hair threw down his cards and limped over. "Give me the gun," he said.

Jake's fingers twitched on the trigger as he glared at the white-haired man.

"Give it to me, Private."

Jake looked at the man, then lowered his eyes. "Yessir, Cap'n," he said.

The captain took the gun, emptied the chamber and put the bullets in his pocket. "Just in case," he said. He hobbled back to the table and picked up his cards.

Red Dove watched the one-eyed man slink away. Then she noticed her mother. Her eyes were fixed on the white-haired soldier. "Do you know him?" Red Dove asked.

Her mother didn't answer. Instead, she turned away and pulled her blanket over her head.

She doesn't want him to see her... why? Red Dove studied the man. Middle-aged and paunchy, he wore a uniform covered with gold-colored metal. He must be someone important.

When he dropped back into his chair, raised a flask to his lips, and reached for his cards again, she noticed his arm was bent at an odd angle.

Like it had been broken—and healed wrong.

Then she looked at the boy, still holding his dog, his face buried in its scruffy fur.

She smiled at him, but crouched over the animal, he didn't see. She was about to say something when the one-eyed man turned and walked back to the boy.

"Hiya," she cried. "No."

Too late. Jake took aim and gave the animal a hard, swift kick.

The dog howled in pain.

"For the love of Christ," shouted the captain.

"I hate mutts," snarled Jake. He turned his one good eye on Red Dove. "Indians too."

Red Dove raced up behind her mother onto the rough plank sidewalk, as far away from the one-eyed man as she could possibly get.

>> You Dropped Something <<

They came to a rickety screen door that squawked as it opened. Behind it was a little, round-faced white woman in a shiny purple dress.

She's the one who came to our village.

The woman narrowed her eyes at them and raised her chin as she tried to shove through, but her enormous skirt caught between the door and the frame until finally, after tugging and twisting, she worked her way free.

"Excuse me," she sniffed, as the door slammed behind her.

Red Dove watched her go. "That's the woman—"

"I know. Hurry," Falling Bird said, pushing the door open again.

Red Dove looked in at the shelves piled high with bags and boxes and metal things, more than she had ever seen in

one place.

"Hello," her mother called to the man standing behind a wooden counter.

"Whatcha want?" he said.

"Mista Reed?"

"Not here. Go away."

"We trade... *Washte*... ."

"*Washte*? Don't speak Indian."

"*Washte* mean... good," Falling Bird tried. "Mista Reed say—"

"Reed ain't here, I tell you. Now go away," snarled the man.

Her mother reached into her *parfleche* and pulled out a pouch. "Good... *washte*," she said, and tried to lay it on the counter. "You like." But her voice was shaking.

The man raised his fist and lunged, sending everything flying. He grabbed a pouch and threw it at them. "Get out, I said!" Blue and yellow crystals skittered around the room.

Red Dove snatched the *parfleche*, grabbed as much as she could, and she and her mother raced out the door. Eyes to the ground, they ran across the courtyard, past the card-playing soldiers, the strange white-haired man, and the line of ragged women.

When at last they reached the far end, they stopped to catch their breath. Red Dove felt something behind her. The boy... .

"Is your dog all right?" she called in her own language.

"Huh?"

Red Dove pointed to the animal.

The boy nodded.

“Washte... good,” said Red Dove.

The boy raised his hand. “You dropped something.” He pointed back to the courtyard.

The sun was high overhead, the ground without shadow. Red Dove lifted a hand to shield her eyes and squinted.

“Whatcha doin’, Rick?” called Jake. “You turnin’ into some kinda Indian-lover?”

“Nah,” said the boy. “I’m not... Watch this.” She saw him, silhouetted against the glare, his arm raised. Something hit her ankle and the pain knocked her speechless.

Stunned, she looked at the boy. She saw the rock on the ground at her feet, the blood oozing from her leg.

“That’ll teach ’em, Rick,” yelled Jake.

She heard Rick laugh. “Why?” she asked silently.

A cloud swallowed the sun and the light changed, exposing things that weren’t visible before. Rick’s amber-colored eyes caught Red Dove’s. I’m sorry, he seemed to say.

Are you? Red Dove wanted to ask.

“Come. Now,” her mother said, frantically pulling her away.

When at last they were safe outside the fort, Falling Bird pointed to the trickle of red seeping from her daughter’s leg. “Here,” she whispered and picked up a small gray piece of fluff lying on the ground at their feet. She dabbed until the bleeding had stopped and handed the pink-tinged feather to Red Dove. “It’s from a dove, your namesake. A good omen, I think, after all that has happened today.”

>> The Dead Man’s Plum Bush <<

Afternoon shadows lengthened as Red Dove limped slowly along, feeling her ankle throb and the pain in her belly get

worse.

“How are you?” her mother said.

“All right,” Red Dove lied.

Falling Bird held out the water skin. “Drink. There’s enough for the trip back if we’re careful.”

Red Dove sipped slowly, leaving a few precious drops, and handed it back.

A breeze riffled the grasses that lined the hill, and the sun sank low in the sky as they climbed. The cool air was a relief, but the now-familiar ache of hunger began to claw and there would be nothing to eat that night. “Maybe we should have asked for help from the soldiers, since we didn’t get anything from the shopkeeper—”

“We will not beg,” her mother hissed. Then her face softened. “I know you’re hungry, daughter—we all are. But we cannot listen to the white man’s promises. We will find another way to fill our stomachs.”

They reached the top of the hill, where Red Dove saw the bush, thick with plums that were ripe to bursting and begging to be picked. “They look delicious,” she murmured as she stumbled along, lost in thought.

So much had gone wrong that day; so much that her mother had predicted hadn’t happened. Falling Bird had been wrong a lot—wrong about going to town, wrong about white people, wrong about finding food.

One plum couldn’t hurt, could it? Fruit that had fallen would only rot and go to waste... .

She slowed her walk and waited until her mother was well ahead and bent down, pretending to rub her burning ankle. Then she reached over and closed her fingers around

a plum lying near her foot. Waving off the stinging bees, she picked it up, slipped it between her lips and felt the luscious sweetness explode in her mouth. She sucked on the scratchy little pit until all the meat was gone.

Just one more, she thought, craving the taste of another plum as hunger overcame her.

Suddenly, a *hissssss* and she saw, in the shadows, a coiled shape: bead-black eyes, flitting tongue, and yellow fangs, poised to strike. Terror seized her and she ran, limping and stumbling up the path to her mother.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” Red Dove said, wiping her chin with the little plum seed still nestled on her tongue.

Her mother sighed and resumed her walk; when she wasn’t looking, Red Dove spat the seed into her hand and tried to throw it in the grass. But her palm was sticky with juice and when she looked down she saw it was stained a deep purple, and the seed was stuck.

She reached out, grabbed a fistful of grass and rubbed and rubbed until the seed fell off. She next scooped up a handful of sandy soil, wiped her palms together, and watched the dust swirl up until her fingers were dry.

Mother will never know, she thought with relief as she waded through the whispering grass.

>> A Purple Stain <<

Fires were lit for the evening meal when Red Dove and her mother got back to the village. Red Dove watched Falling Bird feed the flames with twigs and shreds of wood. “What are you cooking tonight?” she asked.

“Find me something to cook and I will,” her mother snapped. Then her voice softened. “The fire is for the night, Daughter, because it’s cold. Go fetch water and we’ll drink it with the last of the venison *papa*. That’s all we’ll have to eat tonight.”

Red Dove crawled out of the tepee. The moon was rising full and reflected off the surface of the stream, lighting the world around. She filled the empty water skin and cupped her hand to drink—and saw... .

The stain—it’s still there on my palm!

She thrust her hand into the water and scrubbed hard until she was sure it was gone. Looking around to make sure no one had noticed, she picked up the water skin and walked slowly back to the tepee, listening to the voices of her family coming from within.

I worry too much, she thought. Cheered by the promise of light and warmth, she pulled up the flap and crept inside.

Her mother was waiting for her, holding out a small piece of *papa*. “The last of it.”

“Shouldn’t we save it then?” Red Dove whispered.

“It will make it easier to sleep. Do as I say and eat.”

Red Dove reached for the tiny scrap of meat and bit down. She could have devoured it in one swallow, but instead, she broke off a tiny morsel, crept back, lifted the tent flap and tossed the crumb to the hungry ghosts waiting outside.

She caught the look of approval on her mother’s face.

We both know it will be licked up by ravenous animals, but after all that’s happened today, I don’t want to break any more traditions.

Red Dove followed her mother to her grandfather's tepee. She settled herself on the worn buffalo skin and watched him prepare to tell his nightly story.

Falling Bird leaned back against the pile of folded blankets and reached for her daughter's hand. "Things will be all right now," she started to say and then broke off abruptly. She dropped Red Dove's hand as if it burned. "How could you?" she hissed, and pushed her away.

Red Dove looked down and all her dread returned. The purple stain was back.

"Get out," her mother said.

All eyes were on Red Dove as she slowly crawled outside. Alone now, she stared at the moonlit world. The small stream glistened and the trees still rustled in the wind. But somehow everything had changed.

She strained to hear the murmurs coming from the lodge. The sounds no longer cheered her. Now they were scattered, abrupt and anxious, and they frightened her.

What are they saying? Is she telling them what I did?

Once all was quiet, she crouched low and stepped back inside. No one looked at her as she found another place on the women's side of the tent. Gray Eagle stared at the fire as he began his tale.

"The Dead Man's Plum Bush," he announced.

Does he know? Does everyone?

Red Dove's face burned with shame. Desperately, she searched the faces around her. She wanted someone, *anyone*, to tell her that after such a disastrous day, everything would be all right—but no one did.

"We do not touch its fruit," Gray Eagle began, "for its

roots are wrapped around the body of a fallen warrior.”

I know that, Red Dove thought, bowing her head.

She watched the faces around to see their reaction. The adults were impassive, but her little cousins’ eyes were bright, fixed upon the old storyteller as they snuggled in their blankets. Firelight flickered off the walls of the tepee, casting shadows against the light.

“And we would be eating the fruit of his misfortune. Do you understand?” said Gray Eagle, leaning forward. “Our people do not speak of the dead, but I speak of *him* today because this lesson is important for you.”

He looked at Red Dove.

“From the seed a bush sprang up, a bush that bears its fruit all year round, in rainless summers and sunless winters, protected by a swarm of bees and a single hissing snake.”

His eyes bored into her.

