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**INTERIOR LANDSCAPES: TECHNIQUES FOR DEPICTING THE
NUANCES OF INTERRACIAL RELATIONSHIPS.**

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A complete version of the approved thesis
submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of
Bath Spa University
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Humanities and Cultural Industries, Bath Spa University

June 2016

Interior Landscapes: Techniques for depicting the nuances of interracial relationships.

ABSTRACT

This research explores techniques for depicting interracial relationships, and their accompanying racial and cultural tensions, in fiction with an emphasis on Native American literature. This includes an examination of assuming other ethnicities through character development, and the line between appropriating racial identity and demonstrating empathy for characters regardless of races. This research specifically addresses techniques for illustrating the post-Civil Rights tensions between Euroamericans and Native Americans within the Interior West. As a non-Native American author native to the American West, I also identify the obstacles and strategies for including interracial relationships within my own work, a novel titled *A Delicate Divide*, which is based on a historic event: The Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes' water compact proposal that threatens to strip land owners—primarily white—of their water rights within reservation borders.

This research discusses Cosmopolitan and Nationalist arguments in favor and against non-Native American depiction of Indians¹ in fiction, and traces the progression of Euroamerican characterization within Native American fiction of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Through its examination of this aspect of racial tension, this research illustrates the arc of sentiment toward the colonizing race from early in the twentieth century, through the Civil

¹ Throughout this paper I use the terms Indian or American Indian to clearly identify indigenous natives from post-colonial non-indigenous natives. These terms are consistent with some contemporary Indian self-identification.

Rights Movement and Wounded Knee II in 1973² (a significant event in Indian history), and into contemporary literature.

An important outcome of this research has been my own personal understanding of the methods used to create fictional characters with varying viewpoints on race, including extreme racism, without making the overall nature of the work racist. I examine authors whose work deals heavily in themes of racial identity, racism, and cultural tensions between the colonizing race and the oppressed races. These authors also clearly illuminate the hardships of race relations from each of their characters' perspectives.

This paper discusses my approach to interracial fiction through the use of a third-race or “outsider” perspective to tease out racial stereotypes and cultural differences; the concept of imperative racism as a way in which characters overcome racism; and the use of self-directed racism as a technique for dispelling racial biases. Lastly, I highlight the predominant depiction of reservation life in literature as that of addiction, abuse, and poverty, with methods for updating depictions to a modern industry- and education-focused community, which is present on many of today's reservations.

² Wounded Knee II is defined as the 71-day siege of the town of Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota by Oglala Sioux protesting corruption among tribal officials and the US government's failure to fulfill innumerable treaties throughout history. More than 60 deaths are attributed to the protest.

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na-tive /' nɛɪ tɪ v/ *adj.* (Stevenson & Waite, 2011)

1. associated with the place or circumstances of a person's birth.
2. of indigenous origin or growth.

INTRODUCTION

The interior northwestern United States—Eastern Washington and Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, and North and South Dakota—is remote: impenetrable mountains, untamed rivers, and disorienting prairies paired with unpredictable and extreme weather. Its urban populations are few and relatively stunted while its rural landscape invites escape. Once an intricate patchwork of territories occupied by Nez Perce, Salish, Blackfeet, Pend O'Reille, and Sioux, to name a few, the region has undergone a post-colonial identity shift to that of ranching and hydropower, agriculture and wilderness playground. In the one-hundred-and-fifty years of Euroamerican occupation, the Interior Northwest has become birthplace and life landscape for generations of non-indigenous people who, in the footsteps of novelist Wallace Stegner, claim nativeness. I am one of these natives, born in Forsyth, Montana near the Custer Battlefield³ during the Civil Rights Movement. The landscape of the west is a part of my identity, much as it was for the indigenous people who lived here before me. We have experienced in common the warm, wet wind of a chinook ushering in spring after the brutal cold of winter. We've tasted brook trout and suffered under the punishing sun on sagebrush prairies. We have contextualized our lives and humanity against the backdrop of rugged peaks so grand that rivers are divided. To grow up in the rural west is to experience its hardships and sweetness first-hand, directly, with your sleeves rolled up and grit under your nails.

³ The Custer Battlefield, also known as the Battle of Little Bighorn, is the site where the US Army 7th Cavalry—263 soldiers—fought thousands of Lakota and Cheyenne Indians on 25–26 June, 1876. Col. George A. Custer and his men were killed in the largest Army defeat of the Indian wars.

For early non-indigenous natives like Stegner, the Massacre at Wounded Knee, South Dakota⁴ in 1890 ended the Indian Wars and opened the west to uncontested settlement and white expansion. Euroamerican writers, looking back on a hard fought victory, entered an era of romanticizing and mythologizing the New West and the fortitude of settlers. These writers could occasionally claim direct knowledge, but more often wrote from the comfort of their eastern seaboard homes, tapping into their east coast sensibilities. They mythologized Euroamerican hardship in the face of a wild land in which Indians⁵ were summarily dismissed as “the vanishing people.” As such, Indian identity in literature was often depicted in one of two ways: as savages and villains, or mystical beings who communed with nature, and lived as “one with the land.”

When my family moved from eastern Montana to central Idaho in the late 1960s, my sisters and I routinely found Indian artifacts such as arrowheads and stone scrapers in the tilled soil of our vegetable garden. These tools of daily life so foreign to our own existence sparked questions that went beyond passing curiosity. I wanted to know about these people. I wanted to understand them. My family spent the arid summer days at the Salmon and Snake Rivers, where we traced our fingers over ancient petroglyphs and observed the more recently carved teepee rings—flattened circles in the slopes above the river where lodges were erected. We talked about those who had been here before us, always trying to piece together their existence in a canyon we now considered our own. Nez Perce was a name that was tooled onto my father’s leather belt, a gift

⁴ In 1890 Cavalry Soldiers killed hundreds of unarmed Minneconjous men, women, and children at Wounded Knee, South Dakota. It is considered the last episode of the Indian Wars, and is commonly described as “The Massacre at Wounded Knee.”

⁵ Throughout this paper I use the terms Indian or American Indian rather than Native American to clearly identify indigenous natives from post-colonial non-indigenous natives. These terms are consistent with some contemporary Indian self-identification.

from his Forest Service colleagues signifying his home in the Nez Perce National Forest. Nez Perce, to me, was first perceived as a governmental institution and only later did I understand that it was the tribe of indigenous people whose tools we collected and landmarks we witnessed. When the 1975 television drama *I Will Fight No More Forever* (1975), starring Ned Romero aired, my friends and I hailed Chief Joseph for his bravery in attempting to out-pace the US Army with his entire tribe—children and elderly among them—in tow. With heart-felt allegiance, we mourned Joseph’s defeat just miles from the Canadian border, and we often repeated his now-famous words, “From where the sun now stands I will fight no more forever” (Beal, 1963). Like ghosts, Indians were present on the land and in our lives in ways that we imagined were meaningful, but they were seldom present among us. My classmates, few as they were, possessed the freckled faces and dirty-blond mops of Caucasians. We were the children and grandchildren of Scottish immigrants, French fur traders, sheep and cattle ranchers, miners, mill workers, Fish & Wildlife, and US Forest Service workers. Our school mascot, depicted in the profile of an Indian brave adorned with feathers and face paint, was called the “Savage,” and we waved our imaginary tomahawks at pep rallies and opposing sports teams, dancing our war dances in displays of conjured fierceness.

But Wallace Stegner’s literary contemporaries had included so-called “vanished” Indian authors such as D’Arcy McNickle, N. Scott Momaday, and James Welch; some writing about the very landscape to which Stegner claimed himself not just native, but indigenous. McNickle wrote about the Flathead Indian Reservation in western Montana and was a member of the Salish & Kootenai Confederated Tribes. The cattle ranch my family purchased in 1984, and still owns today, was a part of McNickle’s 1936 landscape, and because it was white-owned by 1917 it represents the reality of Euroamerican settlement on treaty land as he described it in his work.

The Dawes Act (also known as the General Allotment Act and the Land Allotment Act) was passed by congress in 1887 and was adopted by the State of Montana in 1905. As a result, the Flathead Reservation was divided into parcels and each Indian head of household was granted 160 acres under the law. The remaining land was deemed “surplus” and sold for settlement, which is how treaty land first came into Euroamerican ownership.

I had Indian contemporaries of my own growing up, and like Stegner, I was scarcely aware of them. Sherman Alexie was stretching his literary wings on the Spokane Indian Reservation a hundred miles away from me while I was immersing myself in the lesser art of Wild West movies starring Clint Eastwood and other iconic cowboy actors. In retrospect I can see that these movies represented Hollywood’s golden years, and they taught a revisionist history to my generation of Americans—and perhaps the world—about the West and what it represented. Genre Westerns, whether books or film, have iconized the West in ways that undoubtedly damaged Native Americans, but also the viability of literary artists from the region. Our work is often pigeonholed in preconceived tropes that cause readers and literary scholars alike to skip over it with little regard for the merit it might possess. But as a child and a member of the colonizing race, I was anesthetized at best and completely ignorant at worst, to problems this mythology created, as well as the cultural conflict that is still present in the region today.

The first Indian I can recall meeting was a Nez Perce foster child who moved into our home in 1976 and attended the fifth grade with me. As a child, the vague ideas of class and race seemed like someone else’s problem. During the mid-1970s the Civil Rights Movement was winding down, though the images of marching African-Americans, water cannons, and riot police were fresh in our memories. Those conflicts had taken place in the South, so far removed from the rural West that it could have been another country entirely. Thousands of miles separate us, and

I had never met an African-American in person. While Idaho possesses an earned reputation for being a stronghold of white separatist groups such as the Aryan Nations,⁶ I was not aware of overtly racist behavior. It was common for us to refer to the South as a highly racist region and to sympathize with its oppressed, while our school teacher routinely and publicly chastised my Indian foster sister, Leah for not keeping up. The criticism carried a trace notion that it was her Indian-ness that caused it, but the verbal reprimands were never rendered in terms direct enough to be conclusive. Leah's acceptance of this abuse, too, seemed to suggest a sort of rightness to that notion. Where Alexie, in his twenties, began boldly writing about the realities of privilege through his experience of its absence, it took me years longer to find my voice. My experience growing up in the remotest parts of the West, my connectedness to the landscape and its power to shape or kill people, made me a regional writer by default. I had no choice but tell the story of life there. And though my burgeoning understanding of the cultural conflict around me played a part in the impetus for my writing, recognizing my unwitting participation in the ongoing Indian Wars gave my writing voice a tentative timbre at times. As Elizabeth Cook-Lynn suggested in her essay "Why I can't read Wallace Stegner" I, too, was aware that we might "discover the unwelcome news that we have been enemies and perhaps still are" (Cook-Lynn, 1996, p. 33). For a child in love with Chief Joseph, this was a staggering recognition—a chrysalis releasing an identity crisis. Like many Euroamerican authors writing during the post-Civil Rights era, with the exception of one poem, my work has omitted Indians and their influence on my life in the West entirely. As the writer sitting down to her craft, I often seek to understand these

⁶ Aryan Nations, founded by Pastor Richard Butler in the early 1970s held "white power" gatherings on his compound near Coeur d'Alene, Idaho through the end of the twentieth century. Butler's Aryan World Congress, celebrating Aryan solidarity, held every July was the longest running event in the White Separatist Movement. (Balch, 2006)

things: How do I write about the nuance of racial and cultural tension between Indians and Euroamericans that is present in the West today without making the same missteps as Euroamerican writers before me?

As I experienced the unfolding of present political issues regarding water rights⁷ and non-Indian ownership of land within the boundaries of the Flathead Indian Reservation, I could no longer focus my attention on other things to write about. I needed to write about *this*. More specifically, I wanted to write the human impact of this issue through fiction. What does it mean to be a second-, third-, or fourth-generation rancher who is facing a loss of livelihood? History is replete with stories of white victory in the West. In our post-Civil Rights awareness, descendants of those colonizers have attempted to tell a different story—that of the horror and loss Indians suffered. We have tried to assuage our guilt with more accurate accounts of the indigenous human toll the Indian Wars delivered. But *this* is new: The “vanishing people” have not vanished. And one-hundred-and-fifty years later, their descendants have not only learned our laws, but have begun to use those laws to regain what was taken from them. It scarcely seems fair to the ranchers. As individuals on the stage of history they have done nothing wrong—meaning they are living within the political and economic boundaries that their ancestors and their government created. They are, in essence, living the American Dream as it has been defined for generations, and yet, they stand to lose everything. There is irony in this story, and as a regional author, I needed to find a way to tell it, which meant including Indians in my fiction.

⁷ The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of Montana proposed a water compact that reverts control of all water within the boundaries of the Flathead Indian Reservation, and in-flowing streams, based on their right to “take fish,” which is clearly defined in the Treaty of 1855.

The central question of my research when I began was: How do Euroamerican authors native to the West write about the racially charged tension of our post-Civil Rights generation without appropriating indigenous identity or making the same romantic or racist missteps that our predecessors have? It seemed natural for my research, then, to begin with Native American fiction and a eye toward understanding Indian perspectives on race, especially in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. I started by examining the following works: *The Surrounded* (McNickle, 1936) by D'Arcy McNickle, *The Jailing of Cecelia Capture* (Hale, 1984) by Janet Campbell Hale, *A Yellow Raft in Blue Water* (Doris, 1987) by Michael Doris, *Love Medicine* (Erdrich, 1984) and *The Round House* (Erdrich, 2013) by Louise Erdrich, "Yellow Woman" (Marmon Silko, 2013) by Leslie Marmon Silko, *Winter in the Blood* (Welch, 1974) by James Welch, *Medicine River* (King, 1989) by Thomas King, *From the River's Edge* (Cook-Lynn, 1991) by Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, *Perma Red* (Magpie Earling, 2002) by Debra Magpie Earling, and *Reservation Blues* (Alexie, 1995) and *Blasphemy* (Alexie, 2012) by Sherman Alexie.

One aspect in particular that stood out in my research: Several authors used characters who attempt to bridge the racial divide through intimate relationships. These love interests and sexual encounters illustrated a more personal attempt to overcome racial biases by understanding a member of another race intimately. These characters, in some cases, seemed to transcend racial biases, but not without significant struggles. I found this highly focused topic rich with information, not simply about how Native Americans have viewed Euroamericans over the last century, but as one way they have imagined overcoming the cultural divide. Perhaps the approach was more real to me on a personal level, as well, because I have been married to a man from another culture, religion, and country for most of my adult life. I found the depiction of these characters' struggles and hardships identifiable and consistent with my own experience.

Based on this revelation, I further refined the focus my research and recast my thesis question as: What techniques can we derive from Native American literature to clearly depict the cultural and racial nuances of interracial relationships of the West?

I explored the metaphor and language that the central characters invoke to perceive themselves and the other, and in Alexie and Hale's work I further analyzed the use of adulterous affairs with members of the same race as a way of reconnecting the characters to their original identities. The new direction of my research necessitated eliminating several texts that did not support my narrowed focus. In this paper I discuss the most relevant texts in detail. I also explored comparative non-Native American texts, such as Krista Bremer's creative non-fiction *My Accidental Jihad* (Bremer, 2014). I chose Bremer's work specifically to identify parallels between Indian and non-Indian interracial relationships. Bremer and I share the first-person, real life experience of being an American woman married to a Libyan immigrant.

Early in my writing career, I imagined that the simplest way to avoid appropriating indigenous identity was not to assume Indian identity in my fiction—that is, to avoid writing Indian characters from inside or omniscient, first- or third-person perspective, in which I included their thoughts, feelings, and ideas. But as I examined the work of authors Cook-Lynn, Hale, and Alexie, I found that contemporary—or post-Civil Rights era—works by Native Americans did not shy away from writing inside first- and third-person perspectives of Euroamerican characters. And in the case of Alexie, he writes from the perspective of a variety of races (white, black, Indian, and biracial), and within those characters he specifically creates a variety of racist, non-racist, and interracial perspectives toward characters of other ethnicities.

I am aware of the missteps of my Euroamerican predecessors and the views that some Indian scholars have taken of those missteps, which I discuss in this paper. In my desire not to repeat the

mistakes of the past, I have studied the scholarly arguments for and against depicting Indians in my fiction. I have researched the techniques and methods of Native American authors from the beginning of the twentieth century through the present, traced the arc of their depiction of Euroamericans as well as ethnic characters, and the views of those characters on racial issues. I included—to a lesser degree—comparative depictions of Native American, Arab, and to a very small degree African American characters by Euroamerican authors during the same time period and from roughly the same region. The relatively small number of referenced works about African American interracial relationships, which I explain in detail later, is due to the historical influence that slavery plays in these relationships, which is different than other cross-cultural relationships, as well as the large body of work already addressing this subject. The focus of this research is the depiction of Native American-Euroamerican relationships in literature (with special attention to the Interior Northwest), but including broader comparative references. The product of this research is a novel titled *A Delicate Divide*, which depicts Indian, Euroamerican, and Arab-American characters and their personal relationships through a political and economic battle of water rights in the contemporary American West.

NATIONALIST AND COSMOPOLITAN PERSPECTIVES ON LITERATURE

An active debate among Native American scholars has influenced writers of all races, and never more so than in the decades following Wounded Knee II (1974). As an outspoken member of the community of Native American Scholars, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn has asserted that Native American literary theory and productivity must come from within the Indian community—a position that is characterized as Nationalist (Lundquist, 2004)—with the primary perspective being that at this time in history Indians must exclude Euroamerican, or any non-Indian,

influence as the Native American aesthetic develops. Craig Womack, a Cherokee Indian scholar, and author of *Red on Red, Native American Literary Separatism*, shares this view and writes:

The postmodernists might laugh at claims of prioritizing insider status, questioning the very nature of what constitutes an insider and pointing out that no pure Creek, or Native, viewpoint exists, that Native and non-Native are constantly deconstructing each other. . . . we might remind ourselves that authenticity and insider and outsider status are, in fact often discussed in Native communities, especially given the historical reality that outsiders have so often been the ones interpreting things Indian. (Womack, 1999, p. 5)

Cook-Lynn included in her assessment of Wallace Stegner the following criticism of all Euroamerican writers:

The principal perpetrators of a wrongful history, as far as Stegner was concerned, are allowed to melt into the heroic and hopeful future of America with no more than an expression of regret. Such terrible regret is expressed so beautifully that readers are helpless to resist a sympathetic emotional response. This is the power of Stegner and those who preceded him, and those American writers of the West who follow. They all become part of the American literary movement which claims possession of the American West. . . . Un-self-consciously, they write about the plains and the American Indian and their own experiences in an attempt to clarify their own identities (Cook-Lynn, 1996, pp. 31-32).

As a student of creative writing and a writer of regional fiction about the West, this perspective seems to negate any literary contribution that I might make to the cross-cultural landscape of our shared homeland—at least from an Indian perspective. And given the historical depiction of Indians by Euroamerican writers throughout the history of the United States, it seems reasonable for Indians to draw hard boundaries around the reclamation of Indian identity. I don't want to contribute to a history of inaccuracy and cultural appropriation, though clarifying my identity, as Cook-Lynn states it, requires that I write about my experiences in the West. The Nationalist perspective (if it were something one is expected to adhere to, rather than an intellectual debate)

would deny the larger truth of my own experience by suggesting that I omit Indians and Indian influence when writing about characters who reside in the West, and specifically Euroamerican characters who live on treaty (or reservation) land, which is an undeniable fact in the West today. It can be argued that the Nationalist perspective, if adhered to, threatens to further perpetuate cultural discord by suppressing the voices of non-Indians when it comes to how we relate as separate cultures living together and sharing resources in the same region. It is precisely the intertwining of cultures that makes the Nationalist perspective problematic, even for those within its own ranks. The term “Indian” is a simplified definition in America of “not European,” and it fails to account for the varied cultures and affiliations that comprise it. As Louis Owens points out in his critical analysis of Native American literature:

For the Indian author, writing within consciousness of the contextual background of a nonliterate culture, every word written in English represents a collaborator of sorts as well as a reorientation (conscious or unconscious) from the paradigmatic world of oral tradition to the syntagmatic reality of written language (Owens, 1985, p. 6).

Owens goes on to state that mixed-blood Chippewa writer, Gerald Vizenor, gets to the heart of the issue when a character in his novel *Bearheart* (Vizenor, 1990) asks “What does Indian mean?” Indian authors are redefining Indian identity as they develop a written aesthetic—one that threatens to obscure the nuances of Indian culture as perceived by the rest of the world. In this respect, I recognize the importance of the Nationalist debate, as well as its exclusion of non-Native American voices.

Arnold Krupat, a non-Indian scholar of Native American literature, argues in favor of a different approach. He is a Cosmopolitan by his own non-indigenous status, but the term has greater meaning—that of worldliness, universality, and internationalism. Krupat goes on to define Cosmopolitan perspective as deriving from Classical origins, stating “*polis* was the *cosmos*, making

him *cosmou polites*, a citizen of the world” (Krupat, 2002, p. 15). He also cites Barry O’Connell as saying of the history of indigenous people of North America:

Crossing cultural lines had to have happened and even though the number of ‘cosmopolitans’ may have been small, they surely existed as mediators, traders, translators, etc. (Krupat, 2002, p. 15).

The Cosmopolitan perspective advocates for a collective discourse and multi-ethnic contributions to the literary aesthetic. In *Red Matters*, Krupat writes:

Neither identities nor critical perspectives are given by birth; neither indentities nor critical perspectives are ‘in the blood’ or produced by descent alone (Krupat, 2002, p. 1).

Cosmopolitans are, and always have been, cross-cultural liaisons. Krupat further asserts that one cannot understand the United States without coming to terms with the indigenous presence here. Krupat draws parallels by summarizing Paul Gilroy’s comments that the Holocaust has been viewed as a Jewish issue, and slavery has likewise been viewed as a black issue. In terms of American Indians, the history of genocidal devastation is “part of the ethical and intellectual heritage of the West as a whole” (Krupat, 2002, pp. viii-ix). The present lack of awareness hurts both Indians and non-Indians equally.

In the context of creative writing, and especially the art of fiction, it is the work for authors like myself to produce a complex, multi-layered story that deals with a universal condition—in essence to bring the reader a truthful facsimile of one or more aspect of life. Within that discipline, the Nationalist perspective is too restrictive. It cannot answer these questions: What of the interracial experience? And beyond that, the biracial experience that is frequently the outcome of such unions? Do we restrict the literary contribution depicting these individuals to authors whose racial makeup represents it? The argument becomes quite muddy when taken to

its logical conclusion. Astute authors have significant contributions to make to the literary tradition of the West as it applies to these cross-cultural matters, regardless of their race.

INTERRACIAL UNIONS AND THEIR BIRACIAL OUTCOMES

Cook-Lynn’s assertion that we might “discover the unwelcome news that we have been enemies and perhaps still are” may be true for some, but since the first encounter between two warring cultures, and playing out in every encounter to follow through history, there have been those who reluctantly or enthusiastically entered into intimate interracial relationships of love. These people have arguably taken the largest risk, facing alienation from family, community, and in some cases the threat of bodily harm. Though I had dated Indian boys while in high school, the cultural divide I personally attempted to bridge was not the unreconciled Indian/Euroamerican clash of my geographic region. Instead, it was the Arab and American struggle of the 1980s when Ronald Reagan was bombing Libya, Libyan terrorists were bringing down airliners over Scotland, and American stereotypes of Arab men in particular were at the peak of negativity, leading to a growing distrust. Interracial couples often pay the price for seeking understanding, fulfilling curiosities, or acting out rebellions, but in many cases like my own they are attempting to build bridges and gain knowledge from a deeper more profound connection. My experience married to a Libyan man is fertile ground from which to create fiction that presents a truthful facsimile of an aspect of interracial life. Without question, my personal experience as a member of the colonizing race who was becoming aware of the ongoing Indian struggle in the wake of genocide, institutionalized cultural robbery, and a legacy of broken treaties set me on a journey to understand other cultures.