“We do not touch the fruit of loss, for *no one* is beyond the reach of fortune and *everyone* is to be treated with compassion and respect. That is the right way—it is our way—and if we turn from our ways, the circle will be broken, and misfortune will follow.”

Red Dove touched her throat and reached for the comfort of the turtle *opahte*.

It wasn’t there.

She felt her chest, her waist, her throat in a desperate effort to find it, but the precious gift was gone.

No! she wanted to scream, and lay awake, eyes staring, ears straining, until at last, close to dawn, she heard a sound.

“*Hoo hoo*,” it cried.

An owl? Messenger of death?

“Hoo hoo... hoo hoo hoo.”

A five-tone trill, she thought, breathing with relief. A dove, my namesake.

And finally fell asleep.

>> The Apple <<

Sunlight streamed through the top of the tepee as Red Dove woke. Without stopping to smooth her hair or straighten her clothes, she scrambled out.

The smoke from the evening fires mingled with the morning mist. She pulled her blanket close, retraced her steps to the river and followed the path, searching for the turtle amulet.

Her mother was in the clearing, sitting on a log, bent over her beadwork.

Should I tell her I've lost it? She's so angry about the plum. But Red Dove could bear it no longer. She *had* to confess.

“There's something I have to tell you,” she blurted, rushing up to her mother.

Falling Bird cut her off. “You disappoint me so much.” Her voice was barely above a whisper. “You do not listen. Maybe you can't help it,” she went on more gently, “because your father was white.”

Her words landed like a blow. Red Dove opened her mouth, but nothing came out.

“You do not respect our ways. You disturbed the dead man's spirit. You have brought us harm.”

Moments passed.

“I'm sorry,” Red Dove said at last. “What will happen?”

“We do not yet know.” Her mother lowered her head.

“But it won’t be good.”

Fear clutched at Red Dove. Could it be that for once Falling Bird was right?

Then she heard a violent clatter from beyond the trees. She saw Old Tom, perched in his wagon, urging his horses up the hill and making straight for the center of their camp.

Beside him, the white woman called “Hellooo!” as they rolled past and came to a stop near Gray Eagle’s tent. She picked up her skirts and climbed carefully down. Then she reached into her dusty black satchel and pulled out a rectangular object with two crossed lines on its cover. “Bible,” she said.

She thrust her hand in again and brought out something else, red, round and shiny. Holding it up, she looked straight at Red Dove. “Food. Eat.” She put her fingers to her mouth and then her belly.

You don’t have to act it out. I know what food is.

The woman launched into louder speech, too rapid for Red Dove to understand. Then she nodded at Old Tom, who began to translate with a question on his face, as if the words were hard for him to say.

The woman wrinkled her forehead and narrowed her eyes. “Let me,” she said, brushing him aside. “This is an apple. Ap... ple.”

“She wants you to try it,” said Old Tom, translating into Lakota. “And *if* you like it, there will be plenty more. For you and your family as well.”

It looks good, Red Dove thought, as she listened to yet another growl from her empty belly.

Gray Eagle came out of his lodge, but his expression told

her nothing.

“Should I?” she asked her mother.

“No.”

“But if I do what the *Wasichu* want, they *might* give us food. I can make up for what I did.” She stepped forward and held out her hand.

Her mother snatched at her arm, but Red Dove shrugged her off.

She took the fruit.

And bit.

Washte, good, she thought as her teeth pierced the skin and the warm juice rolled down. It tastes wonderful.

She bit again and a shred of peel cut into the flesh of her gum. Blood and sweetness blended together, and she stared at the unfamiliar fruit. There, against the creamy whiteness of the pulp was a single speck of red.

The woman smiled. She looked at Walks Alone. “This is for you,” she said, and held out another piece of fruit.

Gray Eagle knocked it from her hand. “*Hiya!*”

A torrent burst from the white woman’s mouth, angry and unintelligible.

Old Tom pulled off his hat, and stared at the ground. “We’re trying to do what’s best for your children.”

Red Dove knew from the woman’s blazing eyes that she had said much more. Finally, Old Tom jerked his head towards the wagon and climbed up onto the seat. Red Dove watched the woman tug on her heavy skirts and pull herself up next to him.

“You... must... go... to... school,” she said, looking at Red Dove.

Must I? she wondered. Is that where I belong?

She had no more time to think before the white woman grabbed the reins from Old Tom and steered the wagon through the trees, along the rutted path, and down to the meadow below.

>> Just a Dream <<

Sleep came slowly that night. Red Dove's worn old buffalo robe, usually a comfort, felt coarse and scratchy. She squirmed, rolling her body over to find a better position. There was something hard, a small round lump lodged beneath her, and no matter how much she twisted and turned, she couldn't avoid it.

My turtle amulet?

She sat up and reached under her robe. But this lump was rough and prickly, not smooth and regular like her mother's beaded gift. She held the thing up and squinted in the darkness.

With a rush of horror, she saw what it was:

The plum pit.

She closed her eyes and slumped back down.

I have to get rid of it.

Her mind raced, her body ached, and she was desperate for sleep. Instead, she lay awake, eyes wide, waiting for the smudge of light that would announce the dawn.

At last, when she thought she would never sleep again, she fell into a dream.

A white man's village, like the one she had visited the day before—crowded, noisy, and filled with people in Wasichu clothes—but not the heavy, round-limbed whites she knew. Instead, stick-like

creatures with arms and legs of bleached-white bone. The men in long gray pants and coats, holding cross-covered books in their claw-like hands, their naked skulls rising out of stiff white collars and topped with bristly thatch. The women wearing lacy black headdresses, carrying baskets of bright red apples. The little ones scampering in short buttoned pants and frilly dresses hanging from skeleton bodies.

Red Dove, standing in the middle of the street, watching in terror, with no one noticing. How could they, with no eyes in their heads?

A voice: "Pick it up."

What?

"Pick it up."

Something lying there: pointed, sharp and small.

A plum pit.

Snatching it in panic, afraid to touch it, but more afraid not to. Holding it between her fingers, feeling its prickly surface, then closing her hand around it. And watching the skeleton bodies change.

Flesh growing on their limbs, covering them with pink, glowing skin. Long, narrow noses sprouting from their empty skulls and pale little eyes filling their sockets.

Turning together, towards her, circling closer.

"What do you want?"

The voice: "They cannot hear you, for they have no ears."

A scream.

Red Dove woke.

Was it me? Did I cry out? She looked at her family. All asleep. She pulled her robe close. Why did I dream that? What does it mean? The plum pit... I have to get rid of it.

She opened her fist, but it was empty. She searched her robe, the area around, but there was nothing there.

“Was it *all* just a dream?” she moaned.

>> Where I Belong <<

“Walks Alone!” Red Dove yelled to her brother, who was sitting in the late afternoon shade of the little cottonwood tree. She had been waiting all day to talk with him. “Will the *Wasichu* give us food if we go to their school? Apples?”

“Why are you asking me, sister? You never take my advice.”

That’s because you never have much to give. “You know what their schools are like, from when you went to one before.”

“It’s where I learned not to trust white people,” her brother snorted.

“So do they have the things she says?”

“Food you mean? They do, and they have warm places to sleep, and light you can carry around with you. They make marks on paper so their words will not be forgotten. But they do not honor them.” He turned his clear-eyed gaze on her. “Yes, little sister, they have all that. But do you think they will share it with us?”

“I don’t know—”

“Well *I* do. They won’t. They’ll only betray us like your father did.”

“He was *your* father too,” Red Dove said, stung by the blame in his words.

“He wasn’t,” said Walks Alone. “*My* father was Lakota. And he died at the hand of a white man.”

Red Dove ducked her head. She knew this was a battle she wasn’t going to win. She changed the subject. “That woman said she *wants* to help us.”

“If we do what *she* wants.”

“You mean go to school?”

Walks Alone narrowed his eyes. “*And* give up our ways, become like them.”

“Is that so bad, if it means we’ll get food?”

Walks Alone stared at his sister, as if seeing her for the first time. “It isn’t right,” he said.

“Why?”

“You shouldn’t have to ask.” He kicked at a clod of dirt at his feet. Then he raised his eyes to hers. “If you go to their school, they will steal your spirit, your power—”

“How?”

“They will beat it out of you—”

“No one would do that.”

“Oh wouldn’t they?” Walks Alone sneered. “Then go find out for yourself.”

“Maybe I will,” said Red Dove, shocked at the words coming out of her mouth.

“You wouldn’t,” her brother glared.

She glared back. “I would.”

He rose, gave a dismissive wave, and stalked away.

He’s wrong, Red Dove thought. It can’t be like that. He was sick when he was there, so what does he know? I’m healthy... it’ll be different for me.

But do I really want to?

And suddenly she did. Now the thought of going to the white man’s school seemed like an adventure, a chance to prove herself to her family, to show that she could help—and make up for what she did .

She looked overhead at the patch of autumn blue sky framed by cottonwoods. *And* I’m half white. So maybe that

woman was right. Maybe it is where I belong.

>> You Must <<

“Wake up, daughter.” Falling Bird tugged on Red Dove’s shoulder. “I’ve been up all night thinking,” she murmured. “You and Walks Alone must go to the school. Today.”

Squatting close to her, her mother whispered, “It’s for the best... the best.” Her arms were wrapped across her chest and her head was bowed.

Red Dove was fully awake now. “You said you didn’t want me to. Does Grandfather think I should?”

“We’ll talk as you get ready,” Falling Bird pulled a deer bone comb through Red Dove’s long black hair, plaiting it into two neat braids that fell behind her ears.

Alarm coursed through Red Dove. “Wait... ,” she managed in a croaky whisper.

“You said that apple was delicious. And everyone knows how much you love to eat.” Her mother tried to laugh. “The only way you’ll get enough is if you go to the school.”

“I don’t want to,” Red Dove blurted, and at that moment, she didn’t. The plans she’d made the previous day seemed all wrong.

Falling Bird took her daughter’s face in her hands. “There’s no food for us here. You know that,” she said as her voice started to break.

“But what about Walks Alone? Will he go too?”

“*Han.*”

“He won’t. He hated it when he went to school before.”

“He will have to—”

“And if he goes, who will do the hunting for you?”

“There isn’t much game now and there won’t be any once the snow sets in—”

“We always get by.”

“We don’t. And it will be even harder this winter. There aren’t enough chokecherries and *timpsila* turnips to get us through.”

“We can trade—”

“White people no longer want our beadwork.” Her mother stared at the ground. “If you go, they will give us food.”

“White people lie, you told me. Walks Alone says it too. Maybe they’re lying this time.”

“Maybe they are, but we have no choice.” Falling Bird turned her face away. “I don’t want to see you starve, Little One.”

Little One—that’s what she used to call me, thought Red Dove with a pang of sorrow so intense she wanted to cry out.

The choice wasn’t hers to make. She *had* to go.

“You don’t *want* me to leave, do you, Mother?”

“Leave?” Falling Bird choked. “I want you to stay, but you can’t. Grandfather had a dream last night about what could happen.”

“I had a dream, too,” Red Dove said, but her mother didn’t hear her.

“He saw soldiers on a hill,” Falling Bird went on, “with guns so big they had to be carried on wagons. They were firing on a village—”

“Our village?”

“He didn’t know. He thinks it was a warning. The whites take more and more and we can’t stop them. They have weapons we don’t—”

“Guns?”

“Yes, guns. And more. They have words and writing that have power as well.” Falling Bird fixed her eyes on Red Dove. “He thinks only *you* can help us. He thinks *you* are special.”

Special? Red Dove looked away, not sure if what her mother said pleased or saddened her.

“You are young—young enough to learn their language and their writing. You can use their words *against* them and protect us from their tricks. Because you’re clever.” Falling Bird pulled something from out of her *parfleche*. “He wanted me to give you this.”

Red Dove reached for the object. “A doll? He knows I’m too old—”

“He says it’s for you to give to someone else,” her mother said, “when the time is right. It will help you remember us and our ways, even as you learn the ways of the whites.”

Red Dove stared at the blank, empty face of the doll, the beaded, red calico dress. She struggled against her tears as she saw the hopeful look on her mother’s face. She forced a smile. “Thank you,” she said, patting the soft calico. “It’s beautiful. But don’t tell me I have to go.”

“You must, daughter. Today.” Falling Bird rose slowly. “So we will get ready now. We will show the *Wasichu* how to behave. Come.”

“But my coming of age—will I even have that?”

“I don’t know, daughter. Now go say goodbye to your aunts and your cousins—”

Suddenly it was all too much. “No. And Walks Alone will never go!”

“He has no choice,” said Falling Bird, her voice catching.

“And my cousins—”

“Will go when they are older.”

Red Dove felt her heart tear in two. She wanted to scream; she wanted to run far, far away. She wanted to take that ugly old white woman, grab her by the shoulders and throttle her until—.

The night before, she had wanted to go—but now everything she had ever wished for was right here.

Her mother handed her a leather-wrapped bundle. “*Wasna* for the journey. I made it from the last of the venison and chokecherries.”

“But they have food where I’m going, remember?”

“Take it anyway.”

Red Dove reached for the little dried patty and with shaking fingers laid it in her *parfleche* bag. She tried, for one last time, to find a way to change her mother’s mind. “Please don’t make me leave,” she begged.

“I’m sorry, daughter, but you must.”

>> Special <<

“Come in, Granddaughter,” called Gray Eagle as Red Dove walked slowly towards his lodge.

“You told Mother I had to go.” She tried to keep her voice from breaking.

“This will be hard for you, and even harder for Falling Bird.” Gray Eagle’s face was creased with wrinkles and his tired old eyes were filled with worry. “The hurt is here; I know.” He tapped his chest with gnarled old fingers.

“She said you had a dream. Well, I had one too,” Red Dove blurted.

Gray Eagle nodded, as if he already knew. "Tell me."

"It's hard to explain."

"Try." He closed his eyes to listen.

"I was standing in the middle of a *Wasichu* town filled with people. They were skeletons, dressed like whites, moving around. Horrible. And as I watched, flesh grew on their bones and eyes filled the sockets in their heads—"

"They came back to life?"

"*Han*... as white people. I looked down and there, on the ground, was the plum pit—from the fruit I wasn't supposed to eat." She ducked her head to hide her embarrassment.

"*Hau*." The old man didn't open his eyes.

"And then I heard a voice. It told me to pick it up, but when I did, I woke."

Gray Eagle opened his eyes and gazed at the smoke hole above his head. He glanced down again. "The skeletons came back to life—but as white people? You're sure?"

Red Dove nodded. "Do you know what any of it means, Grandfather?"

"Maybe they are more powerful than I thought." He turned his gaze on her. "Have you ever heard of a man named *Wovoka*?"

Red Dove shook her head.

"He is a man from the west, a Paiute, and he had a dream like yours, but in his dream it was our people who came back from the dead." Gray Eagle stopped suddenly. "You are hungry to know things, Granddaughter." The lines in his face deepened with concern. "But you must wait for answers to come." He paused, took a deep breath and stirred the ashes of the cold fire. "So tell me now—what is it that you really

want?”

“What I want?” For a moment, Red Dove didn’t know. And then she did. “I want people to hear me when I speak, Grandfather. I want them to listen... to what I say.”

“And do they not?”

“No. They ignore me, as if I’m not important. As if I’m not even here.”

Grandfather turned the ashes slowly with a stick and drew a circle in the dust. “You want the power to be heard. But why should they listen? Do you know so much more than they? What is it you would tell them, if you could?”

“Well,” said Red Dove, suddenly unsure. “I... don’t know.”

“And what would you do with that power?” he asked.

“If I had that power, then I’m sure I would know what to do with it, Grandfather, because I would be wise—”

“Would you?” he asked, smiling broadly. “Power is given to many who are not—”

“But I would be, Grandfather,” said Red Dove. “Wise. Like you.” She held her breath, afraid she had said too much. And let it out when she saw the twinkle in his eyes.

“I see. Then you must learn to understand others first. You must hear what *they* hear, see what *they* see—and feel what *they* feel. You must know what is in their hearts. Here.” He tapped his chest again. “You ask questions, Granddaughter, but do not hear the answers when they come. That is your flaw—”

“My flaw?”

“*Hau*. You know that the Great Spirit, *Wakan Tanka*, gave everyone a flaw, and that is the one he gave you—”

“Is that so terrible?”

“No.” He smiled again. “Everyone has a flaw. It’s what

makes them special.” He extended his hand. “Show me the doll your mother made.”

Red Dove reached in her *parfleche* and gave it to him.

He held it up. “*Wakan Tanka* made each of us perfect, see? Like this little creature.”

“She isn’t perfect. She has no eyes, no nose, no mouth.”

“That is so she won’t think she’s prettier, or better, than others. Now watch.” He took his thumb, dipped it into the cold ash and pressed a smudge against the doll’s blank face.

“Don’t!” Red Dove cried.

“What do you think of her now?” he asked, handing it back.

“I think she’s ugly. You’ve ruined her!”

“I haven’t. Now she has a mark, a flaw, a place for spirit to enter, so she can understand the flaws—and the pain—of others.”

Red Dove was on the verge of tears. “I don’t understand,” she moaned.

“You will, Granddaughter, when *Wakan Tanka* thinks the time is right—”

“But why can’t I *now*?” A sudden thought occurred. “That’s why I’m so different, isn’t it, Grandfather? Because I’m not patient and I ask too many questions. That’s why you’re sending me away.”

“That isn’t it at all.” The old man turned his head and she could no longer see the pain in his eyes. “You *do* belong here,” he whispered. He stared up at the smoke that curled through the hole in the top of the lodge. “More than *anyone*, you belong here.” He turned back again. “But you belong wherever you are. You are restless, a truth-seeker, a traveler between worlds. That

is what makes you different, Granddaughter, and special—as are we all. You are like the bird I named you after—”

“A red dove?”

“The one I saw when I sat by myself at dawn, thinking about you and your brother and what your lives would be—”

“You called him Walks Alone.”

“Because I knew he would choose to be by himself—”

“And then you saw the dove on a branch above your head. She was special, you said. Is it because of her color?” asked Red Dove, eager to hear more.

“The rose light of morning was on her wings—”

“So... she wasn’t really red?”

“In the glow of dawn, she was—”

“Then she wasn’t special at all. She was ordinary,” said Red Dove, trying not to frown.

Gray Eagle ignored her disappointment. “She was ordinary and special. As ordinary as any creature—and as special. She sang to me but I knew her message was for you. She told me that you would live a life of great sadness and joy, that those feelings would give you your power, that you would share them with others, and that one day you would become—”

“*Iyeska*, you said. And travel between worlds.”

>> The Pouch <<

The old man pulled out a small round object of dull gray leather. “Here,” he said.

“An *opahte*?” Red Dove wrinkled her nose at the strange, musty smell.

“To make up for the one you lost—I know about that as well.”

You know everything, Red Dove thought, so you probably know this is nothing like the amulet my mother gave me. That one was carefully worked, shaped like a turtle, and beaded in blue and yellow. This one is plain.

“*Pilamaya*,” she said, bowing her head to hide her disappointment.

“Don’t look so sad,” Gray Eagle said. “Your old *opahte* contained the medicine that connected you to your mother and the earth. This one connects you to your power, so carry it always—but hidden, especially when you are with the *Wasichu*. And never, ever open it—”

“Why? What’s inside?”

The old man shook his head. “That is not for you to know. It will connect you to your thoughts and feelings and to the thoughts and feelings of others. So never, *ever* use it in anger—or let it be used that way. Do you understand?”

“I’m not sure,” said Red Dove.

“Hear me now, because there isn’t much time. The power of the pouch will grow. It will open your ears and free your tongue, so you will speak the language of others—”

“I already do. I learned English listening to Walks Alone talking to Mother when he first came back from the school.”

“You learned a few words. Now you must learn more. This will help you to do that, to listen and learn and communicate—”

“I’ll understand white people?”

“And they will understand you. If you open your eyes and ears and watch their faces carefully, the thoughts behind their words will come clear—”

“I’ll know what they’re *thinking*?”

The old man nodded. “If you study them, you will know

what they truly mean. And if you open your heart, you will feel what they feel.”

Red Dove fingered the little bundle. “But it doesn’t look like much, does it?”

“It is what you make it. Because its power comes from you. It will open you to dreams and visions, and give you answers you seek—and some you do not.”

“Like the dream I told you about?”

“Like that, and like this.” The old man pointed to the cold ashes. “See how it is?”

Red Dove wrinkled her brow and watched as the old man stirred the gray dust until the fire, dead until that moment, sprang to life.

“How did you do—”

“Look inside and see a story of your people.”

Red Dove stared deep into the flames, and saw, dimly at first, a vision that began to form:

Gold seekers, white men shabby in denim and homespun, swarming into the sacred Black Hills, hungry for the yellow metal; others hunched over documents, quill pens in their hands, greedy for the precious land. Their angry voices warn her people’s leaders that their families will starve unless they sign.