My writing has always explored the cultural divide, which springs from an inability to reconcile my nativeness in a region that was home to my race through the wholesale slaughter of its

indigenous people. My first novel *Blackbelly* focused on the uncomfortable accommodation of a lone Muslim family in a small Idaho town, drawing on the Aryan Nations' presence in the state and its incidious influence on many of its residents. My fourth novel explored the realities of Mexican migrant workers in the Pacific Northwest and their invisible, yet economically vital presence. Why then should I shy away from writing about Indians? To begin, I needed to deromanticize my own perspective of my native land in order to clearly see my relationship to it and its indigenous people.

One approach I have taken is to bring the cross-cultural perspective I gained from my marriage, and the challenges we faced as a couple and as parents, to my writing about the West. One might imagine that it would add unnecessary complexity. But the uniting of two individuals with different world-views, cultural traditions, and mythologies carries similar challenges of understanding regardless of which two races or cultures are uniting and what specific issues they are trying to understand. I found that dismantling my own interracial marriage provided me a structure to measure my relationship with Indians. The reaction I received from my immediately family when they learned that I was dating a Libyan man was negative and, unfortunately, somewhat predictable. Most of my Euroamerican friends and family members immediately assumed that, as a woman, I was being controlled by him, and that I would be stripped of all my basic human rights as the relationship progressed. They cited "cultural norms" of the Middle East as if they had lived there, especially as it pertained to their understanding of the treatment of women. No matter how I tried to assure people that I was proceeding with my eyes open, fully capable of assessing the relationship, most did not believe me. Just speaking to this man, in their view, put me in danger of becoming his victim. From the same people who had shared my admiration of Chief Joseph and a genuine sorrow about the history of his tribe, came a new,

racially charged perspective that was as foreign to my thinking as the man I was dating was mysterious. There is an irony with many of these bridging relationships, whether interracial, interfaith, or interpolitical, that traces itself back to the very beginning: the harder the families push to break the couple apart, the more determined many of these couples become in staying together. William Shakespeare wasn't writing original content when he penned *Romeo and Juliet*; he was simply providing a beautifully rendered, and highly truthful facsimile of the human condition.

When we married, my husband Salem was a Libyan citizen with Resident Alien status in the United States. He didn't need our union to remain in the country, which is an important point that I will discuss later. Before he acquired legal residency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) routinely checked on his activities and whereabouts, and I was included in that circle of investigation when an agent made an unannounced visit one evening shortly after we began dating. He was polite, and I answered all of his questions, while wondering if I had gotten myself involved in something I had no business in. But the nagging and unanswerable questions that plagued me from my childhood—that of the Indians and their dispossession of our now shared homeland—had given me an open-minded inquisitiveness about all races and cultures that made walking away simply because this man was Arab out of the question. My subsequent experience as one half of an interracial couple who raised a mixed-race child has given me greater empathy for the subtle struggle for power, dominance, understanding, and peace that plays out between cultures in the kitchen and bedroom rather than on the battlefield.

Perspectives on interracial unions in the West

Interracial relationships between Euroamericans and Indians have been criticized for their further fracturing of precolonial culture by scholars like Cook-Lynn. In her essay on Stegner, she writes:

For the most part, native populations continue to view intermarriage as one of the risks to cultural and political survival, and there is plenty of evidence in contemporary tribal life to indicate that the Plains Indians have always regarded it with suspicion. . . . The Sioux still call those with white blood *iyeska*, literally translated as “talks white,” and it is not generally regarded as a complimentary term (Cook-Lynn, 1996, p. 36).

There is little debate among literary scholars that Stegner’s depiction of interracial relationships and their resulting children, which he referred to using the term *Métis*,⁸ was misguided and the *Métis* were not a buffer race, or neutral state between larger, more hostile groups. But what can these mixed race people teach us about our cultural differences? What can they tell us about the breadth of that divide?

I initially approached two Indian professors in the field of Native American Studies with my thesis topic, hoping to gather recommendations on literature and other resources to examine. I explained my interest by contrasting my personal experience as both a native of the West and as someone with first-hand knowledge of interracial marriage and what it means to attempt to bridge a cultural gap. I was surprised by the initial responses from both. They immediately dismissed the parallel between Arab-Euroamerican and Indian-Euroamerican interracial marriage issues and conflicts citing that Arab males marry American women to profit through citizenship and property. One was quite adamant that in matrilinear cultures such as the Chocktaw tribe, there would be no tangible value for an Arab male to marry in. I was somewhat stunned by the prejudice of motive. In my personal experience it was entirely inaccurate, and it reminded me of how easy it is for one culture to be blind to another, even when both cultures have experienced

⁸ *Métis* are a recognized indigenous people of mixed race in Canada. They trace their ancestry to the indigenous tribes and “first nations,” or Europeans. The *Metis* were hailed by church and government leaders as a buffer race, and in some instances, Europeans were encouraged to marry indigenous people to speed the assimilation process. *Metis* has become a catch-all term for biracial Native American and European people.

similar treatment like colonialism at the hands of the same oppressor. There seemed little correlation between the two types of interracial unions in their minds, which led me to question the accuracy of my assumptions. Although I have not personally found their argument of profit motive on the part of Arab males to be accurate, they are correct in their assertion that the cultural divisions between Euroamericans and Arabs are not exactly the same as those between Euroamericans and Indians. However, Western culture is rife with Arab stereotype that echoes earlier decades of Indian stereotype. In 2014 a fourteen year-old Dutch girl named Sarah was arrested for tweeting to US Airlines that she was an Afghani man named Ibrahim and was planning “something big”:

@AmericanAir hello my name's Ibrahim and I'm from Afghanistan. I'm part of Al Qaida and on June 1st I'm gonna do something really big by (Oregonian, 2014)

The news about the threat and her subsequent arrest lit up social media sites like Twitter and Facebook, but surprisingly little was said about her racist impersonation of an Afghani male. Once the teen realized she had done something that officials take very seriously, she tweeted that she was “a white girl,” implying that terrorist intent was aligned with race, followed by another that she was not from Afghanistan. “I’m just a fangirl pls I don’t have evil thoughts and plus I’m a white girl,” ... “and I’m not from Afghanistan.”

The reaction I found in social media and news website comments was focused almost exclusively on Sarah’s foolishness to tweet a threat without expecting to be held accountable, but the fact that she assumed Arab identity to lend credence to that threat was not discussed much; or perhaps more troubling, it was accepted.

My own apprehension about anti-Arab racism in the West was symbolized a few years ago in a dream I had in which Salem and I were out for an afternoon drive. After a series of wrong turns we ended up in a mountainous area on a two-track logging road. We were unable to turn around

because a large sport utility vehicle had followed us and blocked the road behind us. Salem got out to talk to the driver, but several men poured out of the vehicle and overtook us. They beat Salem while forcing me to watch, then they told me I would be spared (from death, I assumed) if I denounced my love for him. He nodded to me. A private message to do it. But I couldn't. The dream is significant because it represents the fear interracial couples carry with them in semi-hostile regions. I was at home near Portland, Oregon—an area known for its tolerance toward multi-culturalism—when I experienced that dream, not traveling through rural parts of the West where the threat might have felt more real. Waking from the dream did not dispel my fear; it had simply polarized what was already there. It is this sort of intense, real apprehension that I want others to understand through my writing.

So why not simply write from the perspective of my own interracial Arab-Euroamerican experience without including Indians as scholars like Cook-Lynn seem to suggest for writers like myself? I believe that to pretend Indians have not shaped my perspective of the West, my life, and my writing as a whole would ignore one of the reasons that I engaged in an interracial marriage and raised a biracial son. It was my perplexion and curiosity about the indigenous people of my region and the awareness of the devastating impact of colonialism imposed by my forebearers that shaped my intercultural literary aesthetic. Avoiding an important factor in the formation of ideas and identity while writing regional fiction leaves the underlying truth of the story, which is what the writer is tasked to deliver, untold. One may as well not write at all.

EUROAMERICANS AND OTHER ETHNICITIES IN NATIVE AMERICAN LITERATURE

Before I discuss interracial relationships in literature and some of the ways in which the cultural nuances are depicted, it's useful to understand race relations in literature (in general) from the

Indian perspective. The open depiction of racial tension was slow to appear, and its metamorphosis can be traced in Indian literature, revealing an interesting arc.

Pre-Civil Rights Era

Prior to 1900 only two novels by Indian writers had been published in America: John Rollin Ridge's *Joaquin Murieta* (1854) and Simon Pokagon's *Queen of the Woods* (1899). From 1900 to 1968, only seven more novels by Native American writers were published: Mourning Dove's *Cogewea, the Half-Blood* (1927); John Milton Oskison's *Wild Harvest* (1925), *Black Jack Davy* (1926), and *Brothers Three* (1935); John Joseph Mathews's *Sundown* (1934); and McNickle's *The Surrounded* (1936) and *Runner in the Sun* (1954). *The Surrounded* (McNickle, 1936), which I selected, in part, because it is set in the same location as my own novel, touches on racial tensions only briefly and tentatively. In fact, the single most racist character in the novel is the merchant George Moser's wife—a character who never actually appears on the page, but is only obliquely visible through the frustrated thoughts of her husband. She wants to move back to the east coast, leave Montana and all that they have invested in because she has never been able to abide the smell of Indians, which I infer as a broader cultural disdain for the entire race. It was written at a time when the US government was routinely removing Indian children from their homes, placing them in boarding schools often hundreds of miles away, and forbidding them from speaking their native languages or practicing tribal religions and traditions. Less than a half-century after the Massacre at Wounded Knee, this novel was groundbreaking in its Indian perspective on the difficulty of assimilating into the dominant culture. McNickle's fiction uses the return of the elders to their traditional religion and ritual in secrecy, as it was forbidden by the Catholic church—a central influence for assimilating tribes—and the government, as a commentary on whether Indians ought to accept assimilation. But he was careful to reach his

Euroamerican audience in a way that didn't scream too loudly the horrors of the past or the injustices of the present. The story is presented in a Euroamerican-centric aesthetic that, by the standards of post-modern literature, seems to understate and even omit what we might imagine was Indian sentiment toward whites on the reservation at that time. Yet McNickle managed a careful spreading out of circumstantial truths for those with eyes to see, which I discuss in detail later in this paper.

Civil Rights Era

James Welch's novel *Winter in the Blood* (Welch, 1974), likewise barely touches the topic of race relations, except to include the unusual and intentionally vague relationship the protagonist's mother has with the white priest who had once overseen the local parish. The priest has long since moved to a new parish, but the two still exchange letters regularly, something her son (whose name we never learn) finds troubling. The protagonist eventually fails to deliver one of these letters to his mother, tearing it in pieces while he sits in a bar in Malta, Montana. It's difficult to know if this severing statement is about the priest's whiteness, his religion, or both. Though the novel was published just months after Wounded Knee II, it was surely written before the peak of the American Indian Movement⁹. Like McNickle, Welch seems to be writing to an audience that is predominantly Euroamerican during a volatile time in US history. One wonders exactly what the Indians in *Winter in the Blood* thought of white Montana in the 1960s and 70s, but Welch's story focused on returning his character to his indigenous identity as a Blackfeet Indian, which makes a powerful statement about race relations by way of abandoning them.

⁹ The American Indian Movement is a civil rights organization, founded in in 1968 to help Indians displaced by government programs. Its goals encompassed economic independence, revitalization of traditional culture, protection of legal rights, and autonomy over, and restoration of, tribal lands.

Post-Civil Rights Era

Janet Campbell Hale's novel *The Jailing of Cecelia Capture* (Hale, 1984) is a clear-eyed account of the struggle to overcome poverty and racial stereotypes plaguing young Indians, particularly women, in the 1960s and 70s. Told through flashback while Cecelia awaits processing and release from jail after a drunken driving arrest, the novel takes us to a northern Idaho reservation where Cecelia is the youngest child of a mixed-blood mother who is embittered and abusive, and a full-blood father who has failed to achieve his potential and become a lawyer, despite his college education. Instead her father, like so many of his generation, has fallen into alcoholism. But Will Capture holds onto his hope for Indians, sending Cecelia to the white school in a nearby town rather than the mission school at the reservation in order to give her the best academic advantage. For all his hopes and encouragement, though, the messages he gives her are mixed at best, especially when he jokes that Cecelia will need to play dumb to get a husband because men don't like smart women, or the way he insists she not wear red and broadcast her Indian-ness. Cecelia's mother is a darker presence. Suffering from advanced rheumatoid arthritis, she takes her pain and misery out on everyone around her by calling them "damned dumb Indians" and referring to Cecelia as a "damned dirty cur" (Hale, 1984, p. 84). She talks of her Irish heritage, but Cecelia reckons that those great-grandparents she has never met could not have been accepting of an Indian daughter-in-law and half-breed grandchildren. Hale's novel is one of determination and perseverance in the face of roadblocks that often plague the underprivileged—dropping out of school, unwed motherhood, welfare, and relationships of convenience. She is blunt in her exposition of Indian self-hatred, especially from the generation who endured the reservation years before the rise of the Civil Rights Movement. Cecelia's father, Will Capture's alcoholism and subsequent decline could have been the sequel to McNickle's tale of Archilde—a young man

who followed the rules, but was not permitted to succeed in the white world despite his valiant efforts. Hale's work is also successful in illustrating the plausibility, and even inevitability of a disillusioned Indian girl from the reservation making choices that compromise her ability to get ahead, and the unfair battle to later overcome that track record and go on to success.

Hale is writing to a new generation, and her main character doesn't have the option of embracing the old ways as a form of rejecting the new culture that is present in earlier Indian works. Cecelia is a modern woman fully aware that her success, and ultimately the success of Indians, lies in her ability to compete in the new world. She is allowed the sexual freedom and pursuit of education available at the time, if she has the strength to make it happen. She stumbles down this path toward success, working through obstacles that have discouraged countless predecessors—unwed motherhood, welfare, and the compulsion toward criminal activity simply to make ends meet. In the civil rights-aware 80s, Hale is also freer to give her characters controversial feelings about race, such as when Cecelia gets high with a group of people she shares a house with in San Francisco and begins to feel paranoid. Hale writes:

Maybe Rainbow and Lupine and What's-his-name, Rainbow's old man, were all involved in some kind of conspiracy against her. And, Christ Almighty, they were white, weren't they? All of them. White and hairy as could be. White, white, white. Sickly white like the underbellies of frogs or certain kinds of fish. She had to stop seeing them as white (Hale, 1984, p. 137).

Elizabeth Cook-Lynn's novel *From the River's Edge* (Cook-Lynn, 1991), published less than ten years later, takes a sharp turn into overt anti-white sentiment. John Tatekaya, a Dakota and successful cattle rancher, is losing his land to flooding due to a power project on the Missouri River when nearly half of his cattle are stolen. Facing economic disaster, he seeks justice in the "white man's court." The trial becomes a metaphor for the larger injustices visited on Indian people throughout history. Cook-Lynn strikes a staccato pitch in her indictment of "white"

people in the novel, and she takes it to the page in a visual refrain. The invocation of the word “white” throughout the book draws unmistakable *us versus them* lines, such as this passage where she also adds quotation marks to the *jury of peers*, indicating that the idea is a falsehood (bold added for effect):

Inside, he went up the **white** marble stairs to a desk where a tall, large-boned, graceful, and dignified **white** man sat, checking in the participants for this awkward meeting, Indians and **whites** coming together to testify for or against, telling the truth or making up lies for the “jury of peers” to see who is more believable than the next, like pawns in a chess game of legal mumbo-jumbo where John’s rules for survival no longer applied. A game, for Indians at least, which had its origins in the not-so-distant past, it was an ongoing and consistent fraud, set up to make all of those concerned believe that justice in Indian Country was real. But such games seemed totally oblivious to the presence of historical duplicity in any particular case. The **white** man has always stolen from the Sioux, he thought as he climbed the stairs. First it is our land, then our way of life, our children, and finally even the laws of our ancestors. And now this **white** man, the son of my **white** neighbors, has stolen my goddamn cows (Cook-Lynn, 1991, p. 21).

Cook-Lynn’s accusations may well be deserved; few would deny any of the statements her fictional character makes about the history of white oppression. *From the River’s Edge* is an important example in my research because it steps beyond discourse and fair depiction of the human aspects of cultural issues and moves into blatant anger—perhaps even rage. As a non-Indian native, I have comprehended the sorrow and devastation that Indian authors have depicted using far more graphic accounts than hers, but Cook-Lynn’s novel was the most difficult for me to read. Rather than producing an understanding of her rage, I was put off by the white characters, which often felt two-dimensional, and the broad-sweeping subtext that “white” people are selfish, thieving oppressors who lack honor. If feeling the full force of her anger is what she had hoped to achieve with this novel, especially when read by Euroamericans, she

indeed accomplished that. But her anger in this work, I believe, has eclipsed her ability to see the human qualities of Euroamericans. In so doing—and perhaps this was her point—it has made her treatment of “white” people equally as bigoted as she accuses Euroamerican authors such as Wallace Stegner.

As I read *From the River's Edge* I repeatedly considered Cook-Lynn's statement about Euroamerican authors in the West, which I quoted earlier:

They all become part of the American literary movement which claims possession of the American West. . . . Un-self-consciously, they write about the plains and the American Indian and their own experiences in an attempt to clarify their own identities (Cook-Lynn, 1996, p. 32).

I found it ironic that she would have non-Indian authors silenced on the subject of Nativeness while indulging in a sort of flogging of white people in her own writing. No one should be denied the right to express her opinion. In witnessing Cook-Lynn vehemently express her opinion in this novel, as well as her numerous essays, it settled my apprehension about writing the West in its entirety, including the depiction of Indians. It illustrates the importance of understanding the humanizing aspects and motives of each character I place on the page. That is best achieved with neither anger nor sentimentality—the common missteps of Euroamerican authors like Stegner.

The arc of metamorphosis reached its fever pitch with Cook-Lynn's work. From the subtle subtext on race present in McNickle and Welch's fiction early in the century, to open flirtation with racial tensions in Hale's post-Civil Rights fiction, Cook-Lynn expressed vehement, pent up anger over centuries of injustice. But writers who came after her have been less inclined to follow in her footsteps.

Contemporary Literature

Sherman Alexie's collection of short stories *Blasphemy* (Alexie, 2012) is an example of contemporary Indian writing that not only addresses race head-on, but is comfortable assuming other racial identities on the page to achieve it. In "Gentrification" Alexie's character is a white man living in a black neighborhood. When his next-door neighbors deposit a mattress on the curb in front of their house, then fail to remove it, it becomes infested with rats and he decides he should get rid of it himself. But being a white man, he doesn't want to appear racist, so he rents a truck and disposes of the foul mattress under the cover of darkness. The story is narrated in first person, and the narrator speaks of race in a pedestrian way that is familiar to nearly every conceivable reader. He writes:

"I am the only white man living on a block where all of my neighbors are black. Don't get me wrong. My neighbors are like any other groups of neighbors I've had. . . . They are people, not black people; and I am a person, not a white person. . . . We live as people live, aware of racial dynamics but uninterested in their applications as it applies to our neighborhood" (Alexie, 2012, p. 295).

Alexie employs the denial of racism to depict racism in this passage. If the narrator were not sensitive to and concerned about his neighbors being black, he would have no need to point it out. Likewise, the story itself is one illustration of racist behavior after another—refusing to simply ask the neighbors to remove the mattress, then disposing of it at night when no one will see it was him, and pretending nothing is different in the morning. Alexie's thorough understanding that racism is seldom as overt as the Ku Klux Klan marching down the street in white robes and pointed hats, but very often the product of misunderstanding and fear wrapped in good intentions, give this story an undeniable truthfulness. The inclusion of the line 'Don't get me wrong' shows the reader the good intentions that often accompany racism. The character goes on at length in the opening of the story telling us about not being able to pronounce the

African-sounding names, and how it made him feel racist. Then he immediately invokes the Mexican name Juan Carlos and states that simpler names are easy to remember. The charm of Alexie's writing, especially in "Gentrification" is that it is absurdly funny. But he packs a serious punchline. The neighbors know exactly who moved the mattress and the following day they call him a "white boy" and tell him to go home. The story ends with the narrator musing that he "felt pale and lost, like an American explorer in the wilderness" (Alexie, 2012, p. 299). From an Indian author this is a delicate parallel to the origins of racism, and a reminder that nothing much has changed.

Alexie's earlier novel *Indian Killer* (Alexie, 1996) about a serial killer in Seattle who murders and scalps white citizens, inciting backlash against native populations in an escalating conflict, is widely viewed by critics as a racist work. It has also been characterized as rage-filled by Arnold Krupat in *Red Matters*. It's interesting, then, that Alexie goes on to write about race with deep compassion for his characters, regardless of their race. As I discuss later, it is his empathy, along with other specific techniques that make the stories in *Blasphemy* rich material for this research.

INTERRACIAL LOVERS IN NATIVE AMERICAN LITERATURE

D'Arcy McNickle's novel *The Surrounded* (McNickle, 1936) is among the first Indian works accessible to Euroamericans and is set in the same location as my own novel and my family's land, on the Flathead Indian Reservation in western Montana. McNickle explores the issue of non-Indian settlers on reservation land through the perspective of mixed-race Archilde Leon, and he characterizes the interracial marriage of his protagonist's parents quite clearly. Inter-marriage with Indians was prevalent in North America, but very little of the nuances of these relationships show up in literature before the Civil Rights era.

Born to a Salish mother and Spanish father named Max Leon, McNickle's protagonist, Archilde, straddles both white and Indian worlds. Max Leon is an immigrant who operates a ranch on the outskirts of town, and he embodies the Euroamerican Individualist¹⁰ archetype so thoroughly that he lives alone in a large, modern ranch house while his Indian wife and mother of his twelve children remains in the rustic cabin nearby that he built for her when they first married. When her tribal community arrives to celebrate Archilde's return from Indian boarding school in Oregon, they pitch their teepees in the forest where they share a feast. But Max remains alone in his house, listening to them tell their tribal stories. Though he is fluent in Salish, he is unable to comprehend his wife's people—the way they interact with and respond to one another—for cultural reasons. Max is likewise perplexed by his own children, who have disappointed him based on his European view of work and family contribution. He cannot understand why his sons choose to go fishing instead of working at the ranch when they can see there is work to be done. In his estimation, they are lazy and wild, they do not possess good work ethics, and they are unworthy to inherit his ranch. He fails to recognize that the fish they catch, which his wife then prepares for her sons and herself without Max, is their tangible contribution to family existence. Because he has behaved as a European patriarch and not an Indian father, to his children, Max sees the money he earns working his ranch as simply that—*his* money.

As a member of the dominant culture, even on the reservation, Max assumed that his wife, Catherine, and their children would conform to his way of living, completely discounting the

¹⁰ Euroamerican mythology encompasses the Individual as supremely qualified to master his own destiny. The Individual is iconic and especially present in stories about the American West, which often symbolize the ability for an individual of any background to remake himself in any image he chooses. Conversely, the Community as a primary archetype is central to pre-colonial Native American mythology, creating an ideological mismatch between the two cultures.

cultural differences between them. Catherine was the daughter of the old chief, and though she had been schooled by the Jesuit nuns in the arts of Euroamerican homemaking, the housework of white women has remained nothing more than a curiosity to her. She is accustomed to the old ways of her people, and she lets the stove Max bought for her rust from disuse while she continues to cook over an open fire in the yard. The butter churn he gave her dries and falls apart, and the wash tubs are battered out of shape by her children while she lets the clothing soak in the creek. In an excerpt from Catherine's perspective, she feels the brunt of the differences between them:

Even without those complications it was difficult to be a white man's wife. In the old way of living one never stayed in one place for very long. One camped wherever there was game and grass and water for the horses. . . . When the old way came to an end and the Indians had to live on the Reservation, the habit of moving persisted; people went visiting. They would live on their allotment until they got restless; then they would take their tepee poles and travel to some relative's place . . . A white man does not care to have his relatives or his wife's relatives come live with him. He will slam his door in their faces (McNickle, 1936, p. 172).