“We will not.”

“Then we will find others who will, who can’t read, who don’t know what they’re signing.”

Grass-covered slopes and a pounding of hooves on earth. A yellow-haired soldier riding high into the hills... .

“The one is called Custer, coming for the gold—”

“Can’t someone stop him, Grandfather?”

“Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse gathered warriors to do

that, thousands of them, in the battle the *Wasichu* call Little Big Horn, the one we call the Greasy Grass—”

“We won, didn’t we?”

“We did.”

The yellow-haired general shakes his head, refusing to believe that thousands of Indians could mass against him and the blue-coated soldiers of the Seventh Cavalry. Gaily painted flags, a bugle call as the Yellow Hair waves his arm—

And then his terror, swift and sudden, as wave after wave of warriors, crying “Hoka Hey,” storm the hill.

Peering through smoke and haze at the gaudy flags, lying crumpled in the dust, the bodies and the blood.

The vision shifts to blue-coated military men, swords at their sides and gold buttons flashing, mounting the steps of a white-columned building. They cross the hard marble floors and gather in a high-ceilinged room, as a man mounts a platform.

“It was a massacre,” he cries. “Custer was outnumbered, so it wasn’t fair—”

“But it was, wasn’t it, Grandfather?”

“As fair as any battle. We had superior numbers so we won. That was what Sitting Bull tried to tell them, but the whites wouldn’t listen. ‘We did not go out of our own country to kill them,’ he said. ‘They came to kill us and got killed themselves. God so ordered it—’”

“So why didn’t the *Wasichu* believe that?”

“They didn’t want to. They made the Yellow Hair a martyr instead. ‘We will avenge his death. We will avenge Custer’s massacre at Little Big Horn.’ And the plotting began.”

“Plotting for what?”

There was a clatter from outside the tepee.

“Time is growing short, so take this and tie it around your neck. Quickly,” Grandfather handed her the pouch.

Red Dove did, and as her fingers connected with the soft leather, her ears filled with a far-off buzzing, like a swarm of a thousand bees.

She dropped her fingers and the buzzing stopped. “Is that what the pouch can do?”

“The hiss of the rattle and the swarm of the hive,” Grandfather whispered in her ear. “With it will come the words and thoughts of others, along with visions and dreams, as you have seen.” He reached for a stick of sage, touched it to the glowing embers of the fire, and wafted a curl of smoke over Red Dove.

She opened her palms to gather the vapors that would soothe her spirit.

“Words carry medicine, Granddaughter. Remember that. And if you ever need my help, just ask. The pouch will connect us.” He straightened stiffly off the ground.

“Always?” Red Dove whispered, rising slowly to meet him.

“If you find the courage to trust its power, it will.” He placed a gentle hand on her shoulder. “So trust its power—and your own.”

>> I Understand Her <<

The noise they’d heard came from the wagon, now waiting outside. Red Dove felt the weight in her chest as she watched the white woman climb down and walk towards the small group already gathered around the fire circle, all the people who remained in the village.

The woman saw Red Dove, and her frown changed to a smile. "Hello, my dear," she called brightly.

Red Dove didn't return her smile. Her heart hurt. A blunt, insistent ache lodged inside her and would not let go. It throbbed like the pain from the rock that hit her ankle that day in the *Wasichu* town.

I have to leave my home.

She touched the bundle around her neck and the strange noise, like a swarm of a thousand bees, began. She lowered her hand and the buzzing stopped. Grandfather said it would help me understand better. She raised her fingers again.

"Are you ready, my dear?" the woman was saying. "It's going to be a long journey and I want to make sure you're fully prepared."

Journey... prepared... I understand words I've never heard before. Is it because of the pouch? Red Dove dropped her hand and listened again, but with her fingers off the pouch, only a few words came clear.

She reached up once more.

"And now it's time to go to school," the woman said.

To school? Already? No!

Old Tom sat high in the wagon, whistling to himself and dangling the reins. He stared at the ground in front of the horses, his face covered by his crumpled hat.

Red Dove scanned the faces around the fire circle. Her anxious aunts held tight to her squirming cousins, who were still too small to be sent away. Her mother slumped next to Walks Alone, eyes to the ground. Grandfather stood apart, his expression blank.

The white woman jerked her head at Old Tom. "They

don't understand me, Thomas, so you tell them."

"Sure thing, Sis," he answered.

But we *do* understand, thought Red Dove, fingers on the pouch, as she watched Old Tom hobble down off the seat. At least I do. Every word.

The woman took a step closer to Red Dove and held out the flat, black book with the cross on the cover.

She said it was a Bible. It looks like the one the skeletons were carrying in my dream.

"Inside this, you will find all of the answers to all of your questions," the woman said.

Red Dove expected the woman to hand it to her, but instead she jerked it back and shoved it into the satchel. "Later. After you've learned to read. First this." She pulled out a small round package, wrapped in white paper.

An apple?

Red Dove stepped forward to take it, just as the woman snatched it away. Smiling coyly, she unwrapped the paper, raised the shiny ripe fruit to her lips and took a tiny bite. She held it up. "See? Outside, red, but inside white... like you with your strange gray eyes, my dear."

Red Dove looked at the pink-faced woman, the apple in her hand. Then she looked at her mother's ashen face.

Tell me what to do, Mother, because I don't know!

Suddenly she did know, and her legs carried her around the fire circle, away from the white people and towards Gray Eagle. "I won't go," she said.

"You must."

"Come back here, you," said the woman, dropping the apple. She moved slowly towards her.

Red Dove grabbed her grandfather's fingers with one hand and the pouch with the other. "I won't," she repeated.

"*You must, you must, you must,*" she heard through the din of a thousand bees.

Red Dove looked at the apple, lying half-bitten in the dust. "Take it, Mother," she whispered, raising her eyes to meet those of Falling Bird.

It is not for us, her mother seemed to say. "*Toksa,*" she heard her mother whisper. "We will meet again."

She looked at her grandfather and the faces all around. She saw the resignation that they wore.

At that moment, Red Dove knew she had no choice. The adults she loved could no longer protect her. She was on her own.

She gripped her grandfather's hand as tightly as she could. She felt its delicate thinness, its gentle heat, the papery softness of his fingers.

And finally let go.

>> Civilized <<

The wagon clattered over the bumpy, rutted road. From their perch facing backward, Red Dove and Walks Alone watched their old life disappear as the landscape changed from pinkish bluffs and evergreen hills to open prairie clotted with grass and scrub. The air was thick with the scent of sage mingled with dirt and dust. Red Dove had been here before during her family's long wanderings, but now everything looked strange.

"Not been introduced—" Red Dove heard Jerusha say.

What? Red Dove turned around to see Jerusha point to herself. She touched the pouch and the meaning became clear.

“Not properly, that is.” Jerusha fixed Red Dove with her bright, birdlike gaze. She waved at Old Tom beside her. “This is my brother, Thomas. Some call him Old Tom but you should call him Mr. Kincaide—”

“Just call me Tom.”

“Oh, all right.” Jerusha frowned. “Everything here is so informal. You can call me Jerusha.”

“Je—” Red Dove started, but didn’t finish, as Jerusha filled the air with her chatter and Red Dove tired of listening. She took her eyes off the woman, dropped her hand from the pouch and the words became nonsense again.

Walks Alone, shoulders slumped, stared back at the disappearing landscape.

What’s *he* thinking? She had seen the anguish in his face when he climbed onto the wagon. This is *your* fault, it seemed to say.

Is it?

The sun crested as they rode, lighting the dusty trail, until finally, the broad, angular buildings of a white man’s town came into view.

Old Tom brought the wagon to a halt and muttered something.

Red Dove touched her pouch and watched, listening.

Old Tom dropped from the wagon and started towards two swinging doors marked *SALOON*.

“Wait. Where are you going, Thomas?” said Jerusha, looking anxiously around. “You can’t just leave us here.”

Old Tom just kept walking.

“He’s getting directions to the school, probably,” said Jerusha, shading her eyes as she watched him disappear inside

the building. She pulled a piece of ivory cloth out of her satchel and dabbed at her neck and forehead.

Red Dove looked at the ramshackle buildings, some painted, most left a weathered gray. What's inside? she wondered, but the cracked glass in the few small windows was too murky to see through.

"Come away, Abigail!" a woman screeched, breaking her thoughts.

Red Dove touched her pouch and stared. The woman wore a lacy bonnet and was tugging on a round-faced little girl in a frilly yellow dress. Next to her was a boy in suspenders and short pants that reached his scabby knees.

They're dressed like the people in my dream.

The girl gazed wide-eyed at Red Dove. She pulled something from her mouth and held it out.

"Don't give her your candy. No!" The woman swatted it from the girl's hand.

The girl stared at the fallen candy, lying sticky in the dirt. Then she looked up at Red Dove and began to wail.

"Indians," muttered the woman, dragging both children into one of the shops. "Come away!"

Jerusha clucked in disapproval. "Some people have no manners."

They hate us. Why?

Red Dove's fingers searched the bottom of the *parfleche* until she found what she was looking for: the black leather-bound book that Jerusha told them held all the answers. She opened it.

"Well now," said Jerusha with a shy smile. "Would you like me to read it to you, my dear?"

Red Dove nodded.

“It will make the time pass more quickly. But let’s wait until Thomas gets back, so he can translate any words you don’t understand—”

“I *do* understand,” said Red Dove in a clear, strong voice, her fingers touching the pouch.

“Where did you learn English?” asked Jerusha.

“From my brother and mother. They lived with my father. A white man. But I don’t remember much. At least I thought I didn’t. Maybe it’s because of this—” She patted the top of her deerskin robe—then remembered her grandfather’s warning and dropped her hand.

Jerusha waved at a fly buzzing around her nose and wiped her shining forehead. “What is it you have there, under your collar?”

“Nothing.”

“Then why do you keep touching your neck? Are you hiding something? Let me have a look.”

Red Dove pulled back. “*Hiya!*” she shouted. “No!”

“Well, honestly. I just wanted to help—”

“Good,” blurted Red Dove, desperate for a way to change the subject. “*Washte*. I help you too. I teach our language.”

Jerusha laughed. “You want me to learn *your* language? Why should I do that?”

“So we... can talk.”

“We’re talking now, aren’t we?” Jerusha pressed her lips together. “Look, my dear, it’s important that you learn *our* language, so you can be civilized—”

“Civilized?”

“Yes. Learn to be like us.”

“White people?”

“Of course,” said Jerusha. “But we’ll discuss that later. Right now I’d better go see what’s keeping Thomas.” She stepped carefully off the wagon, down onto the street and started walking towards the saloon. “Thomas?” Red Dove heard her call as the doors swung closed behind her.

Grateful for a moment of quiet, Red Dove looked around at the dusty street, her brother now dozing beside her. She thought about the angry woman and remembered the venom in her words.

Is that what it means to be civilized?

>> Delicious <<

Red Dove waited, eyes fixed on the hanging doors of the saloon. Another drop of sweat rolled down her neck. She brushed it away and felt the pressure in her bladder.

Her thoughts began to drift.

She saw a shape lean up against a building. It was the same boy she had seen before, but his mother and sister were gone. Brown-haired and scrawny, the boy looked half her age. He was holding a plum: ripe, purple, and heavy with juice.

“Delicious,” she murmured, wishing she could taste it. She touched her fingers to the pouch and watched him bite down.

A burst of flavor exploded on her tongue and a lush sweetness filled her mouth. She felt her teeth break through the crisp skin to the fleshy meat as juice tickled her chin. Now she was chewing, swallowing, sucking on the small, scratchy seed until every morsel was gone.

Is this what Grandfather said would happen? He said the pouch would open me to dreams and visions, that I would understand

people's words—and feel what they feel. Is this what he meant? Or am I just dreaming?

Out of the corner of her eye, Red Dove saw someone come out of a shop.

“You’ve made a mess again, Harold,” the woman shouted, raising her hand above the boy.

Don’t!

Red Dove dropped her fingers from the pouch as the hand smacked down—but not soon enough. The slap fell hard and she felt the sting.

“Aiyeee!” She jumped.

“Sister?” Walks Alone startled awake. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing.” Stunned and confused, Red Dove touched her fingers to her burning cheek. “I... must have had a dream. But it felt so real.”

>> I’ve Come to Help <<

Sweating in her deerskin dress, Red Dove felt her exhaustion. Her arms were sticky, now coated with the sweat and grime kicked up by horses’ hooves. She longed for the coolness of the stream that flowed through their village, the one where she used to swim.

Used to, she thought.

“We’re back,” Jerusha announced, clambering into the wagon.

Old Tom lumbered up behind and Red Dove smelled the sick-sweet stink of whisky as he jerked the reins and they all lurched forward.

“Did you get directions to the school?” Jerusha asked over the clatter of the wheels.

“Yeah, Sis,” Old Tom mumbled.

“Well, then tell us where you’re taking us, Thomas. We’re hot, we’re thirsty and we’re so tired, so please say you know where we’re going—”

“Five miles yonder, that direction.” Old Tom nodded at the road ahead.

“Is that what they told you in there?”

“Nope. Knew it all along. Been there before.”

“You have? Why didn’t you say so?”

“Like to keep you guessin’, Sis,” Old Tom said, as a faint smile curled the corner of his mouth. “You’re always so darn sure of everythin’.”

Jerusha didn’t answer. Instead, she sat rigid with annoyance, staring straight ahead.

He’s not very nice to her, Red Dove thought. She says she’s come to help us, but what does that mean? Fingers on the pouch, she twisted her head to stare at Jerusha’s rounded back.

“What is it you’re plannin’ to do, Sis?” said Old Tom, asking the question for her.

“Help these people. If that’s what God wants, I’ll wait for instructions. I’ve been meaning to ask you... that medicine man—”

“Gray Eagle? The *wicasa wakan*?”

She’s talking about Grandfather . . .

“Shhh,” Jerusha warned. “Keep your voice down or they’ll hear us.”

“Can’t. They’re sleepin’,” said Old Tom.

I’m not, thought Red Dove. I’m just pretending to be.

“You said his people think he’s a magician—”

“A shaman. He has powers.”

“Powers? Why, Thomas, that’s absurd. What can he do?”

Old Tom was silent for a moment. “You saw him disappear,” he said at last.

“That was just a silly trick—”

“Weren’t no trick, Sis.”

It wasn’t! Red Dove wanted to shout. He *does* have powers. He healed my brother when he was sick with fever. He gave him his spirit back again. And he gave me the pouch!

“His people believe in him and they listen to him, more’n they’ll listen to me or you. They been tricked an’ lied to by white folks, time an’ time again. Know what they call us?” He didn’t wait for an answer. “*Wasichu*. Means the ones that take the fat, the best part of the meat. That’s how they see us, helpin’ ourselves to what we want.”

“Why Thomas, you’re not making any sense. You’ve been here so long—maybe too long. I’ve always meant to ask, why did you leave your life back East?”

“Dunno, Sis. Can’t rightly say. Guess I just wanted somethin’ more... but what about you? Why are you here?”

“I suppose I wanted something more as well.”

Red Dove, peering round, was surprised to see Old Tom place his hand gently on Jerusha’s. “Must’a been kind hard for you back there.”

“Oh, Thomas,” choked Jerusha, raising her handkerchief to her lips. “Why did they all have to go?”

Old Tom patted Jerusha’s hand. “Parents die, Jerusha. It’s the natural course of things—”

“Yes, but losing them both at once. And then my fiancé—”

“Who? Oh yeah, forgot about that. You were s’posed to marry him, weren’t you?” Old Tom pulled on his hat brim. “Guess you’ve had a pretty rough time of it, haven’t you, Sis? Well, you’ll find somethin’ here to make up for it all.”

“Will I, Thomas? The missionaries seem to think so, but I don’t know,” said Jerusha with a sigh.

“Sure you will, Jerusha.” Old Tom cocked his head.

Jerusha shifted sideways to stare at the vast, empty prairie far in the distance. “I suppose you’re right, Thomas. Maybe this isn’t like the person I used to be. Maybe I’m becoming a whole new person, with a whole new life.”

>> Ghost Dance <<

“Do you hear that?”

Walks Alone’s urgent whisper startled Red Dove awake. She saw where she was, slumped against his shoulder on the rocking wagon, her hand wedged between her chin and neck, fingers touching the pouch. The air was cooler now, the sun lower in a cloudless sky.

“What’s that over yonder?” Old Tom wondered, squinting past the thicket of trees that lined the road.

Jerusha shaded her eyes and looked to where her brother was pointing. “There is something, isn’t there... what? Smoke?”

“Nope. Dust, I reckon—”

“And that noise. Sounds like thunder.”

“Ain’t thunder—”

“*Isn’t*, Thomas, the word is *isn’t*. What on earth could it be?” Jerusha squinted against the late-day glare.

“*Wanagi Wachi*,” said Walks Alone. Red Dove saw the

excitement in his eyes as he craned around.

“What’s that?” asked Jerusha.

“Ghost Dance,” Old Tom answered.

“Really? I’d like to watch. Please stop the wagon—”

“Ain’t regular dancin’, Sis. Some white folks think it’s more like a war dance. Could be dangerous—”

“Dancing? Nonsense. Please stop. How am I going to help these people unless I learn more about them?” She nodded at a craggy boulder to her right. “I’ll head up there so they won’t see me.”

“I don’t think—”

“I’ll be careful,” Jerusha said matter-of-factly. “Do as I ask, please.”

Old Tom shook his head and brought the wagon to a halt and Jerusha climbed down. “You stay here and guard the children,” she said, before picking up her skirts and making her way slowly up the boulder, slipping and sliding in her leather-soled shoes.

“Dang woman. Won’t listen to anyone or anythin’,” Old Tom mumbled as he flicked the reins against his knee and sighed. He shook his head, pulled his hat down low over his eyes, and slumped back on the wagon bench. “Dang woman,” he repeated, before he fell into a deep doze and began to snore.

Walks Alone put a finger to his lips.

“What are you doing?” Red Dove whispered.

Her brother pointed to the fringe of cottonwoods. “The Ghost Dance,” he said. “Wait here.”

Walks Alone slipped off the wagon and raced across the open field towards the trees.

Red Dove stared at his departing back. “Don’t leave me,”

she whispered, and waited, watching the wind riffle the sea of grass between her and the line of trees.

I'm not waiting any more, she thought and climbed quietly down to follow her brother. The steady roar grew louder as she approached, until at last she saw the source of the sound: a vast encampment of hide-covered tepees arranged in an enormous circle. In the center were throngs of men, women and children, more than she had ever seen in her life, chanting and swirling in a dizzying dance.

She didn't see Walks Alone, huddled behind a downed cottonwood, until she almost toppled over him. "Watch out!" he called.

She crouched low. "Who are they? What are they doing?" She struggled to be heard above the din.

"What does it look like? Dancing. It's what *Wovoka*, the Paiute, said they should do—"

"Grandfather told me."

Walks Alone sighed. "If he told you, why are you asking?"

"I want to know more. Tell me about the prophecy."

Her brother rolled his eyes. "I will if you stop interrupting." Speaking more loudly now, confident that they could not be heard by the dancers, he went on. "*Wovoka* dreamed that the whites would drown in a giant flood and that the buffalo would return, that flesh would cover the bones of the dead—"

"The *Wasichu* dead?" Red Dove asked, remembering her dream of blue-white skin covering bleached white bone.

"*Our* dead, sister." Walks Alone smiled. "*Wovoka* dreamed that *our* people would regain the earth. But only if we danced and danced and never stopped."

Red Dove caught sight of a warrior in a tunic painted

the color of the sky and covered with stars and turtles and fantastic shapes. "What's he wearing?"

"A medicine shirt to protect him from white man's bullets," Walks Alone said. "To keep him safe."

"Safe from bullets? Then why don't our people do that? Why don't they dance and dance and wear the painted shirts?"

"Grandfather thinks it will scare the whites and just make things worse for us—"

"Do you believe that?"

"I don't know," her brother said. "Sometimes I think Grandfather's wrong, that he's just an old man—"

Just an old man? Grandfather? Red Dove stared at her brother, shocked that he could say such a thing.

Walks Alone caught her glance and tilted his head. "Things are changing, little sister. Grandfather doesn't always know what our people need now."

He *does*. He's Grandfather! But Red Dove didn't voice her thoughts. "What is it our people need, brother?" she asked instead.

"Guns," said Walks Alone, turning away.

Red Dove watched a woman, far across the circle, about her mother's age, tap the ground lightly with her feet and sway. But something was wrong. Her steps were slowing, as she lost time with the music and fell.

"Help her," Red Dove said, but Walks Alone didn't respond. His eyes were fixed on a group of male dancers pounding the earth in front of them and the drumming was so loud he didn't hear. "Well if you won't, I will," she said, and hoisted herself over the log barrier between them and the dancers.