Though Max and Catherine are estranged, they remain married, living in separate houses on the same ranch. On his death bed, Max admits that Catherine was not the cause of his troubles, and through his son Archilde, extends her reconciliation. While he doesn't understand her behavior, nor that of their children, it's important to him that he not die without mending the relationship. Yet he continues to behave as a European patriarch, telling Catherine he doesn't blame her, rather than asking her to forgive him for his selfishness and judgment.

McNickle uses the language barrier and assumptions of common understanding between two cultures with vastly different mythologies and world views to illustrate how unpredictable and illogical they seem to each other. The first technique the author uses is Max's race and origin. Max is a Spaniard, not typical to a region settled by French fur traders and Scottish sheep and

cattle ranchers. He possesses European sensibilities while remaining an “other” in the community—both the fictional and literal community as McNickle was writing about a specific place and time—presumably making the novel more palatable for readers of the day by a degree of separation in Max’s Spanishness; in 1936 in Montana, a native Spaniard would not be viewed as white.

The second technique is through his use of every day chores and the work of survival. The Indians in *The Surrounded* show both confusion about the white world and its laws, and distrust of whites themselves because of it. McNickle offers both perspectives for us to better understand the origins of that distrust, such as the hunting regulation that prohibits killing female deer in order to protect next year’s fawns. Only after the animal is killed are the Indians aware of the regulation because they have been accustomed to abundant game and have historically hunted for young, tender animals regardless of sex. Failure to understand and adopt the dominant culture’s world view does not protect those who break the law, regardless of their logic on the matter, giving the novel its powerful point.

Hale’s *The Jailing of Cecelia Capture* traces the cultural divide between Indian and Euroamerican interracial relationships more closely than her predecessors. In fact, all of Cecelia’s lovers throughout most of the novel are non-Indian. Her first child, born out of wedlock in the 1970s, is the result of a passionate, but short-lived affair with a young white man about to ship out for Vietnam. He is killed en route, leaving her to raise the child alone. Her second child is the product of her marriage to another white man (one of many white lovers to follow the first). Cecelia had by then completed her undergraduate degree, but had not yet left Washington State for law school in San Francisco, California. Her white husband cannot understand Cecelia’s need for more education, and this is perhaps the most subtle aspect of the cultural divide between

Indian and white: Cecelia carries the painful awareness that Indians must succeed at education before they can succeed at anything else in the white world. Her father's dream of becoming a lawyer was passed down from his own father, and on to his daughter. Like her father and grandfather, Cecelia knows that if Indians will ever thrive as a sovereign people they must understand and employ the white man's law. She isn't working toward a law degree as an individual the way her husband sees it, but as the representative of a community. Hale isn't simply juxtaposing Indian and white perception, she is illustrating the conflict of their underlying mythos: the Community versus the Individual. Cecelia is the first in her family to face a world in which it is possible to achieve her dream as an Indian woman. From the non-Indian perspective it represents an individual achievement. From the Indian perspective, the community is the beneficiary of her success, increasing the burden of that task.

Cecelia's perspective on whites, which Hale addresses directly (as noted earlier in this paper) is diffused, though, because she is a quarter Irish. The fact that she embodies both heritages, even if white culture is not her practical experience, makes her prejudice mildly acceptable, which is further rooted by the fact that both of her children are more than half white. The irony of Hale's novel is that Cecelia is surrounded by whites—her mixed-race mother, her lovers, and now her children. She is a part of the dominant culture. With the exception of her father, who has her undying admiration, Cecelia's experience of other Indians is off-putting, such as when she walks into an Indian bar in San Francisco and is immediately asked about her tribe. She can't quite befriend these "lost urban Indians," just as she struggled with the poor, unwed Indian mothers on the reservation. She strives for what she perceives is a better life, leaving behind the familiar in exchange for the new. But her relationship with her husband Nathan is fraught with cultural misunderstandings. The things about him that had attracted her—his family was socially

prominent, they had money, status and political power, his father was a concert pianist, his mother a liberal activist—begin to repel her over time. Her husband talked of listening to his father play Mozart as a child, while she remembered her mother sitting up waiting for her drunken father’s return home at night and then listening to him stumble down the hallway. Understanding her husband’s privileged world illuminates the cultural state of her own people. Cecelia’s moment of clarity comes at a party one night when Nathan tells a friend that he has wounded his knee. It was 1970, and Dee Brown’s book *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (Brown, 1970), an Indian account of the brutal history of the American West, was on the best sellers list. Nathan and his friend make a pun of it, saying “Wounded knee, as in bury my heart at” (Hale, 1984, p. 166) and laugh. But for Cecelia, Wounded Knee conjures images of dead and frozen Indians—old people, women, children—not her husband’s minor complaint. Cecelia reclaims her Indian identity with a return to her ancestral community as Indian characters before her, but with a slightly modern twist. After the death of her father, she cuts off her hair to honor him, which was customary for the wife and unmarried daughters to do in her tribe. She is the only one in her family who remembers this custom, and she remains silent about her reasons when her mother notices the new cut, mistaking it for vanity. Hale uses the significance of the act to parallel Cecelia’s quest to become a lawyer, honoring her father and grandfather—both full-blood Indians—and their desire for Indian rights while quietly winning a victory for Indians against her mixed-blood, and more importantly, *Indian-rejecting*, mother. But Hale underscores Cecelia’s reconnection with her cultural identity in a way that Indian authors before her have not—through her one-night-stand with Running Horse, a Sioux Indian she meets in an Oregon bar:

Running Horse had beautiful hands, she thought, big, strong, heavily veined hands.

Her father had had hands like that. Her father told her, when she was a little girl, that his veins were like that because he was a full-blood. Cecelia was pushing thirty now, and she had never slept with an Indian man (Hale, 1984, p. 183).

Having sex with him was unplanned and intense, suggesting an innate, subconscious desire for his full-bloodedness. Hale also invokes images of Cecelia's father in her attraction to Running Horse, which is mildly incestuous and perhaps more pointedly a longing for a lost home and reconnection with her true people. Though she has no intention of continuing a relationship with Running Horse, a mill worker, her father's prediction still rings true—Running Horse was unimpressed by Cecelia's intelligence or that she was working on a law degree. She leaves him where she found him and forges ahead into the white world. We are left imagining that Cecelia might have come to terms with issues of culture and interracial relations, but she has not solved them. Her history and her mission almost make certain that she will take up with another non-Indian when she arrives at law school.

Hale's approach to the racial divide doesn't put too much weight on the interracial relationships themselves, but instead focuses on Cecelia's struggle to become a lawyer. And that is perhaps what makes Hale so successful at illustrating the conflict between the races: it is subtle and pervasive, always gnawing at Cecelia. What can be gleaned from Hale's writing is the power to illustrate the divide by focusing the character on some other ambition or goal, allowing the daily conflict to simply be present. I found this powerful approach very useful, and in the crafting of *A Delicate Divide*, I have employed the same technique. The characters illustrate the cultural conflicts of interracial relationships while focusing on the tasks of making a living in a difficult environment and coming together in community support for a young girl with cancer.

In 2012, nearly thirty years after *The Jailing of Cecelia Capture*, Sherman Alexie takes on the issue of interracial marriage and same-race infidelity within that relationship with frank openness and scrutiny. In his short story “Assimilation” (Alexie, 2012), Mary Lynn is a Coeur d’Alene Indian married to a white engineer, and the story opens with her determined search for any random Indian man to have “indigenous” sex with. She is filled with angst about her identity, not because she feels bad about being Indian, but because she wishes that being Coeur d’Alene was a description rather than “an excuse, reason, prescription, placebo, prediction, or diminutive” (Alexie, 2012, p. 332). She is fully aware that she is cheating on her white husband because he’s white. Alexie brings the historic animosity of the two races down to the relationship level through a series of intricacies.

After a clumsy and unromantic sexual act in a cheap motel with a Lummi Indian that Mary Lynn finds in a diner, she meets her white husband for dinner at a trendy Seattle restaurant. As with Hale’s character, Cecelia, Mary Lynn is a grown woman with children and broad sexual experiences, but she has never experienced sex with another Indian. She uses this fact to justify her infidelity to herself, calling it a political act:

If forced to admit the truth, or some version of the truth, she’d testify she was about to go to bed with an Indian stranger because she wanted to know how it would feel. Why not practice a carnal form of affirmative action? By God, her infidelity was a political act. Rebellion, resistance, revolution! (Alexie, 2012, p. 333).

Alexie and Hale both do what Euroamerican writers would be scrutinized (and likely criticized) for—they illuminate the prejudice against Indians by embodying those prejudices within their Indian characters. This technique brings the prejudices into the spotlight in a way that gives them more credence. Alexie also uses extreme comparisons, such as when a reservation Indian compares his people with the Jews who survived the death camps as those who lied, cheated,

murdered, stole, and subverted. Alexie shows us how Mary Lynn ended up with a white husband from her own place of prejudice, and why that prejudice undermines her happiness now:

White men had never disappointed her, but they'd never surprised her either. White men were neutral, she thought, just like Belgium! And when has Belgium ever been sexy? When has Belgium caused a grown woman to shake with fear and guilt? She didn't want to feel Belgium; she wanted to feel dangerous (Alexie, 2012, p. 335).

By Mary Lynn's admission that she desires these dangerous men, Alexie restores the dignity of those he has just excoriated, which brings the reader back to the understanding that these are prejudices, not realities. Alexie repeats this pattern again and again throughout the story. Mary Lynn imagines that her husband, Jeremiah, as "out there" with eighty-seven other white men on business trips, wearing suits, but not their best suits, staying in similar business-class hotels, each separately watching pay-per-view porno. That it is a predictable white-man existence creates a prejudice, but her belief that they deserve better, reversing her ugly stereotype with the idea that they are smarter and more tender and generous than the white men who came before them neutralizes the prejudice, restoring them as human beings once again.

Alexie turns up the volume on the racial tension while the couple waits outside the restaurant for a table, putting it on full display and bringing the exchange to a near fight. When Jeremiah claims to know the difference between individual Asian ethnicities, Mary Lynn accuses him of being an Indian, and his response is harsh for a man speaking to his wife of twenty years:

"Fucking an Indian doesn't make me an Indian" (Alexie, 2012, p. 340).

It's followed by a short exchange about whether they should stay or go, on the surface meaning the restaurant, but the subtext implies the marriage. They've come to the brink—the deciding point. They are now openly hostile and using language reserved for enemies, as the two races have historically been.

Once again, as soon as racial tensions are at their peak, Alexie reverses course, retreating from the overt stereotypes into their family life, softening the conflict through the pair's respective thoughts about their four children. Their two boys take after Mary Lynn in appearance and are obviously Indian to the casual observer. Their two girls resemble their father—blond and fair. When they mutually acknowledge that the boys get preferential treatment from both sets of grandparents, they further retreat into introspection. Jeremiah has vowed to love his girls more to make up for the inequity of Indian preference in the family, but he also wonders if he's doing it simply because they look like him. Mary Lynn wonders if they should have another child to determine once and for all whether they are an Indian family or a white family. They are divided in numbers as in life.

What Alexie achieves in "Assimilation" is not simply a story about an interracial couple who struggle to overcome common cultural misunderstanding. He achieves a stark juxtaposition of the ugliest and most prevalent stereotypes from both racial perspectives. The point of the story is clear when the couple, after infidelity, fighting, and the parsing of children by ethnic similarities, finally get to the root of the issue, and it is the insidiousness of it that bubbles out:

[They] had often discussed race as a concept, as a foreign country they occasionally visited, or as an enemy that existed outside their house, a destructive force they could fight against as a couple, as a family. But race was also a constant presence, a houseguest and permanent tenant who crept around all the rooms in their shared lives, opening drawers, stealing utensils and small articles of clothing, changing the temperature (Alexie, 2012, p. 344).

Alexie concludes his assessment of race and the interracial challenge with the notion that race is an institution created by white people as a reason to enslave blacks and kill Indians. He gives this thought to Jeremiah because it allows the reader to sit with it—an ugly observation about whites by a white man. Jeremiah recognizes the fact that though he wants to eliminate race, it has grown

beyond anyone's control. It has become a Frankenstein monster. And that also lets him—white people symbolically—off the hook a little. There is nothing any one person alone can do about it all these years later.

In this perpetual cycle of glaring racial tension followed by a retreat into compassion, Alexie uses bold language to punctuate the emotion. Mary Lynn, when angry about men, invokes a mantra in her head wherein she chants *hate hate hate* and then lets it go. Three times in the story, she goes through her mantra and releases it. The story appropriately unites the couple at the close. The premise and execution leading up to the reconciliation are an analogy for assimilation because assimilation is ultimately a process of recognizing one's prejudice, acknowledging the hatred it invokes, and then releasing it and stepping forward on the same path. The story "Assimilation" gives us a glimpse into the real work of overcoming racial prejudice and maintaining an interracial marriage. It is also an outstanding model for authors seeking a balanced technique for depicting those racial prejudices within the context of attempting to overcome them.

EUROMAMERICAN DEPICTIONS OF NATIVE AMERICANS

While it's true that many Euroamerican authors, especially writing about the West, have done a poor job of depicting minority motives and actions in literature and, at times, have further injured minorities through blatant misrepresentation, that is not true of all. There are many examples of Euroamerican writing from the region depicting Native American characters, both as point-of-view and non-point-of-view, that illustrate sensitivity to cultural differences. Craig Leslie's novel *Winterkill* (Leslie, 1984) depicts life on the Umatilla Indian Reservation in Eastern Oregon, and chronicles how a young Indian cowboy whose rodeo career is in the gutter finds new hope. Danny Kachiah, a character based loosely on the life of Jackson Sundown, is thrust

into full-time fatherhood when his estranged wife is killed in an auto accident. But finding common ground with his son, Billy, requires Danny to dig into his past and resurrect his own father's stories. Leslie's novel received high praise, including a Pacific Northwest Booksellers Association award for fiction. Leslie's novel, along with Canadian writer Howard Norman's work (notably his novel *Northern Lights* (Norman, 2001) about the Cree Indians) is often taught as an example of literature about Native Americans that is "valid." But what does *valid* mean when the writer is not Native American? The answer is not easily found. The lines that encompass authentic or valid depiction of Native Americans have been drawn and redrawn in debates between prominent Native American authors Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Louis Owen, Leslie Marmon Silko, Sherman Alexie, Paula Gunn-Allen, and others. These have sometimes included criticism aimed at one another for a variety of perceived infractions from tending toward romanticizing to the tenuous tribal claims of some mixed-blood writers. As discussed in the previous section Nationalist and Cosmopolitan Perspectives on Literature, at debate is the much deeper question of whether writers like Leslie should be included in the discussion at all, rather than whether their depictions of Native Americans are authentic or valid. Drawing a distinction between Native American literature and literature about Native Americans, I believe, is the most useful first step. Leslie never claims to be Native American, nor does he claim to write Native American literature. The validity of his work is in its quality first, and its categorization as literature about Native Americans second. In determining the quality of the work, though, one measure is certainly whether the author convinces us that he understands his characters and their circumstances deeply enough to bring them to life.

COMPARATIVE RACIAL DEPICTIONS IN LITERATURE

Literature cannot solve the problem of racism, but it is an important vehicle to understanding it.

This brings me back to my thesis question: What techniques can we derive from Native American literature to clearly depict the racial and cultural nuances of interracial relationships? When I began this research I was hesitant about assuming Indian identity in my writing. If Elizabeth Cook-Lynn and her Nationalist colleagues had any say, I would leave Indians out of my writing entirely, and to assume Indian identity would be akin to cultural appropriating for my own Euroamerican benefit. I no longer believe that is an accurate, or even helpful, position. Through this research, I have found that assuming other racial identities in fiction can, in fact, bring ideas of solidarity to racial issues. To confirm my understanding, I examined a handful of non-Native American interracial depictions for contrast.

Euroamerican-Arab Interracial Relationships in Literature

Krista Bremer's memoir *My Accidental Jihad* (Bremer, 2014) is an eloquent and honest rendering of her love affair with a Libyan immigrant who became her husband after an unplanned pregnancy. Entirely devoid of racial stereotype or overwrought apologetics for Arab culture and Arab men, she illustrates the wonder and intrigue between two lovers who are foreign to each other in nearly every way. Bremer delivers the delicious moments of discovery, such as when, after sleeping together, he dons the traditional *jalabiya*—robe—for her:

There was always something to remind me he came from a different world: the way his tongue tickled the roof of his mouth every time he made the sound of an r, the Arabic books that filled his shelves, whose script looked so much to me like a child's pretend game of writing. His loud, animated phone conversations with his family in Libya, exchanges that sounded to me like heated arguments but which he insisted were only friendly chats. Standing before me in traditional clothing, he became someone I barely recognized. Beneath the brilliant white turban his face seemed a richer brown, his eyes a more intense black (Bremer, 2014, p. 28).

She writes about the quiet moments that seem unremarkable, but that reveal qualities in Ismail that, through discovery of his childhood in Libya, have deeper significance. In the mystery of Ismail's fastidiousness and his utter lack of self-consciousness about his own poverty, Bremer illustrates the divide between them: Ismail treats his meager possessions—things that, early in their relationship, she found embarrassingly old and worn—with an outsized devotion:

He brewed his coffee in a ten-year-old machine, its white plastic streaked brown where steam had scalded it for the past decade. The machine no longer allowed us to pour a cup until the entire pot had brewed. . . Ismail stood in his small kitchen waiting—not while eating or surfing the Internet or occupying himself in other ways. He just stood before the machine as if politely waiting for it to be done speaking. . . . he returned to his machine and began to carefully disassemble it piece by piece. . . lovingly wiping its stained surface with a cloth (Bremer, 2014, p. 18).

What Bremer achieves in both of these passages is to capture the nuance of cultural discord on the most base level. This is important to interracial literature because it addresses the minutia of domestic tension as a reflection of the larger cultural tension. These descriptions of domesticity, which on the surface may seem mundane, are carefully layered over memories of a time and place she can never fully know, such as when he was a boy how Ismail would go spear fishing in the Mediterranean Sea in order to feed his entire family. His descriptions of dusty roads, a one-room school house and its overcrowded classroom with four boys to each book, deepen his foreignness. The memories bunch beneath the surface of the narrative—the death of siblings to preventable childhood diseases, his father's shop where friends and family members took things away on credit—often never paying their debts, the staggering poverty and stark hardships of tribal life in rural Libya. Each story fuels the inner conflict of a young woman raised on the material expectations of middle-class America. Ismail's fastidiousness comes, she learns, from his gratitude

for the bounty he finds in his new country—a bounty that is utterly invisible to Krista’s American sensibilities.

The most important aspect of Bremer’s writing is the way in which she takes the reader on the journey of discovery as if we are experiencing the mysteries with her for the first time. The reader falls in love with Ismail for the patient, attentive person he is, setting aside the seemingly benign cultural differences—numerous though they are—before understanding just how deep and difficult those differences are. When Ismail buys Krista, who is eight months pregnant, the wedding ring she had convinced herself she doesn’t need, it is as if we are suddenly standing in a crowded and ancient Middle East market where men openly haggle over prices. But to Americans who are too proud to allow anyone to believe they cannot afford something, such aggressive bargaining is seen as embarrassing at best, and downright rude at its worst. Standing, not in a Middle Eastern market, but a suburban American shopping mall, Bremer is subjected to her husband’s cultural blindness. People pause to stare as Ismail undertakes a loud exchange, offering the store owner half the price of the ring, then walking out of the shop and forcing the merchant to run after him. When they return to the store, they are led into the back room so as not to draw further attention from the other patrons:

“You’ve got to be kidding me. For this ring? This tiny diamond? Come on, we both know how inflated diamond prices are!” (Bremer, 2014, p. 56).

Ismail triumphs in the end, but the cost may be higher than he imagines. Krista leaves the store wearing the diamond ring, which now appears exactly thirty percent smaller on her finger.

Euroamerican Depiction of African-Americans

John Steinbeck recorded in his personal journal the following statement:

In every bit of honest writing in the world there is a base theme. Try to understand men, if you understand each other you will be kind to each other. Knowing a man well never leads to hate, and almost always leads to love (Steinbeck, 1936, p. vii).

Krista Bremer's work brought a confirming perspective to the issue of interracial intimate relationships. I wondered, then, if it made sense to include Euroamerican-African American relationships in my research because racial tensions in America are predominately defined by the dynamic between these two races. I began by reading works such as Kate Chopin's "Désirée's Baby" (Chopin, 2015) in which Désirée is a foundling who grows up among Louisiana aristocracy and marries a wealthy plantation owner, only to give birth to negro child. The story is set during slavery, and Désirée is rejected by her husband because the child's race offers definitive proof that Désirée's lineage is black. Désirée, so horrified by the revelation of her race, takes the child and wanders into the bayou never to be seen again. As her husband directs his slaves to burn all of the finery he had bestowed upon Désirée when he believed she was white, he finds a letter from his mother—whom he'd been told had died in her native homeland of France when he was an infant—to his father. In it, his mother finds peace with their deception about her nationality through the idea that her child will never know that she (and he) is black.

While the premise is not quite the same—Désirée and her husband do not knowingly enter into an interracial marriage—the work revealed problematic issues in making a comparison using works with African American characters. First, there is the problem of slavery. Whether the story is set pre- or post-Civil War, the specter of slavery changes the dynamic of the interracial struggle. In Native American-Euroamerican, and even Arab-, Mexican-, or Asian-Euroamerican relationships, the participants are different but arguably equal. The history of treaties, no matter how often broken, belies repeated attempts at negotiations throughout history. The concurrent acts of genocide and the advent of the reservation system also reveals a strength of Native

American position that African Americans who were enslaved, or who descended from slaves, simply didn't—and possibly still don't—have. In pre-Civil War America, slavery was common practice in many states, and this was the very time period in which hundreds of treaties were signed and the Indian wars were fought. Had Euroamericans been capable of doing so, they likely would have enslaved Native Americans rather than murdered them, which reveals vastly differing relationships between the races.

The second problematic issue that the story “Désirée’s Baby” revealed is that there is an enormous body of literature about Euroamerican and African American relationships to choose from, and it is an area of study with arguments of its own and debates that are distinctly divergent from those of Native American studies. As I pondered the inclusion of these examples, I realized that to do so would warrant a research project and thesis unto itself. But more importantly, my focus was, and always had been, on the racial and cultural tensions between Native Americans and Euroamericans in a particular region of the West because that is where it is still playing out in the struggle for control of rapidly diminishing natural resources. For these reasons, I chose to leave African American-Euroamerican interracial relationships out of my research, except for one contrasting example from the work of prominent depression-era writer, John Steinbeck. Steinbeck clearly illustrates one of my primary thesis points—an author can assume the identity of another race in fiction without cultural appropriation. I selected Steinbeck’s 1936 novel *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1936) for his point-of-view character, Crooks, in part because the novel itself is not about racial or cultural tensions, but also because it was published the same year as McNickle’s novel *The Surrounded*. Because Crooks is a minor character with a minor subplot, in contrast to Steinbeck’s Mexican immigrants in *Cannery Row* and *Tortilla Flat*, there is less at stake with this character when measuring the overall success of

the novel. Yet Crooks is a point-of-view character, and as such, required Steinbeck's careful attention.

Crooks is a crippled black man who lives in a small room in the barn where he keeps the stables. Writing in omniscient point of view, Steinbeck assumes black identity to characterize the loneliness of being the only black man for miles around. Excluded from the social interaction on the ranch except for an occasional game of horseshoes, he is relegated to a life of solitude without hope for companionship. In assuming black identity in his depiction of Crooks, did Steinbeck appropriate African-American culture? Who am I, as a white woman, to judge the accuracy of his depiction of a black man? Perhaps historians and African Americans will decide, but what I can evaluate is whether Steinbeck convinced me that he understood Crooks. Did he convince me that he had compassion for this character at the human level—enough to provide a reasonable facsimile of Crooks's experience as a lone African-American, living on a ranch in 1930s California? The answer is yes, Steinbeck did convince me. He is sympathetic, without being sentimental. This empathy, which he illustrates through similar techniques as Sherman Alexie (which I will discuss later in this paper), Steinbeck convinced me that he understood what it would feel like to be an outsider, subject to unjust rules based solely on the color of his skin. The technique of illustrating empathy for a character that Steinbeck uses is one of defining the character through the most basic human traits of physical presence, preferences, observations, thoughts and sentiments, and personal history. Crooks is not simply a black man on the ranch; he is a fully formed human being. Steinbeck begins by describing the man in simple, human terms, including Crooks's preference for being left alone:

This room was swept and fairly neat, for Crooks was a proud, aloof man. He kept his distance and demanded that other people keep theirs. His body was bent over to

the left by his crooked spine, and his eyes lay deep in his head, and because of their depth seemed to glitter with intensity (Steinbeck, 1936, p. 66).

By giving Crooks specific preferences about neatness and being left alone, Steinbeck prevents stereotyping his character—in the work itself and in the imagination of his reader.

Steinbeck then deepens Crooks's human qualities by moving into the depth of his intellect through a discussion with Lenny where he reveals that he has quietly observed the dynamic between Lenny and George:

“Sometimes he talks, and you don't know what the hell he's talkin' about. Ain't that so?” (Steinbeck, 1936, p. 68).

And finally, Steinbeck completes our understanding of Crooks and his interaction with Lenny by giving us the man's personal history:

Crooks leaned forward over the edge of the bunk. “I ain't a southern negro,” he said. “I was born right here in California. My old man had a chicken ranch, 'bout ten acres. The white kids come to play at our place, an' sometimes I went to play with them, and some of them was pretty nice. My ol' man didn't like that. I never knew till long later why he didn't like that. But I know now.” He hesitated, and when he spoke again his voice was softer. “There wasn't another colored family for miles around. And now there ain't a colored man on this ranch an' there's jus' one family in Soledad.” He laughed. “If I say something, why it's just a nigger sayin' it” (Steinbeck, 1936, pp. 68-69).

One of the reasons Steinbeck convinces the reader that he understands Crooks is that he does not shy away from the issue of racism. He simply illustrates the racism common to the day in a normal situation that might have occurred. This allows us to register the reality of it, even in fiction.

An important product of this research has been understanding the techniques used to engender fictional characters within a work with varying viewpoints, including extreme racism, without making the overall nature of the work racist. Sherman Alexie, the most contemporary of the

authors I studied, deals heavily in themes of racial identity, racism, and cultural tensions between the colonizing race and the oppressed races. However, in close examination of his narrative structure and narrative voice, he demonstrates a strong empathy for each of his characters, and he does so with a clear purpose to illuminate the hardships of race relations from each of their perspectives.

THE IMPERATIVE STRUGGLE OF RACISM

In “Assimilation” (Alexie, 2012) an interracial couple contemplate race, identity, and the unanticipated cultural obstacles that marriage presents. Jeremiah is white, and his wife, Mary Lynn, is Indian. Jeremiah is the character in the story who concludes that the institution of racism was created as means for white men to enslave blacks and kill Indians. Had these revelations been applied to Alexie’s Indian or black characters it would not make a very powerful social commentary and would seem somewhat predictable. From an authorial perspective, Alexie is showing the truth of America today; racism exists, and many people are not looking the other way, but parsing their own personal relationship with it. Alexie illustrates this technique when Jeremiah grapples with the difference in how his sons and daughters look, and how the boys, who look like Mary Lynn are given preferential treatment by her parents in the following passage:

When Jeremiah had pointed out this discrepancy to Mary Lynn, she had readily agreed, but had made it clear that his parents also paid more attention to the boys. Jeremiah never mentioned it again, but had silently vowed to love the girls a little more than he loved the boys.

As if love were a thing that could be quantified, he thought.

He asked himself:

What if I love the girls more because they look more like me, because they look more white than the boys (Alexie, 2012, p. 342).

Alexie's white character, Jeremiah, not only understands the reality of racism, he also knows it is a monster that neither he, nor the collective white race, can now control. White people may have created it, but it will take the world to defeat it. This is not a summary dismissal of Jeremiah's part in colonialism and racism, and it's an important example for my own writing. Alexie applies racism to his characters with the complexity and unpredictability of real life.

In "Gentrification" the main character, a white man, goes to great lengths to stress that he is not racist, simultaneously illustrating his racism by the simple fact that he is so focused on it. He is a likeable character for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that his racism is born of good intentions. He doesn't want to be racist, and his earnest attempts not to be make him so, as shown here:

. . . frankly, it felt racist for me to look out my front window at that abandoned mattress and wonder about the cultural norms that allowed my neighbors, so considerate otherwise, to create a health hazard. . . . Who was the most racist in that situation? Was it the white man who was too terrified to confront his black neighbors on their rudeness? Was it the black folks who abandoned the mattress on their curb? Was it the black people who didn't feel the need to judge the behavior of the black neighbors? Was it the city, which let a mattress molder on the street in full view of hundreds, if not thousands, of people? Or was it all of us, black and white, passively revealing that, despite our surface friendliness, we didn't really care about one another? (Alexie, 2012, p. 296).

In the successful works I studied, techniques of character development included the obvious physical description, highly specific and individual character traits, personal history, but also complex thoughts about race that were at times highly racist. It becomes imperative, then, to include thoughts about race, discomfort with cultural differences, and some degree of personal struggle with racism on the part of the character, in order to fully illustrate racial tensions.

In addition to finely developed characters, there are five specific techniques that I identified for successfully depicting racial tensions in fiction:

- **Alignment with historic context.** Alignment to both the fictional and real-life historic context of the setting combats racial stereotypes and allows the reader to experience a character's full situation in the story. To ignore actual events that are significant to the development of racial perspectives sets characters adrift and robs the reader of the understanding of actual events in order to put fictional character behavior into context.
- **Outsider perspective.** One of the most effective ways of depicting cultural differences and nuances is through the observations of an "outsider" character, or someone who is from neither race involved in the conflict. Outsider characters are allowed to make mistakes, offend, learn, and earn forgiveness, and their journeys can illuminate truths about other cultures that the reader might never experience first-hand.
- **Imperative struggle with racism.** The difference between co-existing with racism and transcending racism is in one's willingness to acknowledge feelings of cultural discomforts and attempt to overcome them. Characters who are starkly non-racist in racist environments tend toward simple, where characters who struggle through their own biases deliver a deeper, more satisfying view of the cultural divide.
- **Racism toward self.** One of the most powerful techniques for illustrating racism, I found, was through the inclusion of racist ideas about a group from a character within the group. For example, Mary Lynn's (an Indian) thoughts about Indian men making her afraid, and her husband's (a white man) thoughts about how white

people created racism in order to enslave blacks and kill Indians. When the character is of the same race as the racist concept it is easier to show these biases as simple biases and not truths—essentially not allowing the work itself to become racist.

- **Rotating (or circular) racism.** Particularly with the inclusion of interracial couples, there is a privilege that comes from familiarity. This allows characters to make highly racist statements, either out of affection or during battle. But that is only half of the technique, and one that allows the author to call attention to racism directly. However, these characters must then consider their commitment to the other-race spouse/lover, during which they are compelled to see past those racist feelings into the humanity of their partners. Through this technique the author can bring the racism to the surface, then transcend it.

I began my research looking for the ugliest views from minority characters on the colonizing race as a starting point to form my own fictional characters' views. I didn't, at that time, imagine that I would instill these views in my own characters, but it was important to understand the extremes in order to determine where my characters fell on the racist continuum. What I found was that characters who struggled to one degree or another with racist thoughts and tendencies were the most effective at illustrating the racial divide. These characters more closely represented the true nature of racism by engaging in the struggle to overcome it, whereas characters who did not struggle with racist ideas or tendencies were overly romanticized and simple.

A DELICATE DIVIDE: STRATEGIES AND METHODS FOR MY OWN WRITING

My creative thesis is a novel titled *A Delicate Divide* in which I fictionalize an event that is currently unfolding on the Flathead Indian Reservation in Montana. The Salish and Kootenai

Confederated Tribes have proposed a water compact that converts all water rights within the boundaries of the Flathead Indian Reservation, as well as inflowing streams, to the tribe, based on the 1855 Hellgate Treaty. The treaty specifically grants indigenous rights to “take fish.” That right, according to the tribal coalition that drafted the compact, provides for the ownership and management of the waterways in which those fish are sustained. There is much debate about the tribe’s interpretation of the rights outlined in the treaty, especially among land owners with existing water rights based on the history of State water management within Montana’s borders. However, similar water rights claims have been asserted by tribes in other areas of the United States—notably the Klamath Basin in Southern Oregon—in which the tribes have prevailed, setting a precedent that could determine the outcome of the proposed compact on the Flathead Reservation.

At stake if the compact is passed are the existing water rights of land owners within the reservation boundaries, of which a majority are owned by non-Native Americans. Water rights, when granted under the historic State and Federal laws, become an amenity of the property, transferring with its sale and, therefore, to a very large extent determining the agricultural viability and monetary value of the property. Water rights in most states are based on seniority. A 1917 claim will receive its water allocation before a 1966 claim, regardless of when the land was purchased by its current owner, the intended use of the water in most circumstances, or the current state of water availability.

The loss of water rights carries the likelihood of rendering the land near valueless because it can no longer sustain modern agricultural practices, at least not at its historical yield. Where a quarter-section—160 acre—ranch may carry a value of over one million dollars with water rights, the loss of those rights would result in approximately seventy-five percent monetary value

loss, a loss of the owner's ability to make a living, and potentially cause bankruptcy if the property is mortgaged.

My novel examines the human impact of losing one's water rights in these circumstances. While the proposed water compact on the Flathead Reservation was passed by the Montana State Legislature as of August 2015, it is in appeal and may be tied up in litigation for years. As a novelist, I wanted to illustrate the irony of White Americans losing their property to Native Americans due to contemporary interpretation of historic treaties. Given the legacy of loss suffered by Indians over the past four centuries across the region in much the same manner, it represents a significant shift in cultural perspectives, racial acceptance, and power gained through selective assimilation.¹¹ I conclude my novel with the assumption of the passage (and defeat of subsequent appeals) of the water compact, and the protagonist's looming loss of water rights, independently of how it unfolds in actuality.

Approaching Historic Events with Art-based Research

Approaching the work of fictionalizing a historic (or current) event and determining its fictional outcome—independent of the historic record—for the purposes of humanizing its impact, presented some significant challenges. Understanding the current political issue in its entirety was one. I first planned to interview people on both sides of the water compact debate. Aside from my own personal experience with the potential loss of agricultural productivity and monetary value of my family ranch, which I am intimately connected to, I wanted to better understand others who were facing the same loss, as well as those who stand to gain from the

¹¹ I use the term *selective assimilation* to draw a distinction between the legal successes Native Americans have recently enjoyed by assimilating their colonizer's interpretations and practices of law, which is allowing them to regain lost property based on historic treaties, while remaining wholly separate sovereign peoples.

implementation of the water compact. But as I worked through developing my interview questions, the necessary disclosure documentation, and planning for data storage and so on, the water compact story began to overtake all aspects of the narrative. It quickly became the central story in a way that would be better told in biographical or strictly historical formats. I was losing the human story in the legal aspects of treaties, land use laws, and litigation jargon. Every time I sat down to write, I found myself in a sea of complex terminology and concepts that needed simplification and characterization if my readers had any hope of understanding the issues. As I struggled with clarifying the issue, it occurred to me that I was giving the water compact element of the story too much weight in the novel. I reminded myself that the job of fiction is to tell the human story, and as such, I needed to shift the focus away from the complex legal framework of the real, non-fiction problem and move toward focusing on the multi-racial characters and their relationships as affected by it. In essence, the water compact needed to become more symbolic, representing *any* issue that might threaten the delicate balance of race relations; the details of that specific issue didn't matter.

To help contextualize and transition this shift in focus, I turned to Kelsey McNiff's work in *Art as Research: Opportunities and Challenges* where she merges creative writing with the scholarly research of a historic event. McNiff quotes historian Susan Crane stating, "Art which comments on historical consciousness is never merely creative and fictional: such art deliberately references a body of knowledge and experience shared by historically conscious viewers. . . . such a project is thus '[n]ever quite completely separate from historical scholarship despite its lack of scholarly apparatus." That clearly characterized the problem I was having with my novel as it related to the water compact issue. McNiff went on to question how we, as novelists, then proceed with the development of a narrative that "explores the silences and mobilizes [the author's] empathetic

imagination.” She answered that inquiry with the following statement, which provided context for me in handling my own novel:

If the historical moment is nothing more than a backdrop (a setting), then the narrative will not be about that historical moment, it will be about something else. . . . Instead, if a fictional narrative sets out to explore human experience during a particular historical period, the accepted history of that period is a character in the novel: it is an actor in the drama (McNiff, 2013, p. 32).

Based on the concept of “issue as character” rather than my first approach, which I would define as “issue as plot,” I realized that I needed to reduce the overall importance of the water compact in the scene-by-scene narrative of the novel. The water compact element needed to shrink in both impact on the daily lives of my characters (if not the future of one), as well as the physical space dedicated to its definition and details. I decided to abandon my planned interviews, and to instead draw upon the public record of events and opinions, which were readily accessible through websites, public documents, and numerous opinion pieces, such as letters to the editor and internet blogs. Using these artifacts, I was able to identify common themes and sentiments to use in characterizing the issue itself, and to instill in the supporting characters in my novel. By approaching the underlying political issue as a character, I was then free to shift the focus to character interaction and community life. The everyday life of ranching, running local businesses, romance, caring for aging parents, and the coming together of the community to support a cancer-stricken child became the primary, and necessary, fabric of the narrative. The water compact issue, handled as a character, appears center stage only at selected times, but then rotates into the background while other, equally important interactions unfold—interactions that balance the human aspect of both races sharing a now-common homeland.

A Delicate Divide focuses on the strength of the relationships the characters and their forebears have built over a century of living in the same community. When the water compact was the

primary focus of the novel, the characters were forced into contentious postures by default. It was difficult to illustrate the compassion and genuine trust they often showed for each other, and I found that the work often felt racist by default. By moving the water compact into the periphery, it now behaves more like the invisible file-edge undercurrent of a river that is calm on its surface, belying the swiftness of its movement. As undercurrent, the issue sneaks up on the characters, surprising them with the realization that a century of living side-by-side has not eradicated all of the issues that threaten peace. One finds that the lull of peace and surface congeniality is an illusion, and there is now a choice to be made about what is more personally important: power, money, or people.

Character Ethnicities and Perspectives

As stated earlier, when I first began writing my novel *A Delicate Divide*, my protagonist was an Arab-American woman named Kayla Azkari who takes a job on the rural Flathead Indian Reservation in western Montana. She is immediately confused by Euroamericans for Indian, and by Indians for Euroamerican. I had selected an Arab-American character to illustrate the divide between white and Indian residents and, as a true outsider (she is also from an urban area in another state), a device for illustrating the cultural differences between the races.

The novel's secondary characters included Joseph McGill, a fourth-generation white rancher living on the Flathead Reservation, Victor Yellow-Knife, an Indian hydro-electric engineer and boyhood friend of Joseph, and Sylvia Deschamp, an Indian architectural historian working for Intrinsic Architectural Ltd., which is the Indian-owned firm where Kayla is hired on. Central to the plot is Sylvia and Kayla's new friendship by which we learn about modern Indian industry through their work together.

In early drafts I avoided depicting Indian motives, feelings, and thoughts, and restricted the breadth of these characters to actions consistent with the public record of events currently unfolding with the Flathead water compact. My ambivalence about whether I had the right to depict Indian motives and feelings was dictating my approach to the Indian characters in the novel. It was also creating a roadblock to the narrative. As a novelist, I needed to be able to tell the story freely, unconcerned about racial backlash. The constrained narrative gradually ground to a halt as I searched for ways to tell the story without assuming Indian identity.

As I discussed in the earlier section *Euroamericans and Other Ethnicities in Native American Literature*, through my study of Sherman Alexie's work and his approach to racial depiction, I decided to follow his example and develop characters that illustrate the greater point of my story, regardless of their race. I could no longer shy away from criticism about assuming racial identity if I was going to achieve a clear depiction of interracial relationships and cultural tensions in my work. By demonstrating empathy for my characters, I could assume other racial identities without being guilty by default of cultural appropriation.

I also became increasingly bothered by the Arab-American protagonist. While I found her useful to the story, her ethnicity, and the focus on it, was hampering my ability to tell the story of white land ownership and the potential for the loss of water rights, and subsequently, livelihood and future. Kayla Azkari simply didn't have a genuine stake in what was unfolding in the plot. I considered removing her completely, but found there were aspects of my original strategy of discovering the cultural issues through the outsider perspective that were valuable and essential, and ultimately chose to retain the character.

Based on the need to transition the water compact issue away from the central narrative and my decision to write from the Indian perspective, I changed Kayla Azkari from the primary

protagonist to a supporting character. To fully illustrate the transitional arc of Indian assimilation, its boundaries and nuances, and the irony of white land ownership, broken treaties, and lost rights that the story required, I promoted Joseph McGill to the primary protagonist. He is the character who stands to lose the most if the water compact is approved. As the protagonist, Joseph's life-long friendship with Victor Yellow Knife, as well as other community members, and how the water compact impacts it becomes a primary focus of the novel, not the water compact issue itself. To enrich this storyline, I changed Sylvia Descamps, a pro-Indian activist, to a point-of-view character, and I use her thoughts, motives, feelings, and history to further frame the community connections.

In addition to these changes, I included a historic storyline with Joseph's great-grandfather, Ian McGill, as central character. The story now weaves back and forth in time between the two men. This technique serves two purposes: it bridges my novel with D'Arcy McNickle's novel, *The Surrounded*, picking up two minor characters from his work, merchant George Moser and his wife, and it provides the historic context to Euroamerican-Indian relations on the reservation. The historic aspect is important to understanding the rootedness of Joseph in this place, and ultimately, the impact of his loss. But it also serves to illustrate the subtle racism that has persisted in the community over the course of a century. I chose to include McNickle's characters in my novel because George Moser's wife, who does not appear on the page, but only through the thoughts of George, is the most racist character in his work. She is important to illustrating the perspective of many Euroamericans who settled on the reservation in the early twentieth century. McNickle alludes to her racism obliquely. I can never know for certain why McNickle does not expand Moser's wife into a fully formed character, but I can imagine that it would have impacted the reception of his novel in 1936. As a Native American, writing an overtly negative

picture of white racism may have drawn sharp criticism, and it's possible that the work would not have been published at all. In my own work, I take her out of George's thoughts and bring her racism into full view on the page, if only briefly. My intent is two-fold: first, to remind my readers of the presence of racism on the reservation during the time McNickle was writing, and second, to add to his quiet voice a bolder accusation of racism that a contemporary audience is more willing to accept.

In later drafts I also added three new characters: the Erickson family of Paula, Ron, and Aida. Paula is Indian, and Ron is her white husband. Their daughter Aida is dying of cancer, and the community comes together to raise money and support the family. Ron and Joseph are friends from their school days, and Paula is Sylvia's first cousin. This storyline provided me with an ongoing mechanism to bring the characters together repeatedly in a humanizing format, independent of the water compact issue. The inevitable death of a bi-racial child serves to continually remind characters of both races of what is most important.

Contemporary Reservation Life and the Legacy of Depicting Abuse, Addiction, and Poverty

My inclusion of Intrinsic Architectural Ltd. in the novel is based loosely on the real-life business Salish & Kootenai Industries, which is a high tech firm located in St. Ignatius, Montana. It is Indian owned and operated, and they practice Indian-preference hiring. I selected this firm as the basis for business life on the reservation because it illustrates the modernity of the tribe, its competitive edge in securing government and civilian contracts, its international business presence, and its support of the local Indian college, as well as the overall tribal community. Much, perhaps most, of contemporary literature depicting Indians, tribal actions, and reservation life has dwelt on the poverty, internal fighting, and addiction problems that reservations often contend with. In Ian Frazier's non-fiction work, *On the Rez* (Frazier, 2001), he chronicles his

friendship with an Oglala Sioux Indian who participated in the standoff at Wounded Knee II. Set on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota twenty-five years after the event, it takes us through the daily lives of reservation residents in the post-Wounded Knee II era. It is a recollection of the events (the anger and attempt to right the wrongs) told in sharp contrast to the reality of its outcome: little. Reservation life remains a grind of staggering poverty and an epidemic of early death due to drunken driving, despite the ban on alcohol sales within its borders. It may be an accurate look at tribal life on some reservations, but this account, and others like it, is an increasingly outdated story. Most Americans are familiar with the Indian-operated casinos that have sprung up across the country. As sovereign people (which has driven a debate as to whether that translates to sovereign nations), Indian tribes are in a unique position to operate businesses that are otherwise banned by State governments. But to achieve this, it has required assimilating the political and legislative practices of their colonizers in order to use the power their forefathers fought for. As a novelist, I often wonder if the colonizers who signed those treaties one-hundred-and-fifty years ago did so with the absolute belief that Indians would eventually die out or become average American citizens through genetic assimilation. That is research for another time, but based on the historic record of slaughter, it seems doubtful that the colonizers imagined Indians gaining the power to use the sovereignty that they were promised. And few Americans today who don't live and work near tribal communities are aware of the new tribal makeup of lawyers and business professionals, or that their business interests reach beyond casinos into high tech, hydro-electric, and other more traditional industries. Through my novel, I bring this little known aspect of modern Indian tribal life to light. It is a fascinating new aspect of the American Indian story, and one that brings a dynamic element to Western politics and power. Basing my depiction of *Intrinsic Architectural* on Salish & Kootenai

Industries allows me to illuminate this truth of contemporary reservation life. This serves to undermine stereotypes, which is a key element in developing a more truthful and honest depiction of racial minorities.

The Story of Two Novels: Eighty Years on the Flathead Reservation in Fiction

A Delicate Divide is set in Mission, Montana, which is the nickname for the actual town of St. Ignatius. This is both the location of my family's cattle ranch, as well as the location of D'Arcy McNickle's 1936 novel *The Surrounded*. Written roughly eighty years apart, the two novels, when read in succession, will render an epic story of integrated life on the Flathead. McNickle's novel takes place at the peak of institutionalized dismantling and eradication of Indian culture. His characters are subject to laws they did not understand as they watched their treaty land infiltrated by outsiders. The Catholic church, a looming Gothic structure built in 1890, is central to his narrative. His characters straddle Christianity and the forbidden religious practices of their forebearers. In my work, the church remains a central landmark in the town, and the characters straddle Christianity and the rejection of all religion in the face of modern life. In McNickle's novel, the Indians are forbidden from speaking their native language, and the children are systematically sent away (by the Federal government with the assistance of church authorities) to boarding schools where they are "assimilated" into white culture. In my novel, the highway project touts signs in Salish, translated into English for the benefit of those passing through, and the cultural center undertakes an aggressive project to glean traditional stories from elders before they are lost forever. In McNickle's novel the white law prevails, and in my novel, the Confederated Tribes have discovered the power of their legal rights and are systematically reclaiming treaty land and lost rights.

As I studied McNickle's work it became apparent that telling the contemporary story of water rights in *A Delicate Divide* was not quite enough to give the reader a full comprehension of the events that took place in the intervening eighty years between McNickle's work and my own. Some of these events included the Catholicizing of Indians, their continued decline into poverty, the rise of addiction, the removal of children from Indian homes to boarding schools and white foster homes, the rise of the American Indian Movement, Wounded Knee II, the subsequent rise of the cultural preservation movement, and the eventual adoption of the Euroamerican legal system for the benefit of preserving tribal sovereignty. To illustrate the important events between the works, without overtaking the primary story, I further developed the historic storyline with Joseph's great-grandfather, Ian. I open the novel with Ian's purchase of the land in 1911, which has been deemed surplus by the government after the allocation of parcels to Indians under the General Allotment Act of 1905. I alternate storylines between past and present, connecting the two through the eyes of Ian and Joseph, looking forward through the generations, as well as looking back. The addition of the historic storyline also provided broader opportunity for me to link my work with McNickle's. In the opening scene, and subsequent scenes with Ian, I borrowed two of McNickle's characters from *The Surrounded*: George Moser, the merchant and land speculator, and his wife. Moser's wife is the primary racist representative in McNickle's work, and in many respects she sets the tone for the next forty years of overt racism that Ian McGill witnesses. By including her in my work, I am giving body and voice to what McNickle only alluded to in 1936. I can only guess that his treatment of her character might have been more direct had he been writing at a later time in history.