Walks Alone grabbed her hem and pulled her back.
“Don’t!”

“But she’s fallen—”

“She’s doing what she’s supposed to do, dancing until she falls into a trance.” He gazed at Red Dove with his steady dark eyes. “Don’t you understand? It’s part of the prophecy.”

“It is?” Red Dove stared at the fallen woman, the people swirling around her, treading gently, careful not to disturb her trance, and dancing until they too fell to the ground.

“I should be with them,” she heard her brother say.

“No, you shouldn’t. Grandfather wouldn’t like it.”

“It doesn’t matter what he thinks—”

It doesn’t?

Red Dove looked up at her brother’s handsome profile, his sharp, even features, the lock of thick black hair that fell across his forehead. And then she asked the question that was burning inside, now that everything seemed to be changing. “You do still care about me, don’t you, brother? We’ll stay together, won’t we?”

“Of course—”

“*There* you are!” Jerusha screeched, grabbing Red Dove and pulling her up. “I’ve been looking all over. Come. Quickly!” She tugged on Red Dove’s sleeve and pulled her up and away.

Red Dove looked back at her brother, saw his anguished face as he gazed first at her and then back at the dancers. She watched him turn, shrug, and numbly follow across the field and up to the wagon.

Yes, little sister, he seemed to say, I *do* care about you. And this is how I show it.





Chanwape Kasna Wi

The Moon-of-Falling-Leaves

Mission Boarding School

The Reservation—Early Fall, 1890



>> I'm Sister Agatha <<

The sun sank low behind the hills, the air carried a chill, and the sky shimmered from gold to pink to purple-gray, as they covered the miles between them and the school. Red Dove shifted on the hard wagon bench, avoiding the rough splinters that threatened her robe while she watched her world disappear.

She looked at her brother dozing beside her, his head slumped on his chest.

He wanted to run away. Why? What's he so afraid of? What does he know that I don't? "Walks Alone?" she whispered, but he didn't answer.

I have other ways to find out, she thought, touching her fingers lightly to the pouch, just as the wagon jerked to a stop.

“We’re here,” Jerusha announced. “The school.”

Red Dove felt her stomach lurch and craned her neck to see where they were. Against the dimming light, there before them loomed a building. High walls rose up from the earth, pierced by rows of tiny windows, right angles of black against blood-red brick. Beneath a thin white spire topped with a cross that perched above the roof, a massive oak door sat closed but waiting.

“You sure you want to do this, Sis? Somethin’ don’t smell right to me,” Old Tom mumbled.

“*Doesn’t*, Thomas. The word is *doesn’t*. How many times do I have to tell you?”

The door creaked open before Jerusha could finish her sentence and a tall, gaunt woman in a long, dark gown appeared. Her hair was covered by a thick black veil. Her pale, narrow face was framed by a band of white that wrapped her forehead, shrouded her chin and covered her chest. A string of thick brown beads dangled from her waist. She raised a wrinkled hand in greeting, then buried it again beneath the folds of blue fabric that hung like a banner to the ground. And waited, motionless.

“Is this the school?” Jerusha asked with a note of hesitation in her voice.

“Yes,” said the woman, through thin, chapped lips.

“We’ve brought them—the children.”

“Children?” said the woman with a frown.

Red Dove sensed Jerusha’s anxiety. “The ones I wrote about in my letter. Didn’t you get it?” Jerusha asked in a voice

pitched slightly too high. "I explained that I was bringing them and that I was available to come and teach. The missionaries made all the arrangements."

"I never got it." The woman's cold, pale eyes fell on them. A shiver ran through Red Dove.

"Maybe it got lost en route," said Jerusha tentatively.

"No matter," said the woman. "We'll find room."

"But... the arrangements, my offer to teach. We need to discuss—"

"We'll find room for *them*, I said." The strange woman strode up to the wagon, robes swishing as she walked. She extended her thin, narrow hand. "I'm Sister Agatha."

Jerusha hesitated. "Sister—"

"Agatha."

"But... you're Irish. Judging from your accent—" Jerusha said, looking nervously around.

"What was it you were expecting?" said the woman, lowering her hand and hiding it beneath her robe.

"They told me the nuns here were German—"

"Reverend Mother and most of the rest... but some of us aren't. I hope that won't be a problem," Sister Agatha narrowed her eyes.

"Why no... of course not." Jerusha, totally flustered now, dabbed at her neck with the wadded handkerchief. "I didn't mean... It's just that the Catholics I'm used to are German, more like us Protestants." She smiled weakly.

Sister Agatha ignored her and crossed to the back of the wagon, pulling her long-sleeved arm from beneath her robe and motioning for Red Dove and Walks Alone to get down.

"It *has* been a long journey," Red Dove heard Jerusha say,

“and we’re all so bone-weary tired. So come along, children. Let’s go and see where you’ll be staying,” she said, trying to sound cheerful.

Red Dove heard the creak of wood and metal as Jerusha lowered herself off the wagon, but her eyes were still fixed on the terrifying woman. Finally, with one hand on the pouch and the other gripping her *parfleche*, Red Dove climbed down.

Sister Agatha put up a hand to stop her. “Let me get a good look at you first,” she said, pinching Red Dove’s thin arm with her bony fingers.

“Underfed,” the nun said, propelling Red Dove towards the door. “Thought as much. Go inside.”

“Maybe now you’ll get some food, children,” said Jerusha, hopefully. “Let’s go and see—”

“Not you,” said Sister Agatha.

“What?”

“They’re my business now,” the nun called over her shoulder.

“But—” Jerusha, still standing by the wagon, looked helplessly at Old Tom.

“Better this way.” Sister Agatha marched up to the door and threw it wide. “Come on!”

Red Dove looked from Jerusha to Old Tom to her brother, who was now climbing slowly off the wagon.

“I think it *is* better this way, children... isn’t it?” said Jerusha, too brightly.

She wants *us* to reassure *her*, Red Dove thought. She watched Walks Alone cross the gravel courtyard, shoulders slumped, eyes down, as he marked the steps towards his fate. Together they mounted the high threshold into the dark, narrow hall.

“That nun’s crazy,” she heard Old Tom say, before the door closed firmly behind them.

>> You Won’t Be Seeing Him Again <<

The night was cool, but the air inside was colder still. The glass windows were draped, blocking any daylight that remained. Smooth, flat walls rose steeply from the floor and reflected the glare of foul-smelling lamps. Sister Agatha’s footsteps echoed on the hard, polished tile, so different from the soft, packed earth of Red Dove’s village.

“Hurry,” the nun said, barreling through yet another door and over an even higher threshold. It was darker by the moment now and harder to see as Sister Agatha’s heavy footfalls marked their progress, *clomp, clomp, clomp*, until finally they came to a narrow passage leading up. “Mind the stairs. They’re steep.”

Stairs, thought Red Dove as they climbed, feeling the evenness of boards beneath her feet.

They reached the top and faced yet another hallway, lit by a single glowing lamp. She could just make out a framed picture of light-skinned men and women in long, white robes, heads circled in gold.

Who are they? she wondered as they reached the end of the hall.

Sister Agatha creaked open yet another door. “In here,” she muttered. Her clawlike fingers dug into Walks Alone’s chest, pushing him back behind the threshold. “Just her. Come on.”

Walks Alone! Red Dove wanted to cry out.

He stood silent, watchful, nodding slightly. Go ahead, sister, he seemed to say as the door closed between them.

Moving slowly, Red Dove followed the nun into the room.

The nun walked up to a small table, picked up a stick and rubbed it against a piece of rough paper. Red Dove heard a scratch, a hiss and a blue and yellow flame burst from the end.

“Matches,” Sister Agatha muttered, answering her thoughts. “Some people call them Lucifers. Name of the Devil.” Holding the match upright, she touched it to a thin cord that dangled from a tall glass tube filled with murky yellow liquid, and the room burst into light.

Red Dove blinked and looked around. Her eyes stung from the brightness and the smoke. She wrinkled her nose.

“Kerosene. You’ll get used to it. Look over there. Your bed.”

Red Dove squinted past the rows and rows of metal frames covered with dull gray blankets to the far end of the room.

My bed?

She moved closer to get a better look. Something was hanging on the wall above it: a tiny, near-naked man, wearing only a breechcloth, hands and feet nailed to two crossed beams, eyes raised in agony. She jumped back.

“Stupid girl!” Sister Agatha barked. “Haven’t you never seen a crucifix before?”

Sister Agatha nodded at a small chest next to the bed. “Clothes are in there. A dress, pinafore, everything you’ll need. May be too big, but they’ll have to do. So go ahead, get ready for supper... busy... things to do... didn’t know you were coming.”

The nun was barking out instructions so fast, Red Dove could hardly keep up. Then she said words Red Dove understood clearly:

“Leave your old things on the floor so we can throw ’em out in the morning. And I’ll be taking the lamp with me now,” said the nun. “Sure, you’ve enough light for your young eyes.”

Red Dove wheeled around, wanting to see her brother before the light was gone.

Sister Agatha opened the door. He wasn’t there.

“Where did he go?” Red Dove gasped.

“Your brother?” Surely you didn’t think we’d let you stay together now, did you?” she said, raising her pale brows and laughing. “He’s gone to the priests like all the other boys. So you won’t be seeing him again.”

The door closed behind her, darkness filled the room, and Red Dove, unable to bear any more, at last gave in to tears.

>> Pass the Bread <<

Feeling her way through the gloom the nun left behind, Red Dove opened the rough wood chest and pulled out the first thing she touched. “Dress,” she whispered. Even in the dim light, she could tell the musty cloth was gray. She laid her deerskin robe carefully on the bed. Dragging the thin fabric over her head, she poked her neck up and through. Reaching back, she felt a row of openings opposite a line of tiny, pebble-like beads. They were meant to connect somehow, she knew, but even twisting and turning, she couldn’t fasten them all.

She opened the chest again. Lying inside, just visible against the darkness, was a piece of white ruffled cotton. “Pinafore,” the nun had said. She wrapped it around her front and tied the loose bow in back. Then she pulled on the scratchy wool socks, forced her still-sore ankle into one of the

boots and looked at the tangle of laces. “I’ll tie them later,” she mumbled, as she stuffed her foot into the other boot.

Then she felt for the soft deerskin lying on the bed.

I won’t let them throw my clothes away!

She reached under and felt along a crack in the floor.

Something’s loose... . She tugged gently and the board gave with a creak. Pulling harder, her fingers searched the gap.