The Rocky Mountain setting, rugged and beautiful, represents more than the location of the Flathead Reservation. The West is a central icon to what it means to be American. The folklore

of the West, as illustrated by the movies of John Wayne and Clint Eastwood, and the plethora of Euroamerican authors like A.B. Guthrie and Wallace Stegner, is entrenched in the modern American psyche. Generations of Euroamericans like myself have grown up believing that this landscape and narrative is wholly our own. It is important to me, as an author and native Westerner, to bring a broader perspective to our existence here—that of a single chapter in an ongoing narrative. A very small slice in the history of all that has come before, and all that will come after.

CONCLUSION

My research began as a personal inquiry into my place in the literary legacy of the American West. As a non-indigenous native, my perspectives have been shaped by growing up in Idaho and Montana, traversing the same countryside as generations of Native Americans before me whose names are still present in every aspect of that place. But ours have not been equal experiences, and I, along with most white Americans, have been susceptible to the revisionist history that Euroamerican literature and cinema have told about the West.

As I became aware of Native American authors and scholars, I heard the arguments presented by Nationalists like Elizabeth Cook-Lynn. She points out the racism of many Euroamerican authors like Wallace Stegner and has taken a strong stand against non-indigenous authors writing about the Indian experience. With the undeniable and uncomfortable legacy of genocide and oppression that Native Americans have suffered at the hands of my own race, I am sympathetic to the Nationalist perspective. In her work, Cook-Lynn is critical of white Westerners and the tenor of her work often reaches that of rage. I recognize the impetus to that rage and I have heard her voice. It was this voice that made me question my own right to write about the Indians who have influenced my life, both as historic figures like Chief Joseph, and also friends and loved ones

like my former foster sister, Leah. But to ignore their influence seemed equally wrong, especially now as my family faced the loss of water rights on their Western Montana ranch due to a proposed water compact based on the 1855 Hellgate Treaty. The issue is important for a number of reasons, and not all are personal. There is significant irony in white land owners losing their rights to Indians in the face of our history, and it is the selective assimilation that Indians undertook to reach this place in history. This is a story worth telling, but one that carries the danger of racial misrepresentation. I undertook this research to learn how I might approach this story without making the same mistakes as my Euroamerican predecessors.

This research has helped me devise systematic approaches to the inclusion of characters of any ethnicity and with any racial viewpoint in my fiction. Through the study of authors like Alexie, Hale, Welch, and Steinbeck, I identified specific methods and techniques for illustrating an empathetic understanding of my characters' experience in the world, without focusing too much attention on the element of race. As noted in detail in the previous chapter, these include finely developed character detail, alignment with historic context, outsider perspective, racism or biases from within, imperative racism, and rotating (or circular) racism.

In addition to these techniques, I undertook a thorough understanding of the arguments of both Nationalists and Cosmopolitans, which allowed me to reconcile my ambivalence toward race in my fiction. I subsequently took a firm stand on the side of Cosmopolitans, writing my experience from the Euroamerican perspective, including my understanding of Indians.

Using my own interracial marriage and the cultural obstacles that it presents, as well Krista Bremer's similar experience, as a framework for my research has broadened my empathy for my nonwhite characters. It has helped me put into context instances of cultural appropriation in fiction versus the endeavor to understand and depict minority characters in a more meaningful

and human way. The use of interracial couples and bi-racial characters has enriched my ability to illustrate subtle racism from the perspective of those who come to it from a place of good intent. In many ways this is a more potent story, and one that is often overlooked due to its domestic, even pedestrian, applications.

This research has supported and informed the development of my novel *A Delicate Divide* and its depiction of white, Arab, and Indian characters as they grapple with political and racial issues on a modern reservation. In essence, this research has provided me a broad understanding of the scholarly issues surrounding Indian-Euroamerican intimate relationships in literature, and it has allowed me to more comfortably write about Indians through shared relationships.

A DELICATE DIVIDE

A Novel

Mission, Montana 1911

IAN

Ian McGill gazed out over parcel W3 S16, a fertile quarter section at the base of Mission Falls. A vast field spanning one-hundred-and-fifty acres of good level, tillable, though rock-strewn, soil unfolded at his feet. Along the southern edge were ten acres of wooded lowland with Mission Creek, jammed with boulders and logs, roiling through the middle. He would put up a cabin on the overlook, where he could survey his field from the front porch and enjoy the creek from his back. The embankment above the water was just the right slope for a root cellar and a smokehouse, and the narrowing triangle of bottomland could be fenced and cross-fenced for branding, breeding, and other cattle-related work. At his shoulder loomed the ever-present Missions, a rugged and formidable mountain range, snowcapped and purple. A high waterfall cascaded down a sheer cliff face, disappeared into an alpine forest and then reappeared several thousand feet below. The first time he had laid eyes on this place, a week earlier, he had paused in amazement and stared. The journey here had been long and difficult, winding through days of mountain passes and narrow river canyons, leaving him tired and preoccupied by the time he finally gained the last summit. Cast in twilight below him lay an immense and sweeping valley spooned out like a great bowl. The jagged spine of snowcapped peaks stood grand above it, so near he felt he could reach out and touch them. It was as if the land was yet in the act of becoming—the valley floor once crushed beneath the relentless onslaught of an unstoppable white glacier, now

rolling and lurching to life, stumbling into the arc of mountain. From its deepest depression to its granite crown some 8,000 feet high, a magnificent leap of vertical flight straight up into the crystal starscape above.

He stood now on the parcel where he would forge a new life. McGill had spent the previous five days astride the dependable saddle horse that had brought him here, looking over each and every available piece of land in the area, something of a death march through the Mission Valley trying to outrun winter. If the snow fell too deep before he made his selection he would have to wait until spring, and prices would be on the rise again. Modestly, perhaps, but it could mean the difference between getting the land he could afford and getting the land he wanted. A cold wind buffeted his ears, carrying a hint of wood smoke. As he scanned the horizon he took pause. A cluster of ten or more tipis stood black against the evening sky, spark-laden smoke rising up and smudging the stars. But this was Reservation land, he reminded himself. And he had come here because it offered an affordable start. The Indian Wars were over. His copper-colored neighbors were a vanishing breed—these remnant bands would assimilate or die out eventually. The government had opened this place up to white settlement. Others would come before long.

McGill edged closer to the woodstove, snow melting from his oiled boots into a puddle on the wood-plank floor. The store was cavernous and seemed too empty for its purpose of general supply to the town of Mission. Every sound echoed loud about the tin-tiled ceiling. The place smelled of tobacco and wool and some mysterious fragrance—not quite spice, not quite perfume. It was vaguely familiar, and yet exotic. A thin and deathly pale woman worked tentatively behind the oak counter, pausing to rest herself against it before adjusting the rows of canned goods, facing the labels forward for easy identification. She

smiled apologetically at Ian, her eyes rimmed in purple, and he looked away. He wondered what ailment gripped her; she couldn't be expected to survive the winter in her present condition. He eyed the merchant, who sat at a low desk inside the small office near the back of the store, scratching out the warrantee deed on the section of land the two of them had settled on. The sort of man to work his wife into an early grave, Ian assessed. A snow squall blustered beyond the broad front windows, obscuring the Catholic Mission, which usually stood in bright contrast against the dusky mountains. Father Grepilloux would be in his study, working on his Sunday sermon. The priest had made a special visit to the boarding house the previous day to invite its residents to Mass. Ian declined, claiming to be Protestant, though he had left religion in general to his family in Billings when he struck out on his own. Evening was turning to night, and his belly nagged him, his head was anxious for the inadequate pillow waiting in his room.

He arrived early that morning at the mercantile, a firm figure in mind, and a wad of banknotes in his pocket. Standing now at the woodstove, this day had been too long and Ian was glad to see it over soon. He had done his homework before meeting with George Moser. He knew what parcels were for sale, where they were located, whether they included water rights, easements, leans, and the going prices. Today should have been easy, he thought to himself as his numbed fingers began to awaken in prickling waves. Ian knew that speculators like Moser were losing everything they had on overly optimistic investments in surplus Reservation land. After the allotments were divvied by the government in 1905 Moser and others had greedily bought up the remaining parcels, believing that white settlers would be standing in line to purchase them. It was fine ground, everyone agreed. Some of the best in a state filled with fine ground. But Indian-wary settlers had been slow to appear. And those who did come were like Ian, looking for bargains. He had made a fair offer, but Moser wouldn't accept it until he had attempted to talk Ian into every other parcel he owned. Moser

had driven him through the same valley again, but this time in a once-luxurious automobile, trying to sway him first with friendliness, and then with drink. With a smooth, boyish face, Ian hardly looked his twenty-seven years. His attempts at overcoming his youthful appearance with facial hair had only resulted in a ridiculous scrub of thick red fuzz. And here in the wilds of western Montana, a day's ride north out of Fort Missoula—the final frontier until Spokane, some mountainous three days' journey west—he understood that he looked like an easy mark.

Moser finally stood and motioned Ian into the office. “Sign these and it's yours,” he said, pointing to duplicate copies of the warrantee deed.

Ian drew out the map he had carried in his breast pocket and spread it across the table where he checked the section number on the deed against the details on the map.

“What? You don't trust me?” Moser said with a thin smile.

“As much as I trust anybody,” Ian said without looking up. “People make mistakes.”

“No mistake,” Moser muttered.

Ian laid the banknotes on the worn desk, and folded his map and copy of the deed.

“You'll have that drink now?” Moser asked. Without waiting for an answer, he pulled a bottle of whiskey and two shot glasses from the lower desk drawer and poured. The golden liquor splattered across the oak and onto the notes.

Ian hesitated.

“You got my best parcel. Drink.” Moser raised his glass in a toast and tossed it back, keeping a strong eye on Ian as he did so.

“Could have saved us both a hard day by accepting my first offer this morning.” Ian said and took his whiskey.

“Can’t blame a man for trying. That parcel would’ve brought two again in the spring.” Moser looked past Ian at the woman in the store. “If I make it ‘til spring.”

“It was a pleasure,” Ian said flatly and donned his hat, pulling the brim down low. He started toward the door.

“Keep an eye on the parcel to the east of you. That Indian will be wanting to sell it; they all eventually do. You’ll be able to get it for nothing.”

Ian had paused to listen without turning back. He’d had plenty of this man, and he needed a meal and a bed.

The woman smiled again as he made his way to the front door.

“What’s that I keep smelling?” he asked her. “It’s familiar, but it’s not.”

“Cinnamon oil and vanilla,” she said. “I keep it simmering on the stove. It’s the only thing that keeps the smell of those dirty injuns out.”

JOSEPH

2014

Joseph McGill dropped his muddy boots on the porch and stepped sock-footed into the warm house. He hung his sweat-stained ball cap on the antler rack in the entryway and smoothed his hair down. Though it was spring, it had been cool and he was still using the woodstove during the day. The 1914 clapboard farmhouse retained its century-old single-pane windows and scant insulation, which he had been planning to upgrade for as long as the place had been in his name. Keeping it warm required a constant rhythm of chopping wood, stacking it on the porch, and feeding the massive stove in the corner between the kitchen and the living room. He had thrown the last big chunk of oak in just after breakfast and squeezed the damper down so little oxygen could reach the flames. Now, mid-afternoon, it was still burning and so, too, was a renewed sun through the south-facing windows.

“Wow,” he said, and cracked the front door open to let some heat out. Weeb, his border collie, followed him inside and lay down under the stove in his usual spot, but shortly began to pant. Finally, he moved to the tile in the kitchen.

Joseph reheated leftover spaghetti and stood at the sink absently eating while gazing at his greening field. The Mission Mountains stood tall to the east, alternating between a restrained blue-green friendliness and brooding ill-tempered purple. The long metal arc of his irrigation pivot, which spanned the circumference of his one-hundred-and-fifty acre field,

glinted spectacular in the sun. He was still getting used to this new fixture on the landscape. Had wondered what his great-grandfather would have made of such a technological wonder as this. The pivot sat idle now, but when summer was fully underway it would inch along on a circular journey across his field, delivering a steady and efficient drink of water to his growing alfalfa. *But will I have water?* he wondered.

Joseph set his dish in the sink and played back his phone messages. His mother had called to invite him to church, trying to coax him with news of a guest musician. A man named Darrin looking for hay left his number. Matthew Dixon, the Amish man whose ranch bordered Joseph's to the east, explained in some detail a section of shared fence that needed mending, as well as his plans to do so that afternoon. Jim Tonkin wanted him to pick up and review a draft of the irrigator association's letter to the Montana legislature. And his mother called a second time to invite him to dinner after church. That made him suspicious. She routinely invited him to church, but two calls in a row meant something more. She had been on a mission since his divorce from Eilene, five years ago, to find him a new wife. This smacked of a setup.

"No doubt this musician is a single woman," he said to Weeb. The dog lifted his head, an ear cocked as if to sympathize.

Joseph dialed his mother, and she picked it up immediately. They exchanged perfunctory information about their health and the weather.

"Did you get my message about Sunday?" As frustrating as she sometimes was, he liked that she got straight to the point about things. She never beat around the bush or hinted unnecessarily. "We have a special guest coming. I thought you would enjoy her singing. Remember how you used to love to sing? Her voice is really something special."

“Yeah, your message was pretty clear, mom.” He hadn’t sung anything since he was in the fourth grade, and even then he wouldn’t have called it a pleasure.

“I was just letting you know,” she said. “There was nothing more to it than that.”

“Uh-huh.” He tossed an uneaten spaghetti strand to Weeb.

“But you know, you haven’t been to church in so long, Joe.”

He didn’t answer. What would he say? It *had* been years, but she never seemed to take that fact as a hint.

“I’m picking up some heifers in Great Falls on Saturday. Won’t be back until late on Sunday.” It wasn’t true until he said it. He had been putting off the trip, but now it was a good reason to be away.

“I’ll find out if Donna will be in town long. She’s visiting her cousin. Do you know Emily Sheridan? You two may have gone to school together?”

“Emily? The one with the gigantic nose?”

“Well... yes. So you do know her,” she said. “Maybe you’ll have a chance to meet Donna before she heads back to Seattle. I’ll ask her how long she’s staying.”

“Why don’t you just give her the address here and tell her to stop by?”

“That’s a fantastic idea. I’ll do that.”

He laughed. “You better not.”

“Would it kill you to meet some women, Joe? Donna is a really lovely—”

“Yes, it would kill me! I don’t want to meet her, mom. Okay?”

“Well... if you’re sure.”

“I’ll let you know if I change my mind.”

She huffed good-naturedly.

“I’ll stop by for a cup of coffee tomorrow morning before I head out for Great Falls. Okay?”

“That would be nice,” she said.

Days later Joseph was out early, checking on the new heifers he had brought back from Great Falls. His breath clouded on the crisp morning air, and he tucked his hands into his jacket. He scanned their red rumps, but could barely tell them apart from the rest of the herd. He spotted Matthew walking the fence between their properties.

“What do I owe you for the repairs?” Joseph asked when he was within earshot.

“Nothing,” Matthew said, shaking his head. “Wasn’t much in material. Just an afternoon’s work.”

“Well, thanks for taking care of it. I appreciate it.”

Matthew leaned against the post, his black flat-brimmed hat and thick beard the only obvious signs of his Amishness. His face was creased with age, his blue eyes watery beneath drooping lids. Matthew had only owned his ranch a few years, and Joseph had wanted to purchase it when it last sold, but he didn’t have the money. It had changed hands a number of times recently, and owning it had been an inherited dream, passed from his great-grandfather, Ian McGill, to his grandfather, then his father, and again to Joseph. They had all entertained ideas of acquiring that eastern parcel and doubling the size of the McGill ranch. Joseph was coming to see its illusiveness as a blessing. What would he do with twice the land if he ended up without water?

“Sorry to hear about Jedidiah Marsh,” Joseph said, speaking of a friend of Matthew’s who had passed away the week before. The Amish kept to themselves mostly, but it was impossible not to know the inhabitants of such a sparsely populated valley.

Matthew bowed his head slightly. “Ruth and the kids are moving back to Pennsylvania to be with her sister.”

Joseph gazed at the mountains. In spring they sometimes turned colors that defied nature, and the morning sun was perched above them today, casting the snowy peaks in soft yellow. Mission Falls plunged from its hidden lake, hundreds of feet down a cliff face, disappearing into folds of alpine. A pair of magpies circled overhead.

“The tribe purchased her farm,” Matthew said. “She got a good price.”

Joseph wasn’t surprised. The tribe was on a quiet reclamation project that entailed the opportunistic repurchasing of non-Indian-owned land on the Reservation. He didn’t begrudge them that. To the best of his knowledge they had been fair and above-board in their dealings. But the tribe’s proposed water compact made him wonder if he was seeing the whole picture. Perhaps their activities weren’t as benign as he had first given credit.

“Have you thought about the Irrigator’s Association?” Joseph asked.

Matthew shook his head. “This is in God’s hands.”

“I respect your position, Matthew, but you do realize that if the compact is approved as it’s written we have no guarantee of the water rights that came with our land, don’t you?”

“I do.”

“Is that a risk you’re willing to live with? I mean, don’t you think it’s worth putting your name down to save what you have?” Joseph knew the Amish did not engage in political

or legal battles of any kind. If Matthew lost his water rights, he would simply view it as God's will. A test of his faith. A part of life.

"I've stated my position before." Matthew drew his hat down against the glare of morning sun and inhaled the delicate spring air.

"Your neighbors and fellow ranchers could use your help, Matthew. We need numbers if we're going to have any chance in this. Our ranches are practically worthless without water."

Matthew turned his attention to the northern expanse of fields and valley. He stared off a long time, giving Joseph a small inkling of hope that perhaps the man would change his mind.

"Can't eat the scenery," Joseph said.

"God provides." Matthew turned and started toward his home where his wife was hanging laundry on the line.

Joseph watched him go, his disappointment hardening into a knot. A knot that had lately been burning in his gut, threatening to turn angry if he allowed it. He reminded himself of his father, and that he had once made a serious vow to himself never to become like that.

IAN

1911

Ian McGill sat behind his crudely constructed log cabin, a blanket over his knees, concealing his hunting rifle. He had gotten the single-room shelter up a few days before Thanksgiving, working around the clock until exhaustion overtook him, forcing him to rest a day before continuing. It was too cold to chink the logs now, and a bitter winter wind howled through the slits, filtering out only the largest leaves and debris. An army of canvas and wool blankets in various dull shades of yellow and green and gray covered the interior walls, and he'd had to visit Moser's General Store for reinforcements. Moser insisted that Ian stay and take a glass of whiskey with him each time he visited. While Ian loathed the man's arrogance and looking at his wife's skeletal figure and sallow skin only reminded him of death, the loneliness here in this winter landscape had driven him into town for necessary conversation.

A screech owl called out in the twilight, and Ian pulled his rifle against his thighs. The air smelled faintly of smoked meat and snow. The setting sun cast the woods below him in a brittle light, eerily illuminating the fast-moving water. He watched vigilantly as four or five Indians sifted through the woods along the creek, their voices rose in a language that he didn't understand, save for the occasional and persistent French word for meat *la viande*. Their incomprehensible conversation echoed through the creek bottom, reminding him of his own foreignness here. One of them, a young man who appeared to be in his early twenties,

paused below the cabin and looked up at Ian. The two hundred feet between them suddenly seemed like ten, and Ian stiffened. The man's hair was loose about his shoulders, and it fluttered in the breeze. He spoke to his companions, and they, too, stopped to observe Ian, staring up at the cabin without shame. Draped in hide robes and wearing canvas breeches, they conversed at length about something that clearly commanded their attention. Some were in moccasins, some wore boots, and Ian could see that those men were likely the descendants of French-Canadian men who hunted and trapped Montana as long ago as the 1870s. They'd come to work for the Hudson Bay Company, and found a paradise of female company against the backdrop of mountain scenery. It wasn't long before many had taken on large harems native women and populated the territory with innumerable half-breed children who spoke a strange mix of French and whatever tribal language their mother's had known. All of the young men wore felt hats with the brims flattened and the crowns punched into round domes. The lead man carried a half dozen trout strung together by their gills. A long, crisply striped turkey feather jutted from his hat band.

Ian considered casually revealing his gun, but he waited. Had it been a bad idea to purchase this parcel with the creek running through it? Since the day he took ownership, he had encountered a steady parade of Indians up and down the stream at all hours of day and night. Most paid no attention to him, but a few, like these young men, took an interest in his presence. And a single lone Indian just a few days ago had shouted at Ian in Salish and made menacing hand gestures that he could only interpret as threats. It was then that he began keeping his gun within arm's reach.

"You," the Indian said at last, still looking up at the cabin. "You have a very good deer."

His perfect English surprised Ian. He had forgotten about the whitetail buck he had shot that morning in the field. It was now hanging in the spruce tree along the side of his cabin, bleeding out. Its antler rack was impressively broad, and he would use it for hanging his things on. He nodded acknowledgement to the Indian.

“You have a very good deer,” the man repeated.

Ian waited. Would they fight him for it now? It was the first large game he had been able to get, and he needed it. His savings were nearly depleted, and the rabbits he had managed to trap in the first few weeks here were now hibernating. His fishing skills had turned out to be woefully inadequate for the business of producing true sustenance. He couldn't afford any more provisions from Moser.

“Yes. It is a good deer,” he said, hoping that would be the end of it.

“If you like to,” the man said in slow, but careful pronunciation, “I will send my mother to skin it for you.” The young Indian pointed at the buck, smiling.

“No. Thank you. No.”

“She will make you a very good blanket with the skin. You can pay her.”

“Thank you. No.”

“Merry Christmas,” the young man said and waved. The group continued on their way down the creek toward Mission.

“Merry Christmas,” Ian said after them, breathing relief in steamy puffs on the night air.

JOSEPH

2014

Joseph pulled up in front of the post office. The day was warm, and he put the windows down before killing the engine.

“Stay, Weeb,” he said. The dog gave him a disappointed glance, then stuck its head and torso out the passenger window and panted into the sunshine.

“Real cowboys make their dogs ride in the back,” Victor Little Knife shouted across the small lot as Joseph climbed out.

“What d’you know about real cowboys?” Joseph shouted back.

Victor strode over and offered a handshake. “I know you’re a sorry son-of-a-bitch,” he said and grinned.

“You don’t know shit,” Joseph said, shaking his hand.

“Haven’t seen you since that trouble we had down at the Williamsons’.”

“They get that bear?” Joseph asked.

“Yeah, they got it. Relocated it to Canada. Williamson is mad as hell—wanted to see it hanged and quartered after it killed so many of his calves. When he found out the tribal biologist let it go we got an earful of obscenities.”

“How many did he lose?”

“Three.” Victor carved dirt from under his fingernail with his pocket knife. “So where have you been, man?”

“I haven’t gone anywhere. Just been busy. Working on some stuff.” Joseph eyed Victor. They had been friends since grade school. In high school they had played basketball together, helped each other get drunk and get laid. At first Joseph had been glad to see Victor come back to Mission. Not many people who made it to college ever made it back—not permanently, anyway. Victor had stayed in the Midwest after college, working his way up the chain of command at a hydroelectric plant until a new, and somewhat unexpected, opportunity on the Reservation presented itself. And that opportunity was shaping up to be a problem for Joseph.

“Heard about the stuff you’ve been working on. Got time for a cup of coffee?”

Joseph looked at his watch. He had all day, and he knew he needed to have this conversation, but he was hoping to be the one to determine when and where. “Yeah, sure. Let me get my mail. I’ll meet you over at the café.”

Joseph found Victor sitting at the table outside with a group of old timers who spent half of every morning there, drinking coffee and teasing the waitress. Joseph’s dog followed on his heels. Victor left the men to their conversation and met Joseph at the door.

“Lay down and wait, Weeb,” Joseph said, and the dog obediently settled into the shade along the side of the building.

“What kind of dumbass name is Weeb?” Victor said.

“What kind of dumbass name is Victor?”

“Hey, that’s my daddy’s name.” Victor pretended insult.

“The dog’s name started out as Will, but my little niece couldn’t pronounce it. She kept calling him Weeb and then it just sort of stuck.”

Victor laughed. Since returning late last summer, he had put on a few pounds and grown his hair out, which he pulled back and tied with a leather string. Joseph thought he looked Indian now, but that was new. Victor Little Knife was the son of Irene Beardsley, a French Canadian woman, and Victor Little Knife senior, the son of a white teacher at the catholic Mission and a mixed-blood Nez Perce. Victor junior was fair-haired as a boy, but it darkened as he got older. His eyes were yellow-brown, and he used to tell people he was part wolf—a persona he adopted after discovering that he didn’t have enough Indian blood to qualify as a tribal member.

Once they ordered coffee and cinnamon rolls from the frazzled waitress Victor leaned in. “So... heard you have organized a party to fight the water compact.”

“Had to, Victor.”

“Let’s be reasonable about this. Let’s stop writing letters and testifying at the State House and come to an agreement. You know the tribe wants to negotiate, not litigate.”

“Christ, Victor, no one wants to litigate.” Joseph stirred his coffee though he hadn’t added anything to it.

“Well I’m glad to hear it. It’s hard to tell right now, everyone’s retreating to their corners.”

“I just put in a ninety-thousand dollar irrigation pivot.” Joseph said.

Victor nodded.

“Did you comprehend all those zeroes?”

“I did.”

“I don’t have that kind of money laying around. I mortgaged my great-grandfather’s place to pay for it, which is gamble enough under ordinary circumstances. You all form a new water compact that nullifies my rights and I may as well hand the place over to the bank. A hundred years of family ranching.” Joseph looked Victor in the eye. He could feel his nostrils flaring under the pressure of his breath. “Are you hearing me?”

“I hear you, Joseph.” Victor held up his hand as a gesture of peace. “I hear you. The tribe understands this. It’s not in our best interest for you to lose your ranch.”

“Really?”

The two men stared at each other in a silent standoff. The waitress slid the hot cinnamon rolls onto the table in front of them without a word, and neither moved. Joseph wanted to pound Victor on the arm and tell him to come to his senses the way he had done when Victor thought he should marry Jeanann, a girl from Toronto who was so far down the road to cocaine addiction that she had offered herself to most of their friends at least once in exchange for a fix. They were still kids then—nineteen. Victor was head over heels and couldn’t be swayed. He had gone so far as buying the ring and proposing. But getting Victor to see reason then seemed easy compared to this.

Joseph finally broke the standoff by looking out the window. A Mustang drove past, windows down, an attractive woman in mirrored sunglasses lip synced to her radio.

Victor followed Joseph’s gaze. “Someone you know?”

Joseph shook his head, and the two men softened their shoulders and sat back in their chairs. Joseph cracked a smile. “Eat your damn roll before I do,” Joseph said, digging a fork into the soft center of his.

“I’ll ask around for you. See who she is.”

“No. Don’t.”

Joseph worked through his list of callbacks, saving Louise Pike for last and not because he was looking forward to talking to her. There were a few members of the Montana Irrigators Association, or MIA as they were now calling it, who possessed an incessant need to restate what everyone already knew or believed in ever more vehement ways, and she was chief among them. If he could selectively remove certain people in order to give the rest of them peace to focus on the actual work at hand, she would be the first to go. But numbers were important, so he would have no choice but to suffer her.

“Pike’s,” Louise answered.

“Hey, Louise, it’s Joseph.”

“Joseph, I’ve been trying to reach you for three days,” she said. Louise was in her sixties, and treated everyone younger than her as if they were her own children.

“What can I do for you?” he asked, knowing not to provide her with unnecessary details about his life.

“This is just maddening,” she started. “The 1855 treaty states the right to take fish in common with the citizens of the territory, nothing more. That’s not a water right! Where the hell did they come up with the idea that it constitutes a water right? If it was, then anyone in Montana could get a water right to protect their favorite fishing hole.”

“Yeah, I know,” he said patiently. Louise had joined the MIA only a month earlier. It was like she had awoken from hibernation, and now she was ferociously coming up to speed on every aspect of the water compact. Details the rest of them had been tracking for two years now, like the exact wording of the treaty of 1855 when the Reservation was first formed.

“Equal protection under the law is guaranteed by the Montana Constitution. The state can’t just turn over its constitutional and statutory responsibilities to the tribe—a *sovereign nation* for God’s sake, with its own constitution and laws that have no accountability to the Montana legislature or its citizens!”

“I know. That’s what we’re trying to make them understand,” he said. “Did you need something specific from me?” She wasn’t quite right. They were a sovereign people, not nation. But there was plenty of debate about whether one equaled the other by default. He hoped not.

“Do the Amish understand the situation we’re in?”

Joseph closed his eyes. “They know. We’ve been through this. But if you think you can convince them to join then I’m all for you talking to them.”

“We should invite them to the meeting next week.”

“They’ve been invited. They’ve been invited to *every* meeting.”

“I can’t believe they aren’t getting involved. They must not understand what’s at stake.”

“I’ve got to go, Louise.” Joseph looked out the window at the long driveway between the road and his house. He could see visitors coming for several minutes before they arrived at his door. It was quiet and empty today. “I’ve got someone coming. Did you need something specific?”

“I’m going to visit Matthew and Ingrid.”

“Okay. Good.”

“Someone needs to get a fire under these people. We all need to be fighting this together.”

Joseph wondered how a person who had only a short time ago been oblivious to the issue could be so judgmental of others.

“I’ll remind them that Jesus had his moments of anger, too, like with the money changers. He wasn’t all passive like they think he was.”

“Okay, I have to go,” he said, putting the phone down, feeling exhausted.

Joseph flipped on the overhead bulbs in his narrow workshop, the day’s light retreating through the dusty, cobwebbed windows. It was a lean-to attached to the barn that his grandfather had built and his father had insulated and sealed. Joseph had poured a concrete pad and put in a woodstove, allowing comfortable year-round use. The windows were salvaged from an old church up north in White Fish, nothing too elaborate, yet the small square panes along their tops were purple and red and orange, giving the place an odd cheer. His tools lay scattered about in a disorganized mess, and he had to squeeze past the air compressor taking up in the middle of the room. He would need an entire day to organize the place again, but he never seemed to have that much uninterrupted time. He had plenty of urgent problems demanding a quick fix, and those seldom came with time to put away whatever implements they required.

On the narrow workbench against the wall sat a landscape in miniature on an old gray canvas blanket that was frayed and disintegrating. It was the last of what had seemed like an

endless supply of canvas blankets that had been folded and tied and tucked into the rafters of the workshop. He had no idea where they had come from, but whomever put them there had needed a lot of them.

The sculpture he had constructed of newspaper and plaster of Paris, forming a reasonable depiction of the Mission Valley with the gently rolling hills of the Bison Range overlooking a placid river canyon to the west, and a broad hollow valley that rolled eastward to the towering vertical sweep of the Mission Mountains. He had formed the high lakes and sheer cliffs using a small hacksaw blade that he had bent into a bow and duct taped to a thin rounded handle. It fit gently in the palm of his hand, perfect for gouging out shallow lake beds and scraping rock faces—a homemade tool he was particularly proud of for its delicate application. The sculpture was to be a gift for his eldest niece, Taylor, who lived in San Diego. She visited Mission every summer, lately staying with her grandmother, Joseph's mother, for weeks after her parents and younger sister returned home. She was eleven, and she loved Montana—vowed she would move here when she finished college. He couldn't see any way for a bright young girl like her to stay in a place like this unless she wanted to become a rancher and he reckoned it was too late to start that process. Even if she found a profession that might bring her here, and that was unlikely, he believed she would be wasting her intellect here where there were so few opportunities. This place could scarcely hold onto those who grew up here. The newcomers it attracted were retirees or dreamers who lasted a few years before reluctantly admitting that their fantasies of Montana were simply that. The stunning landscape could make people overlook the more obvious deterrents like the lack of high paying jobs, the biting cold winters, the occasional grizzly bear wandering through town, the poverty and the isolation, but only for a little while. He didn't share this perspective with Taylor; she would figure it out on her own, and long before she graduated from college. Instead, he would give some reasonable facsimile of Montana to her.

He pulled up a stool and inspected his sculpture. He had been practicing the technique of painting foliage by using a broad range of colors, including pink and blue and magenta. He took down a small brush and squeezed fresh paint onto a board already encrusted with a kaleidoscope of dried color. Today he focused on the Bison Range—yellow ochre, burnt sienna, sagebrush green. In the gullies and timbers he dabbed midnight blue and dark lavender.

KAYLA

It took less than ten minutes for Kayla Azkari to drive every street in Mission with its clean and simple grid of subdued housing on one side of the creek and its water tower and maze of ramshackle buildings painted neon pink or green or purple—some painted all three on the other. Her stomach pitted and her heart sank as she assessed the three square blocks of downtown and its single-story, flat-front buildings constructed of wood and cinderblock—post office, bank, hardware store, medical center, a few art galleries and twice as many bars. Except for the stately and commanding nineteenth-century Roman Catholic mission for which the town was named, the community itself felt impoverished, a threadbare commercial center in the shadow of breathtaking scenery. Perhaps nothing could hold its own against this backdrop of country so tall and rugged and beautiful. Manmade structures scarcely stood a chance anywhere, and in this place where the landscape bristled up its feathers in an intimidating spectacle of dominance, they were doomed from the very start.

The rental house was unlocked, lights ablaze, a fire in the woodstove. On the 1980s-style maple table Kayla found a welcome note from the agency and a set of keys. She picked them up and rolled them in her hand, wondering how long the place had been standing open for anyone to borrow these and make copies. She peered through the front window at the street of tiny houses in a hodgepodge of architectural styles, eras, and aesthetics.

When Don, the recruiter, had called her last month, not a minute too soon, Kayla was elated. Her unemployment benefits were due to run out within the month, and she had already explained to him, with a measure of desperation she later regretted, that she would take *anything*. Anywhere. She just needed a job! She had begun to wonder if something was wrong with her that no employer seemed interested in her skills, and the longer she remained unemployed, the harder it became to get that first interview. Her former colleagues had started, one by one, to secure jobs again. Kayla had always been a good worker. Praised by her managers, she was one of the last to be let go before the company closed its doors permanently. Why was she still lingering in this protracted state of searching, applying, and waiting?

“Where?” she asked, when he told her it was out of state.

“Near Missoula.”

Kayla had a vague notion of where Missoula was, but only because she had mistakenly referred to it as being in the Midwest while talking with a stranger one night at a cocktail party.

“Missoula is not in the Midwest,” Kayla repeated the woman’s declaration aloud to Don. “Its *west* of the Continental Divide.”

“Indeed it is. The job is not actually in Missoula, though. It’s about forty miles north.”

“Indeed,” Kayla said aloud now to the quiet house as she wondered if coming here had been a mistake.

Kayla awoke in a sweaty panic that night to newly forged night demons unlike those that routinely plagued her. Specific and clear about their purpose, these homed in on a single

point of fact. From the modern metropolis of Portland, she had come to a community of three-thousand people, smack in the middle of an Indian Reservation. What did she know about Indians? She had read Sherman Alexie, and thinking of his stories now only heightened that anxiety.

“I shouldn’t have come,” she said, getting up and searching for her robe. A chronic insomniac, she knew it was pointless to remain in bed, tossing and turning.

Kayla opened the door to the woodstove and peered into the blackness. She had never used a woodstove; who was she kidding? She fumbled for the hall light and examined the thermostat. It was ancient, and the dial seemed to be frozen. *Yes, she thought. It’s frozen to death. Just like I will be come morning.* She worked at it, breaking a nail in the fight to unstick the dial. But she was nothing if not persistent, and once blood was drawn, it was war. She listened with satisfied accomplishment as the furnace finally ticked to life somewhere in the bowels of the 1920s bungalow. The woman at the rental agency had made a very big deal about the woodstove, and Kayla was glad she made sure the house had a furnace as well.

Mildly comforted by the heat now blowing from the tiny floor registers, Kayla wrapped herself in a blanket and sat on the creaky sofa beneath the austere fluorescent glare of the overhead light. The furnishings were what she had expected, cast-offs from a prior era. Spare by all stretch of the definition. She would need to buy lamps. She tried to imagine being here long enough to buy furniture of her own, but she quickly pushed the idea away. This job was a stop-gap. A short term crisis diversion.

“Why is this firm located in the middle of nowhere?” Kayla had asked Don when they met to discuss her pending phone interview with Intrinsic Architectural, Ltd. In her experience, metropolitan areas were the rightful domain of such businesses.

“Well, I suppose the tribe that runs it doesn’t think of it as the middle of nowhere.”

She gave him a skeptical glance. “How viable is this company?”

“It’s a multimillion dollar operation,” he assured her. “They have contracts all over the world. They employ nearly three-hundred people.”

Kayla took a long slow inhale, then counted backward from eight as she released the breath. She was adept at calming her anxiety and refocusing her mind. Fourteen months of unemployment had given her an intimate understanding of fear. Or so she had come to blame it on unemployment. At times like this, when she was alone and vulnerable, she understood in the deepest part of her that it was the recent loss of her mother that had punctuated the transient shifts and callous disregard that the universe sometimes offered. At first Kayla had seen the layoff as a Godsend, a reprieve from the corporate world precisely when her mother needed her most. But she hadn’t expected her strong mother to die. Kayla had seen her battle and beat cancer before. Sometimes guilt crept in. Guilt that she hadn’t followed her mother’s medical details more closely. She would have better understood the brave face and outright lies her mother had offered to the world.

This move to Montana is the easier part of life, she reminded herself, thinking of the night she realized her condo would have to go. Nothing material, including home, was sacred. Nothing could be held too close. Like a point of light to focus on, her fear had become an ally that sharpened her mind and tempered her nerves. It mobilized her in a stark emotionless way that had brought her here and would carry her through the days and weeks ahead.

As Kayla sat in her bathrobe sipping coffee early Sunday morning, there was a knock at her door. She peered out the window, thinking about her messy hair and splotchy makeup-less face. A small girl holding a box waited patiently.

“Yes?” Kayla said, opening the door.

The girl looked up at her with big brown eyes, and smiled. She was missing her front teeth, and Kayla guessed that she was about six. She looked around for a parent, but the girl was alone.

“Do you want a kitten?” she asked, setting the box down and opening its flaps. Three tiny cats struggled to keep their balance in the jostling. “They’re really friendly.” She picked up a black and white one and cuddled it under her chin and it nestled in. “My dad says I have to get rid of them.”

“Oh, sweetie, I don’t think I can take one. I’m sorry.” Kayla stepped back, prepared to close the door, but the girl’s lip quivered and Kayla couldn’t leave her standing there alone.

“He said he’s going to drown them if I don’t find them homes.” Tears spilled down her cheeks now.

God, Kayla thought, what kind of father tells his daughter he’s going to drown her kittens?

“How old are you, honey?”

The girl wiped her face and stood up a little straighter. “Seven.”

Kayla looked into the box again. The kittens barely had their eyes open. They seemed much too young to be taken away from their mother.

The girl held the kitten out for her to take, and she did. It mewed pathetically, and Kayla instinctively pulled it against her chest. She gazed out at the brick mission. The thought of a tiny companion in this place where she knew no one had a warm appeal. The kitten began to purr and knead its claws on her fingers.

“I tell you what,” she said, and the girl beamed in anticipation of her words. “I’ll take this one.” Kayla didn’t look at the other two. She couldn’t allow herself to worry for them. “If

you can't find homes for the other two I want you to take them down to the mission and put them on the steps after they begin Mass today." She looked at the clock, but realized that she didn't know the church schedule, anyway. "It will be starting soon. Wait until they close the doors so no one sees you."

The girl looked at the church with doubt.

"Trust me, sweetie. Out of all those people, there have to be two who will take the kittens. You can check on them after everyone leaves, and see if they are still there."

"But how will I know if they go to good homes?" the girl asked with genuine worry.

Kayla considered this. How did this girl know *she* was a good home? "They go to church," she said at last, hoping the child didn't have enough experience with church goers at her young age to know that they aren't any different than anyone else—some good homes, some not.

The girl nodded, somewhat reluctantly, staring off toward the church. She turned back to Kayla, but the girl was looking at the kitten.

Kayla held it out to her, and she kissed it on the head.

"His name is Henry," she said. "Goodbye, Henry." She picked up the box and lumbered down the steps with the exaggerated gait of a small child with a heavy load. Kayla watched her go, then looked at her new companion. Had she made a mistake in keeping it?

Showered and dressed in jeans, a sweater, and calf-length leather boots, Kayla shut the kitten in the bathroom where he would be safe until she returned with the appropriate supplies for him, and drove the three blocks to the grocery store. She would walk it in the future, but this first trip was a stocking up chore like she hadn't done since she moved to

Portland after college. All the things one takes for granted in a household, and especially a kitchen: spices, oils, flour, etc. She needed everything.

She nodded at people as she pushed her cart along, searching for familiar foods—some small flavor of home. Was it her imagination, or was everyone staring at her? She checked her zipper and peeked at herself in the mirror of her compact. A tall young Indian man with dark skin and darker tattoos paused ahead of her and watched as she passed. He didn't smile or nod. He didn't frown, either. He simply watched her by with a level of interest that made her feel like some sort of freak or never-before-seen animal.

As Kayla unloaded her massive haul onto the slow conveyer at the checkout, a woman behind her said, "Going into hibernation, are you?"

Kayla laughed, relieved to be addressed rather than stared at. "No, I just need to stock my new kitchen."

The woman appeared to be in her late fifties with short, gray-white hair. She wore a purple tunic-style shirt with colorful threads running through it that gave her already bright green eyes a warm sparkle. "Moving back home?" she asked.

"Home? No. I'm from Portland. Well, southern Oregon originally. I—" Kayla wondered if she was sharing too much, but the woman had asked. The checker listened as she scanned items, glancing at Kayla and away again in alternating bursts. "I'm starting a new job at Intrinsic Architectural." She assumed everyone knew the place. Its building was the only modern one of its kind in town—large and elegant with its stone and glass exterior in the style of Frank Lloyd Wright. It stood out among the mix of old west architecture like the giant brick Catholic mission, the mobile homes in various states of decline, and the ranch houses and log cabins that dotted the landscape, none with any sense of relation to the others.

"So you're from another tribe?"

Kayla paused, unsure. “No. No tribe.”

“Oh, I just assumed,” the woman said, laughing in a slightly shrill manner. “I mean... I’m sorry. I...” She swept a hand at Kayla, and blushed.

Kayla turned to the clerk for help. She was Indian, about the age of the other woman, but softer and much less open. The clerk shook her head in disagreement without making eye contact, and she offered no comment. Kayla wondered whom she disagreed with. Was that it? Was it her olive skin and dark eyes? Her black hair, which she wore long, letting its natural wave do as it pleased, which usually meant big and wild, that was causing everyone to stare? My father would laugh his head off, she thought, to know his daughter can pass on the Indian Reservation. But then she thought of the clerk’s response... Well, perhaps not with real Indians.

The woman approached Kayla again in the parking lot as she put her groceries in the trunk of her car.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “I didn’t mean to assume.”

Kayla shrugged. “Don’t worry about it.” It didn’t seem like as big a deal as this woman was making. But it had served as a reminder to Kayla to call her father and let him know she had arrived safely.

“I’m DeeAnn,” the woman said, thrusting her hand out.

“Kayla,” she said, accepting the woman’s handshake.

“I’m one of the owners of the Mission Mountain Art Gallery,” DeeAnn said, pointing up the street. “It’s on the corner of First and Main, next to the old boarding house. Stop in when you get settled.”

“Thanks, I will.”

“It’s a co-op. Do you do any kind of art?”

“Oh, no.” Kayla said. “Nothing like painting. I’m an art director, but I mostly advise others on...” She realized that the woman was staring at her confused. “I do play the cello, though.”

“How lovely. Maybe you’d like to play at one of our openings.”

Kayla shrugged, grieving her lost cello. It had provided her hour upon hour of solace before its sale gained her weeks of sustenance. She had never reached a level of mastery with the instrument, but that hadn’t been its purpose for her.

“I’d have to find a cello. I didn’t bring mine this trip.”

“Marty at Owens Music can set you up,” DeeAnn said. “He owns the music store in Ronan. It’s just up the highway.”

“I’ll check it out when I’ve gotten my sea legs,” Kayla said. Having a cello again might be high on her priority list, she speculated.

For the kitten, Kayla arranged a towel on the floor next to a pair of mismatched bowls she had picked up at the thrift store. It was a tiny hole-in-the-wall business across the street from the grocery. In her other life, before the economy crashed, she would have bought boutique-style matching bowls for the cat, and a plush little bed with paw prints or leopard spots. But that was over, and even if she suddenly made a millions dollars a year, she would always look at things like pet-specific dishes and beds as unnecessary extravagances.

She had lost almost everything she had. This job offer came just in time. Kayla had, by then, sold her condo and spent the equity on six more months in Portland, searching for work as a designer or creative services manager or anything. Six months had seemed overly

conservative at the time, surely she would find work within a matter of weeks. At thirty-seven, she'd never been unemployed. But the economic crash had been particularly cruel to the Pacific Northwest and its architectural community, dumping hundreds of people just like her into a maimed job market. Budgets and expenditures for all things real estate—design, planning, building, or remodeling—were promptly eliminated. Kayla had gone on to sell the antique oak desk she had fought fiercely for during her divorce. She had sold most of her mother's jewelry at the gold exchange, and her grandfather's Masonic memorabilia. She sold her cello—a particularly painful loss. She had hocked everything but her car by the time she found this job, and it was next to go. She had run already the blue book numbers and drafted the ad.

Henry devoured the kitten chow, promptly used his new litter box, and clawed his way onto the sofa where he curled up in the corner, eyes slit in enviable contentment and impending slumber.

“This is your bed,” she said, moving him to the towel on the floor. But he simply stretched and went back to the couch.

“Have it your way, then,” she said, spreading the towel onto the couch, instead. She changed into a lighter shirt as the sun gained the day, bringing with it surprisingly warm temperatures. She donned her sunglasses, locked the small rental house, and took to the road to explore the valley. Perhaps she would check out the music store, even though she was a long way from affording another cello.

She drove north, through a series of small towns and into to the northern end of the long valley. She pulled into the roadside overlook and stood staring at the broad blue expanse of lake hemmed in by sharp white peaks. Thickly forested islands appeared to float on the placid water. The community nestled on its south shore looked like so many little beach

towns. Small and picturesque with the comforts of leisure and lakeside living. Rambling rental cabins from the 1950s, upscale hotels and condos at the water's edge, a Kentucky Fried Chicken, shops and art galleries. It was named Polson, but Kayla first read the Welcome sign as Poison, which made her laugh aloud, and now she couldn't get that name out of her head.

She drove the circumference of the lake, some sixty miles, taking more than two hours. The prospect of Montana was seeping into her with new and unexpected anticipation. From the cherry orchards bathed in pink blossoms along the eastern shore to the upscale Yuppie enclave at northern end where Kayla ate a late lunch and poked through a silver shop and a bookstore, she began to feel not so far removed from the familiar. Her west coast sensibilities were, at least today, put at ease in this touristy, yet mildly cosmopolitan place close enough for an afternoon escape.

Back in Mission, she was in no hurry to return to the quiet house. The two channels she was able to tune in on the television were static-riddled and snowy. She had only the kitten to look forward to, and he was fine for now. She wandered down back roads, passing ranches and farms, their fields newly turned for planting. Wheel-line irrigation pipes bordered the fences like bench warmers awaiting their turn. She criss-crossed the valley heading east, then south, then west, then north, casually taking roads paved and not, bumping along with the water tower as a homing beacon always within easy sight.