It’s big enough.

She pushed the deerskin inside and saw something else lying underneath the bed.

My pouch! It fell off while I was dressing!

She grabbed it and thrust it in her pocket. She then followed the sound of voices down the steep, narrow steps. She walked along the corridor towards the murmurs of young voices coming from an enormous, brightly lit room at the end. It was filled with rows of rough, wooden tables flanked by benches. On the benches sat dozens of girls—all staring back at her.

Like me... but different.

Their skin was brown, their eyes were dark, but their black, glossy hair was chopped to the line of the chin.

Their braids are gone... are they in mourning?

She watched their faces.

They don’t seem friendly... are they smiling... or laughing at me?

She listened to the whispered English that filled the room and, hand in her pocket, she felt for the pouch.

A rush of sound overwhelmed her, first a hissing drone, then a jumble of strange new words as she peered at face after face, hoping to understand—but the tangle of thoughts

confused her. “*What’s wrong with her eyes? They’re strange... gray... not like ours.*”

She whirled around—and thudded straight into Sister Agatha.

“Watch it!”

Frightened gasps filled the room.

“Silence!” roared Sister Agatha.

Dozens of dark, frightened eyes turned towards the nun.

“Miriam,” Sister Agatha called. “Come here, child.”

A pretty, sharp-chinned girl rose with a smirk and sauntered up to Red Dove.

“This is Mary,” said Sister Agatha, pointing at Red Dove.

That’s not my name!

“Hello, Mary,” Miriam said in a voice of milky sweetness.

“She will need a *lot* of help, as you can see. Since you’re older’n she is, I’d like you to look after her.”

“Yes, Sister,” said Miriam.

“I knew I could rely on you.” Sister Agatha clapped her hands together. “And you, Mary, take your hand out of your pocket. That’s a nasty habit.”

Red Dove pulled out her hand as Miriam returned to her seat and the rest of the girls resumed their careful whispering.

Red Dove stood awkwardly, not knowing what to do. She strained her ears, longing for the comfort of her language. Surely someone here speaks it, she thought.

But all she heard was the hard-edged language of the *Wasichu*. In her confusion and not finding a friendly face to focus on, she couldn’t understand a word.

I *do* need the pouch, she thought... but didn’t dare reach for it.

Miriam pointed to the seat next to her. “Sit,” she hissed.

Red Dove sat down across from a tiny girl whose bright, dark eyes glowed up at her.

“Hannah,” said the little girl, pointing to herself.

“Red Dove, *Wakiyela Sa*—”

“You’re Mary,” said Miriam. “So get used to it.”

Mary? Red Dove wondered again. Why?

When she thought no one was looking, she reached into her pocket. Her fingers lightly grazed the pouch as she watched the faces around her.

And understood.

They’re not really laughing at me. They just don’t know what else to do, because they’re sad, too—very sad. They’re each remembering the day *they* arrived here, what it’s been like since. Even Miriam, she realized.

Wedged up next to her, Red Dove watched the other girls sitting on benches, shoulders hunched and staring ahead as they waited.

For what?

On some signal she failed to see, the girls folded their hands and closed their eyes, murmuring in unison. Red Dove bowed her own head, trying to make sense of what they were chanting.

And then, more silence.

Red Dove waited until finally Sister Agatha said something—*Amen*, was it? She opened her eyes just as an elbow jabbed her ribs.

“Pass the bread,” said Miriam, pointing at the wooden bowl that held a dried-out loaf.

Red Dove did and Miriam broke off a piece. She pushed the bowl far from Red Dove.

When Miriam wasn't looking, Hannah pushed it back.

"*Wopila*," Red Dove managed before a slap sent the loaf flying.

"The word is 'thank you,' miss," growled a fat, greasy-faced nun, her hand still in the air. "Don't let me hear zat heazen talk coming out your mouze or I vill shove a bar of soap in it."

Tears blurred Red Dove's vision. She stared at her plate, took a breath and waited. Finally, she picked up a chunk of potato in the bowl next to her plate and raised it to her mouth.

This time the slap came down on the side of her head. "Stupid girl!" the nun screeched, as the potato broke into a floury mass on her plate. "Use a fork!"

Fork?

Hannah pointed to a pronged metal implement lying by her plate and Red Dove reached for it, but her hand was shaking so much she couldn't raise it to her mouth.

What now? she wondered sadly, as she looked at the girls around her, quietly eating.

Tomorrow then, I'll eat tomorrow, she decided, and dropped her hand back down.

Little Hannah caught her eye. She picked up a piece of bread, put it in her pocket and smiled. I'll save it for you, she seemed to say.

>> The Scent of Sun-Drenched Pines <<

The meal over, Red Dove followed the girls out of the dining hall, up the stairs and into the vast dormitory. She sat on her bed, and with her back to the room, reached in her pocket, and tried to tie the pouch around her neck.

“What’s that?” Miriam said from the bed behind her.

Red Dove dropped her hand. “My *opahte*—”

“Use English! The nuns’ll take it away if they see it. But if you’re lucky, we won’t tell, will we?” Miriam said with a wicked grin.

Will they? wondered Red Dove, searching the faces of the girls around.

“Prayer time,” Miriam announced, folding her hands and dropping to her knees beside the bed. “You too,” she nodded at Red Dove. “Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.”

Red Dove knelt, closed her eyes and waited while the rough floorboards dug into her knees.

The door creaked open. She opened her eyes and saw Sister Agatha. “Sayin’ your rosaries? Good night then, girls.”

“Good night, Sister Agatha,” the girls chimed back.

The door shut. Beds creaked and floorboards groaned before the room went quiet. Someone walked over to the lamp, blew it out, and all went black.

Red Dove listened to the sounds of sleep, waiting. With the door shut, the place was hot and stuffy and airless. Through the clouded pane of the tiny casement window, she could just make out some starry shapes. *Wichinchala Sakowin*—the seven little girls carried to the sky by an eagle, a story from the Cheyenne people that Grandfather used to tell. They’re with me now, even here.

Then, from far outside, she heard another sound, a comforting coo, a five-note trill.

But doves don’t fly at night, do they?

She fell into a dream before she could think of an answer.

Drifting high above the room of sleeping girls. Floating free of

the dark dormitory and over a place she knew, her people's home, the Black Hills—the beloved Paha Sapa. Smelling clover-scented air; seeing rivers dancing in the mist; granite crags thrusting up; buffalo so plentiful they churn a sea of yellow grass to black.

“Gray Eyes; remember why you are here: to listen and to learn.”

I will, Grandfather, Red Dove murmured. She saw his kindly old face before it began to blur.

Grandfather?

“Enough for now.” The words began to fade.

“Grandfather?” Red Dove tried again, but the vision disappeared.

She opened her eyes. Light seeped through the cloudy pane as dawn approached and the air carried a chill. She looked at the girls sleeping round her, pulled the blanket close and shut her eyes again, longing for the world of dreams that she had left.

A door creak woke her and she squinted at the morning light. The room was empty, the girls gone.

No!

Little Hannah walked over to her, holding out a piece of bread. “Here,” she said. “Miriam say not wake you... but I know you hungry.” Her bright eyes shone down at Red Dove.

“Wopila—I mean, thank you.”

“You late. Hurry to chapel,” Hannah laid the bread carefully on Red Dove’s rumpled blanket and scurried from the room.

Red Dove tore off her nightgown, pulled the starched gray dress off its hanger and tugged it over her head. She quickly finished dressing and made her way down the stairs.

The hall was empty.

Panic gripped her.

“Where are they?”

She looked through the open door to the courtyard and saw them all heading back into the building.

>> Was It Something You Were Forgetting? <<

Is that the chapel Hannah talked about? Red Dove was about to step out onto the gravel courtyard when she heard the sound of women’s voices coming through a half-opened door behind her. She looked in the room and saw Jerusha sitting at a table, rubbing her temples. Standing over Jerusha was the well-fed nun who had slapped Red Dove.

Red Dove ducked behind the half-closed door and peered through the crack between the door and the wall.

“Sister Agatha vil be mit you in a minute,” Red Dove heard the nun say.

Jerusha raised her head. “Yes, thank you, Sister...?”

“Gertrude.”

“Are the children all right? I worry about them.”

Red Dove wedged herself tighter into the space to hear the answer. She reached up to touch the pouch and sighed with relief to find it still tied around her neck.

“Vich children?”

“The ones I brought, of course,” said Jerusha, frowning.

“Red Dove and her brother Walks Alone—”

“Ach, Mary und George—”

“You renamed them?” Jerusha raised an eyebrow.

“Mit proper Christian names. Zey get used to it, like ze rest.”

“Where is Mary, then?”

Here! Red Dove wanted to shout—but didn't.

"What's this?" barked Sister Agatha, coming from the other end of the hall.

Oh no, she saw me! What'll she do? A chill ran through Red Dove, but the nun only brushed past the door, squeezing her tighter against the wall.

"Well now," Sister Agatha sniffed, "to what do we owe this honor?"

"I wanted to know how the children were doing," said Jerusha, her voice sounding feeble.

"Settling in." Sister Agatha lowered herself into the stiff-backed chair at the opposite end of the table, reached for her glasses and picked up a piece of paper.

"How does she seem... the girl, I mean?" Jerusha tilted her birdlike head and went on. "She's especially clever, you know—"

"She has much to learn." Sister Agatha squinted at the document she was holding and pushed it back down again. "You've done the right thing, bringin' 'em here."

"I certainly hope so. Red Dove—Mary, that is—shows a lot of promise. She speaks English, talks in full sentences—"

"Does she now? Then she knows more than she lets on. Indians often do. They like to deceive."

That's not true!

"Maybe you're right," said Jerusha. "All I know is, when she starts to speak, she puts her hand to her throat like this." Jerusha patted her neck. "I wonder if it's some sort of Native practice."

Sister Agatha arched an eyebrow. "Touchin' an amulet, prob'ly. Nasty habit. We'll soon break her of it."

Oh no you won't! thought Red Dove, as she watched the nun's fingers fiddle with the beads that dangled from her waist.

“But I am surprised to see you back so soon... Miss Kincaide, is it? Was it something you were forgetting or are we to expect your presence every day? We’re very busy.”

“I just came to see how my charges were doing. I’m a busy woman too—”

“You can’t see the children now. They won’t learn anythin’ if you won’t leave ’em alone.”

“But I brought them.”

“And you’ll be glad you did. It’s what you wanted, isn’t it, to see they’re raised proper?”