At Beaver Dam Road she turned toward town, ready to go home. But just as she made the intersection she was startled by a horse-drawn buggy coming fast and straight at her on the wrong side of the road. She slammed the brake and cranked the wheel to avoid a collision, landing in the ditch as the buggy thumped against her rear fender and kept going. She sat motionless and shaken, the buggy heading toward the mountains at a fast clip. When her nerves calmed, she tried to back out of the ditch and onto the road, but her car was stuck.

She gunned the engine, digging deeper into the rocky shoulder soil. Giving up, she climbed out of the car and up the embankment where she could get a better look at how bad the situation was. The nose of her car was lodged in the ditch, the rear-end sticking up and into the road. The back fender was badly scraped, but not dented. She looked up the road in the direction of the buggy, just a black smudge a mile or so gone.

Before she could figure out what to do, a man pulled up next to her in a blue pickup.

“That doesn’t look good,” he said, leaning his head out the window and peering at her car.

“I was hit by a...” She looked up the road again. Was she really hit by a horse-drawn buggy? “A... a buggy!” She gestured in the direction it had gone. “Can you believe that? A buggy!”

He parked behind her car and joined her on the road. His black and white dog stood with its head out the passenger side window, wagging its tale and panting an excited smile. The man was tall and lanky with a copper beard and sandy hair. He looked near her age, perhaps a little older, early forties possibly. He wore dirt-stained jeans and hiking boots that were caked in dark mud.

“I’m sure it was a buggy. I’m not kidding.” She glanced at him, expecting to defend her story against sure skepticism.

He bit the inside of his cheek. “Bet it was Smithson’s rig. He’s got a horse that’s been known to bolt. That and his son is too young to be driving it.”

“Smithson? This guy drives a buggy? What happened to good old fashioned automobiles?” Kayla pulled her hair back and knotted it at the nape of her neck to keep it from flying about in the crisp breeze.

The man looked at her now as if assessing whether she was sane. He let a smile work its way up slow and crooked. He had nice gray eyes, a little squinty, but soft.

“I swear I didn’t make it up. I was mowed down by a buggy,” she said with a slight flip of her chin.

His smile broadened. He took his time to think about it and nodded. “Mowed down by a buggy,” he repeated, now circling around the back of the car and crouching to look underneath. “You know,” he said, standing up and assessing the angle of the car. “You had the advantage.” His smile had gone electric, but he kept his eyes on the Mustang. “Car like this could’ve been the *mower*, not the *mowee*, in the right hands.”

“Are you mocking me?” she said, moving in next to him, trying to see what he found so riveting about the ditch and the other side of the car.

“Might be.”

“Well that’s some howdy-ho welcome committee. Mowed down by a yahoo that thinks it’s the nineteenth-century and then mocked by the one who might help me fix it.” She let out a long sigh, fully aware of her overtly flirtatious tone. Why was she doing this? She wasn’t the sort of woman who used men for help with things like this. No, she had AAA and insurance with roadside assistance. She had a cell phone and ample self-sufficiency. She was flirting with him, she admitted to herself, because she found him intriguing.

After he reaffirmed that he was definitely mocking her, he hooked a chain to the undercarriage of her car and dragged it out of the ditch, in the process spitting gravel all over it with the big back tires of his four-wheel-drive. When the Mustang was back on level ground, he crawled under the front end to make sure the tie-rod hadn’t bent, then deemed it safe to drive.

“You mock me and then you spray rocks all over my car,” she said. “I guess I should thank you.”

He nodded, trying hard to conceal that electric grin. “Probably outta. Yes.”

They stood for a moment in the coming dusk, escaped strands of her hair floating wildly about on the wind, him shoving his hands into his pockets but making no move to go. A herd of whitetail deer meandered through the sun-filtered field nearby, and he raised his chin to point them out.

“Wow. So pretty,” she said.

He nodded.

“Well... I guess I better go. It'll be getting dark soon. But thank you. You saved me from having to call a tow truck. Probably would've sat out here all night.”

“Yup.”

“So I guess I'll see you around.”

“Might.” He looked back at his pickup, and she started for her car. “You got a name, miss mowed-down-by-a-buggy?”

“Kayla.”

“Joseph McGill.” He pointed across the field to the south. “I live down on Mission crick, just through those trees on the other side of the water.”

“Nice to meet you, Joseph McGill.” She pointed toward the water tower and town. “I live in a funny little house in Mission. It's some sort of pinkish-orange.”

“That'll make it easy to find.” His voice was deep and rich, and she noticed for the first time, the old-fashioned wire-rimmed glasses he wore. Buggies and men in spectacles

from another century. This place was curious. And her house was not pinkish-orange. She didn't know why she lied, except that the town was small and it wouldn't be hard to find her if someone really wanted to.

“See you're from Oregon,” he said.

“How did you know that?”

“Plates on your car.” He grinned at the road beneath his feet.

“I must look tremendously stupid right now,” she said.

“It's okay. You were just mowed down by a buggy.”

“Well okay then. I'll see you around, Joseph McGill.”

Kayla stared out the kitchen window at the large and seemingly out-of-place brick mission as she waited for her father to answer his phone. It was after supper, and he would be making himself a Turkish coffee on the stovetop with CNN in the background, though he didn't call it Turkish and took issue with the fact that a common spiced coffee had been attributed to a single country in a vast region sharing the tradition. He liked his sweetened with three teaspoons of sugar, and wasn't bothered by the caffeine so late at night. She could almost smell the cardamom thinking about his familiar ritual.

“Hello,” he answered in his soft, accented voice.

“Dad, it's me, Kayla.”

“Kayla!” he said, as if she had just popped out of a giant cake. It was his way of greeting her from as far back as she could remember. An exuberant celebration of her arrival.

“Where have you been? You never call this old man anymore.”

“I’m in Montana. And I called you last Sunday.”

“Montana? What are you doing out there?”

She hadn’t shared the move with her father. She wasn’t sure why, except that the timing never seemed right. He was still casting about lost in the world without his wife, Kayla’s mother. He seemed to have gone into a tailspin that spun and spun without end.

“I took a job out here.”

He was silent, and she felt the miles stretch between them as if they were galaxies.

“It’s just temporary. You know I needed to find something. I have to work or I’ll be living on the streets soon.”

He sighed, and she wondered if he was wiping away silent tears. She had watched him do that too many times since her mother’s death. It was a new gesture that had given Kayla a deep and painful understanding of how much her mother rooted him in this world.

“I’ll be home by Thanksgiving. Maybe I’ll even move down to Ashland. We can be neighbors.”

He told her about Prince, her mother’s Chihuahua and how the dog had taken over the entire house. Kayla’s father never wanted the dog—it was an obvious bone of contention between the couple. And now here he was stuck caring for it. Kayla had offered to find Prince a new home, assuring her father that she would make sure the dog was well cared for. But her father wouldn’t agree. It was Sandra’s dog, and he had an obligation to it.

“You’re probably spoiling him, Dad.”

“I am not spoiling him. He is so demanding. He sticks on me when I sit down to rest. It is the only way to make him leave me alone.”

“You’re giving him treats, aren’t you?”

“I have to give him a bone to stay on his own bed.”

“You’re just teaching him that if he jumps up on your lap you’ll give him treats.” Her father had always been overly indulgent with the dog. He never understood the concept of alpha dog, or that he should assert himself over others, even animals, that way. “I can still find him a home, Dad.”

“No. I don’t like to have the dog, but I promised your mother.”

The two were silent for a long moment, then she told him about Henry, the kitten, assuring her father that she would find a suitable home for him before she returned to Oregon. They talked about the weather and the greenhouse where he worked at the community college in Medford. He told her about the magnolias he had sprouted from seeds, and how the saplings had sold out in the first hour of their annual sale. He would work extra shifts through the summer this year to help out the instructors, and she understood that it was his way of filling the emptiness now.

JOSEPH

Joseph waded into the calm, reedy edgewaters of the Flathead River, his rubbers sinking into the soft mud. Cumulus clouds reflected in the turquoise water, and mosquitoes bobbed along its surface. He looked for his mother downstream, already up to her thighs and casting a delicate line back and forth in a rhythmic arc. Her broad-brimmed hat and tackle basket seemed too large on her slender frame. Masked behind oversized sun glasses, she might have been twenty or forty or seventy. She would catch more fish than he, and hers would be bigger, too. Even as a grown man he was still trying to match her skill as a fly fisher. He wondered if he ever would.

The rod was light and nimble in his hand as he chose his target—a deep pool in the shadow of a silvery log cabin that was missing its windows and doors. It seemed to gape out at the river in a perpetual expression of surprise, as if it could hardly understand what had happened to it. When they were teenagers, he and Victor brought girls out to that cabin. It was hard to get to, isolated on the other side on the other side of the river, built and abandoned before the first road came through. But the trek from the railroad bridge a half mile east was worth it—no one ever bothered them in this ghostly-quiet canyon. They had spread blankets on the pebble beach above the river and drank beer. Victor had a boom box, and they played Def Leopard and AC/DC loud and late into the empty night, looking for satellites and shooting stars or making out with the girls if the girls were willing. He

wondered what music the kids who used the cabin now played, and he hoped it wasn't Country.

On the drive back to Mission, Alice showed off her twenty-inch German brown trout. It wasn't the only fish she had caught, but it was the finest, and per her tradition, she made sure her son appreciated it.

"Mine is almost the same size," Joseph said, admiring the gorgeous fish.

"What? Are you kidding me?" She replaced the fish in her tackle basket, placing it on the floor by her feet, then dug in Joseph's basket and pulled out his considerably smaller fish—the only one he had caught that day. She held it up between them, but said nothing.

He grinned out the window. "Just can't let a guy save face. Have to go and stomp on his masculinity."

"Masculinity?" She laughed. "I'm your mother."

They were quiet as they rode home, Joseph looking forward to the first bite of that trout pan fried with potatoes. They didn't fish as often as they once had, but when they did, they made a full day of it, including a supper of the catch. He wondered how she was adjusting to life as a widow. She had her church friends, and she went swimming at the community center three days a week. Joseph's father, Gilford—Gil for short as a sort of refrain Gil McGill, had only been dead eighteen months, though he had ceased being a father and husband in the practical sense more than five years before that. He had been injured in a car accident that left him brain damaged and paralyzed. Pneumonia is what finally took him, though. His father's death had come as a relief to Joseph, and he had imagined that it would for her as well. So he couldn't fathom her pain and grief that first year without him. Caring for Gil had been a full-time a job that exhausted Alice and deprived her of any kind of life of her own. Still, she mourned his passing with a depth of pain that astounded Joseph.

“You really should have met Donna,” she said, breaking the silence. “She was a real nice woman. Pretty, too.”

He looked over at his mother, muddy and smelling of fish. She wore no makeup, and her wavy, shoulder-length hair was gray-white. “What about you?”

“What about me?”

“How come you’re not dating?”

“Joseph!”

“Well... I mean, why not, mom?” He hadn’t intended to have this conversation with her, at least not yet. But it served to illustrate his point about not wanting to be pushed into a relationship.

She muttered something he couldn’t make out, shaking her head and turning her face to the window.

“He’s been gone well over a year now, mom. There must be some bachelors in your church who can appreciate a woman with your fishing skills.” He thought about that a moment. “You’ll need to let them to catch the bigger fish, though. Maybe you can start using the catch and release method. Quietly let those big ones go before he sees what you’ve got.”

“I would sooner kill myself than pretend I didn’t catch the nicest fish. I don’t care how delicate anybody’s ego is.”

They laughed.

“You’ll never catch a *man* with that attitude.”

Joseph peeled the crispy skin off the delicate white filet and sunk his fork into it. The first bite was always the best. Nothing could compare to the taste of a native trout pulled fresh from a pristine, glacier-fed river. Nothing.

“Remind me to show you my new paintings,” Alice said. “I’m working on a collection for a show this summer down at the gallery.”

Joseph thought of his own art project in the garage, and almost mentioned it, but decided that it was better as a surprise. His mother had taught him how to draw when he was in grade school, and he had dabbled with oil painting off and on since. But it had remained a passing hobby—something to do in his spare time. He had no designs on becoming a serious artist like her. She had been painting and exhibiting her work across the interior west since he could remember.

“What’s the news with the water compact?” Alice asked between bites.

Joseph savored the meat a moment before addressing the unappetizing subject of the water compact.

“We’re drafting a second letter to the Montana legislature with more specific details of the impact to irrigators if this thing goes through. I mean, it isn’t just the land values. It’s our livelihoods. It’s our whole future as ranchers. They need to comprehend that.”

“Isn’t the tribe offering some assurance that irrigators will still have water? Fred Parker told me they weren’t really changing anything.” She placed a second fillet on Joseph’s plate, though he was still working on the first.

“The way the compact is written right now, it claims rights to all water within the borders of the Reservation, regardless of who owns the land. And it includes riparian streams feeding into it. That means the tribe would own the water all the way to the continental

divide: every river and stream in between. There are no specific allocations of water to ranchers based on historic rights. They would wipe out all existing claims and redraw the allocations using undefined priorities and personal agendas.”

“That’s absurd. Your great-grandfather filed that water claim in 1912. It has seniority. It’s one of the oldest ones. The entire value of the land is in its water rights and the guarantee that it can be irrigated. What could you possibly grow on it without water?”

Joseph looked up and caught his mother’s gaze. “It may be absurd, but so far there isn’t a politician in Montana who recognizes that or is willing to say it out loud. They’re all so gung-ho on repairing injustices, that they aren’t looking at what it actually means. At who’s getting hurt by this.”

“What does Victor think about it?”

Joseph pushed his plate back and set his napkin on the table. “Do you know why he came back from Minnesota now—after all these years?”

“He got hired on up at the dam,” she said.

“That’s right. The tribe is taking control of the hydro-electric plant in one year, and he’s going to manage it.”

“That’s not a bad thing.”

“I know. No one is arguing that the tribe shouldn’t manage the dam, but I’m starting wonder if it’s just the beginning. It’s the tip of the iceberg. The way they’re buying up all the land within the Reservation. What better way to force good land onto the market at cheap prices than to strip ranchers of water rights?”

“Now, Joe ...”

“What?” He looked at her pointedly.

She broke the gaze, shaking her head. But he couldn't make out what she was thinking.

They stared down at their plates in silence. Joseph's appetite was gone.

Alice picked at her food with the tip of her fork. “Did you hear about Aida Erickson?” she finally said.

“Yeah, I heard.”

Joseph saw Victor's red truck turn into his driveway, coming too fast, causing rutting and potholes that he would have to repair later. He wasn't expecting Victor, but was glad to see him. He had missed the friendship while Victor was away. He grabbed two bottles of Henry Weinhardt's and met the truck outside.

“What are you doing tearing up my road, you asshole?”

Victor grinned and left the truck parked in the middle of the lane. “Hope one of those is for me.”

“Not unless you slow down.” Joseph handed a beer to Victor and they wandered past the tiny, overgrown McGill Cemetery, tucked under a pair of giant weeping willows. Out in the field they stood beneath the sleek metal arc of the pivot. The technological wonder hadn't been his intentional destination; the sunset was always best from this spot in the field. And these two men had wandered through this ritual too many times to know.

“There she is,” Victor said looking up at the irrigation pivot.

“There she is,” Joseph said, suppressing a crack about it being poised to become the most expensive ornamental art in the valley.

They sipped their beer and studied the landscape, always comfortable in each other’s silence.

“Remember that chick in the Mustang we saw?” Joseph said.

“Yeah. You find out who she is?”

They walked back toward the house where a pair of stumps in the front yard served as benches.

“Sort of. I pulled her car out of the ditch after the Smithson kid ran her off the road with that damn buggy.”

“That goddamn kid is too young to be driving a buggy, and especially with that horse—I don’t even think it’s a gelding.” Victor embraced the topic with fervor. “Can you imagine trying to contain a stallion at the age of... what is that kid? Six?”

“He’s older than that. Twelve maybe.”

“That pair have caused too many accidents already. Someone is going to get hurt. Or killed!” Victor tossed the empty bottle onto the porch behind him with a clatter.

Joseph grimaced. “I’ve got a trash can, you know.” He went into the house and returned with two more beers, but left the empty bottle on the porch. He would get it later. And there would be more to pick up.

“Just because they’re Amish doesn’t mean they don’t have to follow any rules,” Victor went on. “It’s reasonable for the rest of us on the road to expect that a buggy is driven

by someone over the age of fourteen, you ask me.” He took a long drink of his beer and then studied the label. “Where do you get this fancy beer? Pabst isn’t good enough for you?”

“I don’t hear you complaining. It’s from Oregon. Same as this chick.”

Victor nodded. “What’s her name again?”

“Kayla. Indian, but I don’t think she’s from a local tribe. Guess she got hired on at the architecture firm.”

“Sylvia will know.”

“How is Sylvia?”

Victor hunched forward, his elbows balanced on his thighs, his beer in both hands. He looked sideways at Joseph for a long moment, then turned his face toward the pink sky.

Sometime during the evening Victor had lined the empty beer bottles up on the edge of the porch like a battalion of glass soldiers while he waited for Joseph to bring more beer from the extra fridge in his shop.

“We drank all the good shit,” Joseph said, handing Victor a can of Budweiser. He dropped a short-case at the base of the stump and cracked a can. He studied the empty bottles, hoping that in his drunkenness he was seeing double. They would continue the evening reminiscing about their youth, careful to avoid the one topic that could lever them apart. But it was there, under the surface—a palpable presence.

Victor slid down onto the grass and leaned back against the stump. “I haven’t drank like this since before I left for Minnesota. You’re a bad fucking confluence on me.”

“Influence.”

“What?”

“You said confluence.”

“I did not.”

Joseph took a spot on the ground next to him, and Weeb moved from under the willow tree to sit lie next to them. The two men studied the still-pale sky with its sliver moon and emerging stars. “Member when we used to go to the drive-in and we had to wait until eleven cause it was still too light to show the movie?”

Victor grunted. “We were always wasted by the time the show started.”

“Sober before the second one ended, though.”

“Passed out. Not sober.” He sipped his beer. “I ever tell you that I’m glad Eilene is gone?”

“That’s a hell of a thing to say?” Joseph hadn’t thought of his ex-wife in months, and it had felt good to finally be free of her.

“Well it’s true. She was a bitch.”

“Yeah, she was. Thank god we never had any kids.” He kicked at the soft dirt, digging a trench with his shoe. “I don’t wanna talk about her. She’s married now. Has a baby. I’m happy for her.”

Victor nodded, and Joseph understood that it wasn’t happiness for Eilene that he was agreeing to, but the fact that she wouldn’t be coming back this time.

“Tell me somethin’ about the compact.”

Victor set his jaw and listened, his eyes bobbing along the distant horizon.

“Why can’t the tribe just write a clause into it that says it will honor all existing claims according to their current seniority and allocations? That’s all it would take.”

“I didn’t write that compact,” Victor said.

“I know *you* didn’t write it. But you’re in a position of influence. And I can’t figure out why the existing water rights aren’t protected if there’s really no intention of taking them away.”

Victor held his beer, his gaze faraway and impossible to discern in the falling darkness. “It’s a hell of a thing, Cowboy. To be sitting on the other side of a broken promise.”

“What does that even mean?”

“Just that. Tribe doesn’t want to screw you. But if you got screwed in the process of the tribe getting unscrewed, well...”

IAN

1918

Ian McGill understood her touch first. Gentle, cool against his burning skin. And when he opened his eyes, the first person he saw was Eddie Frye splayed out on a cot so near he could reach out and hit the man. Eddie was asleep, sweat beading on his dark skin, his long black hair matted against his forehead in streaks. He gripped a small beaded sash tightly in his fist.

Ian's whole body ached deep in the large joints like he had been pummeled by a large creature or gang of men, and he tried to remember where he was. Eddie coughed himself awake, whimpered in pain and rolled onto his side facing away. Ian sat up, but she pressed him back down.

“Lie back. I'll get you a cool cloth,” she said.

“Bear?” he wheezed. His mind conjured the grizzly he had recently seen trundling along the creek bed. Joseph had frozen with his hand outstretched toward his rifle in case she suddenly turned.

“You still have a fever.”

As the woman came into focus so, too, did the low-ceilinged basement of the mission church, now filled with cots, each with a human form shrouded in a dull gray blanket. The

place looked like a field hospital straight out of the Civil War—or at least what the old veterans back in Billings had described to him as a child.

“How did I get here?” he asked, but the words choked off in a coughing fit that he struggled to get under control. When it dissipated he was left trembling and feeble.

“Shh,” she said. She was a young woman of about twenty-five. Dressed in a long dark skirt and white blouse, and wore a long apron stained and wrinkled. Her pale orange hair was pinned up in a bun, but corkscrew strands had escaped and become fuzzy and tangled along her collar. Her eyes were rimmed dark, and her hands were chapped red. He thought he had never seen anyone so beautiful in his life.

“Your neighbor, there,” she nodded toward Eddie Frye, “brought you in before he collapsed.”

“I don’t remember,” he said, trying to piece together his last lucid moments. But his brain felt dried out and shrunken, as if it rattled against his skull when he spoke. He had suffered bizarre dreams that he couldn’t make sense of, and wasn’t sure they were actually dreams at all.

“You almost didn’t make it. You’re lucky.”

He assessed the cavernous room filled with people he recognized and people he didn’t. Women and men, young and old, Indians and whites were crammed in together without concern for segregation or privacy, which startled him. What manner of devastation could bring this co-mingling of the sick?

“Influenza has taken nearly one in three on the Reservation so far,” she said. She patted his arm softly. “It’s bad everywhere. But the Indians have gotten the worst of it. And it

is not over.” She looked out over the coughing mass, and he could see her exhaustion in the lines on her face.

“Who are you?”

She turned back to him and smiled. “My name is Elizabeth. I came up from Missoula with a doctor and two other nurses.” She bit back her words, and he saw that her hands trembled. After a moment, she said, “The other two succumbed. They’ve sent for more help.”

He tried again to sit up, but she pressed him back and left him, her skirt swishing softly behind her.

They joked later that Elizabeth’s superior immune system was what had prompted Ian to fall in love with her—a woman clearly capable of weathering hardships both physical and emotional. Two things living in rural Montana, and specifically on the Reservation, promised to provide with consistency. It was the most either one of them ever said about the influenza epidemic that swept the nation and decimated this community. Her family in San Francisco threatened never to speak to her again if she stayed in Mission, among the savages. And Ian always suspected it was that very threat that cinched the deal for him. He considered himself a very lucky man, not so much that he had survived influenza, but that this breathtaking creature agreed to be his wife.

Eddie Frye survived, too. And when Ian went to thank him for saving his life, Eddie greeted him at the door of his ramshackle cabin with a bottle of whiskey. A mangy dog growled at Ian from beneath the steps, and Eddie stomped on the boards, growling back, causing the dog to slink away around the side of the cabin.

“Hard way to try and stiff a man for a horse,” Eddie said and handed Ian the bottle.

Ian wiped the rim with his shirttail and took a swig. He hadn’t been a drinking man before moving to the Reservation, but some things just made life a little easier. He dug in his pocket for the money he owed Eddie and handed it to him with the bottle. Eddie gestured at a log overlooking the creek and Ian followed. This was the first invitation he had ever gotten from an Indian that didn’t entail some sort of deal for goods or services, usually fresh meat or hides.

“My friends told me I should have let you die,” he said, matter-of-factly. He tossed a stone down into the water with a loud plunk. “One less white man telling us what to do.”

“Thanks for not listening to them,” Ian said uneasily.

“I listened to them.”

Ian nodded, not knowing what to say. Eddie handed him the bottle.