“Yes—” Jerusha faltered, looking confused.

Don’t give up now! Red Dove wanted to cry out, sensing that if Jerusha did, there would be no going back to the life she knew. She searched the nun’s face. It was blank, impassive, the pupils in her eyes tiny pinpricks surrounded by watery blue. She was about to step out from behind the door, anything to prevent being given away to this horrible creature in the black robe. And then she heard Jerusha’s words.

“You’re right. One day we’ll all be grateful that we’ve taken this step,” said Jerusha, sounding defeated.

“So if you’ll excuse me.”

“But we haven’t talked about the boy—”

“We’ve said all we need,” said Sister Agatha. “I have work to do.” She nodded at the door.

Jerusha saw she was being dismissed. She rose awkwardly. “I am a teacher you know, so maybe—”

“Yes. Thank you.” Sister Agatha’s tight smile meant the discussion was at an end. “And you can come out of there now, Mary,” she added, as her smile melted.

Red Dove's blood froze in her veins. She stepped from behind the door.

"Have you been here all along, my dear?" Jerusha, startled, rose from her chair and rushed over to Red Dove.

"Yes."

"Well... then... you're going to be fine. Isn't she, Sister?"

"Take us with you," Red Dove blurted, looking straight at Sister Agatha. "Get us out of here."

"Oh, my dear, I can't. I'm not responsible. That's what you said, isn't it, Sister?"

"Tis."

Jerusha's eyebrows came together with concern. "Shouldn't you go and join the others? I think I saw them in the chapel." She reached out to touch a strand of hair that had fallen across her forehead.

"Take me with you," Red Dove tried once more.

But Jerusha didn't answer. Instead, she dropped her hand when she saw Sister Gertrude plodding towards them.

"*Komm*, Mary," Sister Gertrude said, breathing heavily and grabbing Red Dove's arm. "Time to cut your hair."

"No!" Red Dove pulled away.

"Oh dear," Jerusha soothed. She lifted one of Red Dove's glossy black braids. "It's a pity to lose your lovely hair, but I'm sure it will turn out all right. She let the braid drop. "And now," she sighed, "it's time for me to go, since you're no longer my responsibility."

"That's right," said Sister Agatha.

That's *not* right, Red Dove wanted to shout. You brought us here, so we *are* your responsibility.

>> Haircut <<

“Hurry up, Mary. Zat’s vat zey call you, *nein*?” Sister Gertrude lumbered across the floor and dragged a three-legged stool to the center of the kitchen. She mopped her greasy forehead with a damp rag. “How old are you? Tvelv maybe? You haf gray eyes. You part vite?”

Red Dove approached slowly, unsure of what was happening. She didn’t understand what she was supposed to do with the round wooden object that stood small, squat and ugly before her.

“Sit,” ordered the nun.

“You shtink.” Sister Gertrude pinched her nose.

Red Dove *did* smell, but it wasn’t her fault. She hadn’t washed in days, hadn’t been near a stream or a river, or even a pot of clean water. She bent her head, ashamed.

“Here,” said the nun, pointing at the rag swimming in a bucket of evil-smelling brown liquid. She set the bucket next to a tub of dark, cloudy water. “Vash up *gut* or I do.”

But she’ll see the pouch—and take it away! Fingers tight around it, Red Dove bent over the bucket. The stench hit her nostrils.

“Kerosene,” announced Sister Gertrude. “Kill anyzing you haf. Scrub *gut* so I can cut your hair.”

Red Dove didn’t move.

“*Böses Mädchen*. Bad girl.” The nun pulled the dripping rag from the oily liquid and handed it to Red Dove. “Here. Vipe your face.”

Red Dove touched it to her skin. It burned. “*Aaieeee*,” she cried and dropped the rag in the tub.

“Dummkopf! Zat was clean vater, but I not change now.” The nun threw the rag back into the kerosene, sloshed it round and rubbed it hard against Red Dove’s cheek.

“I’ll do it,” Red Dove cried and grabbed the rag. She dabbed at her tortured skin.

“Na ja, Mary,” said the nun with a grim smile. “Take off your dress and vash mit kerosene und zen mit vater. Or I call Sister Agatha.” The nun’s eyes glinted as she lowered herself onto a chair. *“Und you don’t vant zat.”*

“Sister Agatha’s callin’ for ya,” said a young nun, peering in through the doorway.

“Gott in Himmel.” Sister Gertrude raised herself off the chair and waddled to the door. Then she looked back at Red Dove. *“Verstehst du? I come back.”*

Red Dove crept to the door and closed it carefully. She stared at the grimy bucket, the pasty yellow wall, the blackened stovepipe that snaked across the ceiling. Tears blurred her vision as she fumbled with her dress. Picking up the vile-smelling rag, she began to rub the sharp, poisonous liquid into her skin.

“Finish?” Sister Gertrude asked, plodding back into the room.

Red Dove turned away and struggled to pull on her dress. “Yes,” she murmured, fingers on the pouch hidden just below her collar.

“Now hair.”

Sister Gertrude opened the brass-hinged door of a wooden cabinet that hung from the wall. She reached in and pulled out a pair of gleaming metal blades tipped with silvery rings.

Red Dove lunged from the stool, but Sister Gertrude was

quicker. She grabbed Red Dove's arm, wrenched it behind her and jerked her down. "Scissors, you shtupid girl!" she yelled.

Red Dove, powerless against the mountain of flesh that was Sister Gertrude, gave in.

"*Besser*," the nun soothed when she saw Red Dove was not going to resist. Sister Gertrude grabbed her braid and Red Dove, rigid now, stared straight ahead.

Why is she cutting my hair? We only do that when someone dies. *Did* someone die? Is it... *Walks Alone*?

Fighting panic, she began to count silently in her language, *wanji, numpa, yamni...* to block the terrifying images that filled her thoughts. She felt metal, heard the strange *slinch slinch slinch* as the blades sliced through her hair. Suddenly one side of her head felt light.

"No," she cried and leapt off the stool. A slap hit her full in the face and the scissors clattered to the floor.

She struggled to stay upright. Through a blur of pain, she saw the devastation. There before her was the hair she had tended since infancy, the hair she would cut only to honor the death of a loved one.

Red Dove felt for the other braid that still clung to her head.

You won't get this, she thought as her fingers curled around it. It's sacred. It holds memory. No one gave you permission to touch it—no one. She clenched her jaw and glared.

"You!" the nun sputtered, making the sign of the cross. "*Hexe... vitch! Put spell on me, so I not stay. Somevun else finish.*" She picked up the shears. "But I take zese... in case."

>> My Name is Sister Mary Rose <<

Red Dove reached up and felt her butchered hair, the empty air where her braid had been. She was alone now, sitting on a stool in the kitchen, the reek of kerosene still clinging to her skin.

“What’re ya doin’, child?” called a voice behind her.

Red Dove bolted from the stool. “Who’s there?”

“Didn’t mean to startle ya.” It was the young nun who had summoned Sister Gertrude. Her green eyes glowed under her feathery lashes, coal-black against the whiteness of her skin. “Sister Gertrude sent me to finish up.” Crystal beads dangled from her waist and tinkled as she walked.

Red Dove put her hand to her throat, but all she felt was skin.

My pouch!

She looked down and saw it lying in the pile of hair on the floor, just as the broom the nun was wielding swept it up into the shovel.

“Don’t,” she cried. “It’s mine!”

“What? It’s just a pile of old hair.”

Red Dove raced over, picked it out and closed her fist tight around the soft little bundle. “It’s *Wakan*... sacred... magic,” she stammered.

“Your hair’s magic? Well, keep some of it then, if ya like, but let me clean the rest up or I’ll be in for an encounter with Sister Agatha. And I don’t want to get in trouble again.” The nun went back to her sweeping.

She didn’t see the pouch, Red Dove thought as the nun made circles around her.

And then Red Dove realized something else.

I understood every word she was saying, even words I never heard before, like “encounter”—but I knew what she meant... and I wasn’t touching the pouch!

The nun stopped sweeping and looked at Red Dove. “Somethin’ wrong, child?”

“No.”

“Then let’s just have another go with them scissors, shall we? Ya look right funny with only one braid.”

Red Dove pulled away.

“Come now. I’m not gonna hurt ya. I just want to fix ya up a bit. We can’t leave your hair like that. Here. Look at yourself.” She pulled a gleaming silver disc from the pocket of her robe.

Red Dove stared into the glass. “Is that... me?”

“Haven’t ya ever seen a mirror before, silly?” The nun tilted the disc so that Red Dove could see her tear-stained eyes, butchered hair and all. “We’re not s’posed to have ’em—makes us vain, Sister Agatha says—so don’t ya go tellin’ on me now.” She shoved the mirror back in her pocket. “Come on. Let me even it out a bit. You’ll look ever so much prettier.”

Red Dove bit her lip. She’s right. I can’t leave my hair like this.

“Good then,” said the nun. She pulled something else out of her pocket and Red Dove gasped.

“It’s just a brush, silly. I’m not gonna hurt ya.” She rubbed the bristles against her open palm and smiled. “See? It’s me own. Soft boar bristles.” She reached out and patted Red Dove’s hair with her gentle fingers. “There now. Nothin’ to worry about. My name is Sister Mary Rose,” she said,

touching the brush gently to Red Dove's hair, "an' I'm a lot like you, ya know—"

"You're one of my people?"

"Course not," the young nun laughed. "I'm from the old country, Ireland. But I had to leave my home, like you, an' learn strange new ways. An' I'm *still* learnin', so maybe we can do some of that together. Would ya like that?"

Yes, thought Red Dove, nodding slowly.

"We have magic too, you know, where I come from."

"What kind of magic?"

"Oh, many kinds. And one day maybe I'll show you. But now... hold still." Sister Mary Rose reached into her pocket again. "They're sewin' shears, but they'll have to do."

Slinch, slinch, slinch they went. Red Dove closed her eyes and gritted her teeth, but this time the sound was accompanied by the high light melody the nun was humming. It was oddly reassuring.

And when the nun had finished, she pulled out the mirror and held it up so Red Dove could see.

The cut was even now, in line with Red Dove's chin. She tried to smile, but couldn't.

I *am* in mourning, she thought, for the life I used to live, for the people I loved.

"They cut my hair too when I became a nun," said Sister Mary Rose. "Shorter'n that. Practically shaved it all off. But I got used to it. You will too. Less bother. You might even come to like it one day."

Never! thought Red Dove, staring at the lonely little braid that lay with the sweepings on the floor.