“I don’t tell anybody what to do,” Ian said. He kicked the river rocks beneath his feet. They were a rainbow of pale blue, pink, red, purple, and yellow. When he finally built his permanent house, he would hand select the smoothest stones—fist-sized, in all the surprising colors this stream offered. He had a design in mind, a diamond pattern in argyle. Something to remind him of the old country, though he was born here—a first generation Montanan from east of the Continental Divide. Still, his father had brought him up with stories of Scotland and the crumbling ruins he had explored as a boy, imagining his life different, better. As if he could have been one of these lost monarchs who had lost everything, set adrift penniless to forge a new fortune. It was those images, and his father’s willingness to leave behind the familiar for better opportunities far away that had given Ian the fortitude to follow in his footsteps and stake his claim here in the wild country.

“White man tells people what to do by breathing.”

Ian handed the bottle back. The conversation was making him wary. He didn't need to dull his reflexes with alcohol. He hadn't imagined that this man who dragged him, near death, into Mission on a lodge pole travois behind his horse wanted to kill him now, but he couldn't be certain.

“Why did you save my life if you dislike white men?” Ian asked. He wasn't one to dance around a topic. If a man had something to say, Ian believed, he should just say it.

“You owed me money for a horse,” Eddie said and laughed. He laughed and laughed, rocking back and looking skyward. He opened his mouth wide, showing that he was missing as many teeth as he still possessed.

When he contained his mirth, he handed the bottle back to Ian. “Drink, white man.” He stood then and left Ian alone.

Ian took a swig and stared out at the creek. He wondered if he was supposed to leave now. Was Eddie coming back? Would he be offended if Ian left? Would he be offended if he stayed here, drinking on his log? Ian shook his head, annoyed by the complexity of these people and their customs. Since he had been here, he had watched large groups of Indians put up tipis in the forest, stay a few weeks, then move to the plain, then move again to the foothills, then return to the forest. He couldn't figure what they were doing. Why did they do that?

After a few minutes Eddie returned carrying a tin plate heaping with charred bear meat, pungent and gamy. He set it on the log between them, picked up a large chunk and proceeded to eat, grease slicking his lips.

Ian took a piece and chewed on it. It was dense and tough, but flavorful. He had never eaten bear.

“It was an old bear,” Eddie said, but not apologetically.

“Old bears eat the same as young bears,” Ian said. He knew the value of game in this place. It was life-sustaining, no matter its age or species.

“Old bears are tough.”

“Like some Indians,” Ian said and took another swig of whiskey before handing the bottle to Eddie.

Eddie grinned. He didn't look at Ian, but he nodded.

JOSEPH

2014

Spread across the dining room table were several stacks of papers Joseph had printed off the internet in recent days. He leafed through them, looking for a place to begin. *California Law Review: Indian Water Rights, Idaho Law Review: Implied Water Rights, 1908 Flathead Irrigation Act*, and dozens of treaties and federal acts covering this and other reservations. He was not the first to find himself facing the potential loss of his water rights to tribal suits claiming senior rights based on the “taking of fish.” And, so far, other people’s summary explanations of these issues—most from their own lay interpretations—had been inadequate at best, and downright inaccurate at worst. But he was no attorney. His undergraduate degree was in agriculture. An education that had emboldened him to invest in the pivot. A modern, technological irrigation system designed to improve production through efficiency.

Joseph began with the *Idaho Law Review* and undertook an earnest effort to understand the issue, the court’s use of precedence, and the outcome. Hours later, feeling a great deal more confused than when he had started, he found a passage that seemed to have direct relevance to his situation: *After determining fishing to be one purpose of the reservation, the court was faced with how to attribute water to that right. The doctrine of prior appropriation is most typically used for diversions, not for water remaining in the*

stream. The court looked to how the Cappaert Court framed the right: instead of a right to divert, it was the right to stop other appropriators from diverting water from the stream. It is a right to an amount of water in the stream that is free from impediment. This is the very nature of an instream water right. Accordingly, the Ninth Circuit affirmed a district court decision finding implied instream water rights to protect the fishing right. (Bilodeau, 2012)

Joseph considered that he and the other irrigators were claiming rights under the doctrine of prior appropriation—with each irrigator standing behind his water claim and its date-based seniority. This position was based on the diversion of water for irrigation purposes. And here the court had decided in at least one case that the right to stop diversions was necessary to protect the fishing rights of the tribe involved.

He made himself a pot of coffee and began searching through all of the documents looking for similarities in the original agreements. They were all similar, as if every treaty in the Northwest had been carbon-copied with a few minor edits to location and tribal names. He tried to imagine what the bearers of those treaties thought in 1855 and 1908 when they were drafted. Certainly, they could not have foreseen these circumstances. Perhaps they could not have even fathomed a shortage of fish, let alone a shortage of water itself in what, at the time, was a rugged land of innumerable wild rivers and streams. A land impassible in winter due to heavy snow pack in these barrier mountains. The wheel-line irrigation system hadn't yet been invented, let alone the dams and power plants that decimated fish spawning beds, or the invention of his pivot with its quarter-mile arm span and electronic control center. Could those men understand a scene in which a farmer strolls to his shop and punches a series of numbers into a pad and moments later the exact gallons per minute he has programmed is flowing from the delicate heads dotting the arm as it gently inches its way across the field to complete a full circle within twenty-four hours? Unaided by horses. Drawing water off

Mission Creek and reporting the volume to a regional station by some invisible transmission method. They might have thought it some sort of witchcraft.

For the first time, Joseph believed that he could actually lose his water rights. And that surprised him. Hadn't he believed it this morning? Or yesterday? Hadn't he believed it when he joined the handful of farmers who first formed the Montana Irrigators Association? He had certainly believed in the threat; he had believed that to do nothing could result in a loss. But this battle wasn't unique to Joseph or his neighbors. It was playing out in several communities across the West. And reading through these other cases, it was clear that people just like himself had fought this battle just as fiercely, and not all of them had won.

"Maybe it's time to see a realtor," he said aloud, drawing Weeb's attention. The dog lifted his head toward Joseph, ears pricked. Joseph looked a long time at the dog lounging on a deer hide that was so old it was mostly missing its hair now. He settled back in his chair with a sigh, wondering where that hide had come from. Who brought it in here and how long ago? These were his things, but they were not his things. They were family things—ancestral objects—that were kept or thrown out based on their continued usefulness. Could he sell his family's ranch? Could he leave the only home he had ever known? And if he did, where would he go? What would he do? It wouldn't bring much money with its future water rights in question. One-hundred-and-fifty acres of dry pasture wouldn't make anyone a living.

"If we can't win this, Weeb, we're fucked."

Joseph and Victor had retreated from discussions of the water compact and returned to the more familiar activity of fishing. And they had taken off for the Flathead River in early evening, in grass that was waist high and green along the sloping banks of the placid river. Joseph paused at the railroad bridge to take in the turquoise river in his usual manner. Cirrus

clouds, pink and gold, reflected on its surface. The pair made their way across the bridge and down to where the water ran alongside the abandoned log cabin.

“My mother will be pissed if she finds out I’ve been fishing and didn’t take her,” Joseph said, swatting at a mosquito that had latched on to the back of his neck. “I won’t hear the end of it, so you better keep your mouth shut.”

“No way I’m going fishing with that woman,” Victor said, setting his pole and tackle box down and peering into the doorless opening of the cabin. “She makes me feel like a rank amateur.”

Joseph set his things down, too, and stepped all the way into the dusty cabin. It was a simple one-room building with tiny windows looking east and west. Its door and larger windows looked south where the river ran, but not north where the earth drew herself sharply up in a vertical sweep of shale and crag. Joseph thought the northward view seemed important in keeping a lookout for bears, and it occurred to him that perhaps bears were the reason it had been abandoned. The building had never had floor, and flooding from the river had left a layer of sandy debris that collected thickly along the western wall.

Victor ran his hands over the carved initials on the doorframe. He paused over a heart with VLK + SD. He withdrew his pocketknife and retraced the SD, exposing fresh blond pine. Joseph pretended not to notice.

“Should’ve brought the boom box,” Victor said, slipping the knife into his pocket and stepping out to admire the river.

“We’re too old for that shit,” Joseph said, grabbing his gear and striding down to the shoreline.

Victor grunted and pulled on his waders.

They fished quietly for a time, and then Victor caught a perfect German brown trout. It was just shy of twenty-two inches long, and he whooped and whistled from upstream as he held it up for Joseph to see. Joseph shook his head and pretended to ignore him, but he worked his way upstream toward the pool Victor had found. If there was one, there would be more.

“Damn, Cowboy! I wish your mom was here to see this!”

“*Now* you say that.” The two laughed and Victor handed Joseph his cell phone.

“Take my picture with it. I want to show her.”

“Give you fifty bucks if you take my picture with it, instead.”

Victor paused and thought about this. He had always been the frugal one. He would do any amount of work for any amount of money. When they were kids Joseph was forever waiting for Victor to finish up whatever lawn he was mowing or grocery delivery he was making. No one had as much spending money as Victor, and no one was tighter with it, either. He knew the offer was delicious to Victor. But the man finally shook his head.

“Nope. This is a monumental occasion.”

“Seriously? You’re turning down fifty bucks? Since when?”

“I wouldn’t want to be a party to your plunge into deceit,” Victor joked. “Besides, I have as much to prove to your mom and you do.”

It was true. She was the one who had taught them both to fish. And they had both been chasing the elusive ‘better fish’ ever since.

Joseph held up the camera, but the sun was behind Victor and all he could get on the phone screen was the high silver reflection of irrigation pivots at the base of the far mountains. “Face the other way,” he said.

Victor changed places with Joseph, facing west, and held the fish up to his chest by its gill. He grinned like a child as Joseph took the picture.

“That’s not the biggest fish,” Joseph said. “You know she’s caught bigger.”

“Maybe it isn’t, but it’s damn close. And I’m proud of it.”

They sipped beer and fished until the mosquitoes were too thick to suffer, then packed up their gear and headed back to the bridge and the road. Victor reminded Joseph twice on the return walk that he hadn’t caught anything. Joseph ignored him. He would be doing the same to Victor if he had been the one to catch that trout.

At the truck, Victor said, “It feels good to take fish.”

Joseph’s head snapped up at his friend’s choice of language.

Victor looked suddenly embarrassed, as if he had simply forgotten where he was and who he was with. “I didn’t mean anything by it,” he muttered.

Joseph slid into the passenger side of the truck, the words echoing in his head. *Taking fish*. It was the historic phrasing of the treaty, and the specific line on which the tribe was basing its water claim.

“It’s not like I’m tribal, either,” Victor said. “You know I’m not.”

“That’s a technicality, man.”

“A pretty big fucking technicality.” Victor started the engine and pulled onto Montana 200, spitting gravel along the shoulder.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Joseph’s good mood had evaporated. He was suddenly aware of what he guessed was the Indian conversation behind closed doors. And though he wasn’t surprised, he didn’t appreciate having it thrown in his face.

Victor sucked in a deep breath and stared through the windshield at the yellow road stripe as it disappeared under them for a long time. “If I were tribal,” he finally said, “Sylvia would marry me.”

“*That’s* why she won’t marry you?” Joseph knew she had rejected him, but neither one of them ever talked about it. Yet they still had that magnetic chemistry that made everyone around them jealous. If Joseph had had that with Eilene, they would still be married.

“Yup. That’s why.”

“That’s stupid,” Joseph said. He didn’t know what else to say. It sounded like the stupidest reason possible. The more he thought about it, the more asinine it seemed. “That’s bullshit. She’s just telling you that. There has to be another reason.”

“That’s the reason.” Victor rubbed his face, pulled his hat off, and then replaced it.

“It can’t be.”

“It is! Okay? Just shut the fuck up now.”

“That’s stupid,” Joseph said, mostly to himself.

SYLVIA

Sylvia Deschamps sat at her dining room table and compiled a packet of information for Kayla and placed it in a large manila envelope. She would need the history of the company, information about the projects they had completed, upcoming contracts, the mission and vision statements—everything to orient her on Intrinsic Architectural’s brand and voice. Sylvia didn’t work in marketing, nor was she in human resources, but she had become the unofficial spokeswoman for the company. Her classic Indian features—high cheekbones, bronze skin, black hair down to her waist, and her wide dark eyes—along with her articulate and educated speaking voice, made her a natural, albeit cliché, choice. But employing a full-time architectural historian was a luxury that could be eliminated at the first sign of flagging revenue. She understood this, and she made sure that she contributed to the organization in ways far beyond the strict definition of her role. She and Kayla would have lunch on Monday, and she would explain the details of each item in the packet. Sylvia wondered about Kayla’s Arab last name, and she was anxious to learn more about her roots. She had wanted to ask during the video interview, but they had run out of time. There weren’t any Middle Easterners that she knew of living on the Reservation—Kayla was exotic, and while Sylvia was a staunch supporter of the Indian preference hiring practices of her firm, she had learned the hard way that indigenous heritage was no substitute for professional competence. When there were no qualified candidates of Indian heritage, the firm hired non-Indians. It was always a bone of contention with the Indian candidates, and Sylvia had

already been cornered at the pharmacy by Mary Lapman about the art director position that was awarded to Kayla.

“You know I’m an artist,” Mary had said. “I can do that job.”

“You’re a very talented artist, Mary,” Sylvia had replied, though she was tired of the predictable paintings of buffalo on buckskin, stretched across willow branches that Mary and half the Indian artists on the Reservation made. Whether the artist intended them to attract tourists or they were some bizarre attempt to get in touch with their roots, did not matter to Sylvia. She felt this type of work trivialized Indians, confirming exactly what White Americans expected to find on the Reservation as they traveled through on their way to the lake or Glacier Park. Mary was adequate at her craft, but no master. Her animal depictions were stiff, lacking spontaneity. The settings were contrived for the benefit of outsiders—tipis along rivers with elk herds meandering past. And, worse, Mary signed them with a pseudonym that Sylvia founds especially galling: Princess Little Wolf. She wanted to shake Mary and shout, “You are *not* a princess. There are *no* Indian princesses in our tribe—in fact *most* tribes, if *any*. You’ve let those White bastards brainwash you with their misplaced sentimentality, you idiot.”

“So why did you hire a non-Indian?” Mary had asked. She clenched her fist around a pair of gel insoles until her knuckles turned red.

“The woman we hired has years of marketing experience, Mary. The job entails a broad range of skills, like photo direction, copy editing, printing expertise. Didn’t HR provide you with information about your application?” Sylvia knew they had. She always followed up with them to make sure Indian candidates understood why they didn’t get the job. But it didn’t prevent these conversations.

“They gave me some bullshit about not being qualified, but I *am*. I *am* qualified.”

Mary pushed her glasses up her nose and stared at Sylvia defiantly.

“It wasn’t my decision, Mary. I’m sorry.” Sylvia had, in fact, been involved in the hiring decision, and she had been the one who pushed hardest to hire Kayla even though it meant paying relocation expenses. The two would be working closely together, and Kayla had the experience to do the job. She had a professional portfolio that made the others look like the amateur weekend artists they truly were. Sylvia believed in giving Indians opportunities—more so than anyone—but this was a professional position, and she believed that maintaining a high standard for Indian workers to rise to was equally important. How else would they get ahead in business?

“Intrinsic Architectural isn’t interested in hiring Indians. That’s a big fat lie they tell,” Mary said. She turned to go, stalking roughly down the deodorant aisle. Near the register she turned. “If they wanted to hire Indians, they would.” Several other customers turned to look at Sylvia, as if waiting to hear her defense.

Sylvia bit her lip. What could she say to make Mary understand? Nothing. She had been in this situation before. The rejected never saw it as problem within themselves when the firm chose a non-Indian. It seemed that no amount of reasoning worked. In the past Sylvia had suggested to rejected candidates that they look into programs at the Indian college to acquire the necessary skills, but that had only further offended them. Now she attended Career Day at the high schools and talked about the different study programs available at the college and how Intrinsic Architectural had helped develop some of them as a way of ensuring a steady supply of qualified Indian workers.

She leaned back in her chair, the packet neatly prepared in front of her, and sipped coffee. Today she would visit her grandmother at the assisted living home in Ronan. It was

their weekly ritual. Sylvia had planned a menu of 1950s-style foods: tuna casserole, canned peas, fruit salad, and an angel food cake, which she would make in her grandmother's tiny kitchenette while they visited and crocheted. She hated these highly processed foods, or at least told herself that she did. But Nona loved them.

Sylvia inspected a purple baby dress that Nona was nearly finished crocheting. She smiled at the old woman and nodded. "It's beautiful. Who is it for?"

Nona fussed with the frilly hem, her large glasses perched on her hawk-like nose. She tipped her head back to find the correct lens to view her work through. Her knuckles were bent and swollen with arthritis, but that didn't seem to affect the quality of her work. Sylvia had been trying to match Nona's skill her entire life, and she was coming to understand that she would reach it only when she was as old as her grandmother, with as many years of practice.

"Who is this one for, Nona?" she repeated.

"Well, it would be for your daughter if you would hurry up and get pregnant," Nona said, then cackled.

"Oh, stop it," Sylvia said and patted her hand. Nona's apartment was tiny—a living-kitchen-dining room, a bedroom, and a bathroom. Sylvia had helped her paint it bright, road-stripe yellow—a color Nona had insisted on. It had a large sliding glass door that opened onto a patio. The door took up nearly one wall, granting generous, cheerful light. Sylvia worked at the counter, preparing the casserole for the oven. "Wouldn't you rather I got married first?"

"At the rate you're going, we don't have time." Nona's long braids were as white as new cotton and swayed across her large bosom.

“I have time,” Sylvia said, but she knew that it was running out. She would be thirty-seven in a few weeks and had begun reading up on women who gave birth into their forties. It was safer now. She could be one of these women if she kept herself in shape, she reassured herself.

“Just go find any man with a big dick,” the old woman said. She enjoyed shocking people with her forthright comments about sex. Her vocabulary around the topic was pornographic and blunt, and she always giggled when she used it. “He doesn’t need to be special. Getting him is easy. Keeping him... that’s harder.”

Sylvia shook her head. She was accustomed to Nona’s bluntness and it didn’t bother her.

“Or maybe you don’t *want* to keep him,” she looked at Sylvia pointedly. “Are you one of *those* girls, Sylvia?”

Sylvia laughed. “No, Nona. I like men.” She slid the casserole into the tiny oven and set the timer. “I just want the right man.”

“There is no right man, Sylvia. That’s all a big lie.”

“I don’t mean Prince Charming. You know what I’m looking for; we’ve discussed this.”

Nona shook her head, annoyed. “It doesn’t matter, Sylvia.”

“It *does*.” Sylvia poured them each a cup of coffee and added generous amounts of whole milk, then joined Nona at the table.

“Thank you,” Nona said, taking the coffee. “It’s time to move on, Sylvia. Don’t look back.”

“I am. *We* are. We are moving forward with new strength.”

The two women worked in silence for a time, each focused in their projects, but comforted by the companionship.

“This dress is for the raffle,” Nona said quietly.

Sylvia nodded, her eyes on her work. “Mine, too. I don’t know if it will do much good, though.”

“The raffle won’t save Aida,” Nona said. “That’s in God’s hands now. But it will comfort Paula. That’s all we can do.”

“Tell me about the boarding school, Nona,” Sylvia said. “Please. I want to know.” It wasn’t the first time she had asked. She asked every week.

“It’s in the past,” the old woman said. There was a measure of impatience in her tone.

“It’s important to me to know.”

“This story has been told. Now... tell me a story about you, Sylvia.”

The boarding school story hadn’t been told—not *her* story, and Sylvia was maddened by her grandmother’s refusal to speak of the years when she was away at the Chemewa Indian School in Oregon. It was true that others had told their stories. But not Nona.

A hummingbird buzzed the kitchen window where Nona had hung a bright red feeder and pasted cellophane flowers against the glass to attract them.

“Ah, look!” The old woman set her work down and admired the iridescent green and blue of the tiny bird. “First one this season.”

“He’s beautiful,” Sylvia said. The birds always reminded her of her mother, and it had taken decades for her to appreciate them without the pang of loss. It was the day she realized

her mother had learned to love birds from Nona, and not the other way around, that Sylvia could love them also.

“I’d like to go to the cemetery next week, if you’re up for it, Nona.”

The old woman nodded without looking up. “When will you learn to speak Salish, Sylvia? Time is running out for you.”

“I will. And I’m still young enough to learn it.”

Nona had raised Sylvia for most of her growing up years after her mother was killed in a car accident. Sylvia was eleven when she died and was first sent to Missoula where she lived in a foster home. By then her father was so far given to alcoholism that she and her mother seldom saw him, and when they did, Sylvia felt ashamed. He was a bum, she had thought, even then. The sort of homeless drunken Indian they made documentaries about. Or perhaps he wasn’t a bum, she had reasoned in the later years. As an adult with a graduate degree, she had read plenty about colonialism and the Indian Wars. What was a man like him to do, robbed of his culture, his religion, his pride? He, too, had been sent away to boarding school, forbidden from speaking Pend d’Oreille or practicing his native customs, like dance. He returned disconnected from his family and his culture, unable to understand them, but unable to leave them either. It was a wonder he took so long killing himself.

“I wish I had a head for the law,” Sylvia said. Thinking about her father now irked her. She wanted to right the wrongs that had caused so many Indians such misery. She had set her sights on law school after reading *The Jailing of Cecelia Capture* in high school, but she didn’t get accepted. And she knew the tedium of that profession would have bored her numb. Still, the new Indian war path was law school, and she felt that she was missing out on the fight.

“Have babies,” Nona cried in frustration. “Give me grand-grand babies, Sylvia! Do it for old Nona and I will teach them Salish.”

KAYLA

Kayla braided her hair in a thick plait that snaked down her back in preparation for her first day at Intrinsic Architectural. It was how she often wore her hair to keep it out of the way while she worked. But now, standing in front of the mirror, she wondered if it would seem patronizing of Native American culture to show up at her job in this tribally-owned firm with her hair braided like an Indian. Was she being silly? Was this something to worry about? Her fingers trembled lightly with nervousness as she readied herself. So many months of unemployment finally behind her, and she wished for just one more day to prepare. She hadn't slept but a few staccato winks, and her appetite had evaporated sometime the day before. She pulled the braid out and settled for a ponytail, though she didn't think it looked as professional.

The building housing the firm was refreshingly modern and upscale, with slate floors and birds-eye maple paneling. Except for the larger-than-life mural of tribal elders on a timeline stretching back a century that adorned the wall behind the reception desk, the decor was devoid of ethnic trappings. It might have been any architectural firm, anywhere in the world.

After a short orientation followed by a tour of the building in which Kayla was introduced to a dozen people whose names she had already lost, she was escorted to her new office. With a north-facing window, it offered a commanding view of the valley and the ever-

present Jesuit Mission. The opposite wall was glass and looked out onto her tiny department of creative professionals: a copywriter, a designer, digital media and web specialists, and a photographer. She had met them each over Skype during her many interviews, and they had chipped in and bought her a welcome basket of fruit that she found sitting on the desk with a card. Hanging over her team's cubicles was a four-foot banner with the question "Find *Your* Tribe Yet?" Kayla did a double-take. It was a common enough marketing concept. Since the birth of social media, people flocking together in cyberspace to share common interests referred to themselves as tribes. These tribes could be a marketing goldmine if handled correctly. But here?

A woman appeared at Kayla's door just as she was staring at the banner. The woman nodded at the slogan. "You knew Indians were funny when you took the job, didn't you?"

"What?" Kayla was caught off-guard, left searching for the right answer.

"It's the best part of working for the tribe. We will never fail to make light."

Kayla smiled, trying to appear cool.

"Sylvia Des Champs." The woman offered her hand. "Just try and spell it. I dare you."

"Kayla Azkari," she said, shaking Sylvia's hand. "Let's see, D E S H A W."

"Not even close." The woman grinned good-naturedly. "I'm the architectural historian here. The preservation projects are the ones that best represent our brand, so we'll be spending a lot of time together." Sylvia swept her blue-black hair over her shoulder; it was so long it reached her waist. "Let's have lunch today, I've gathered some materials to help bring you up to speed."

Sylvia was talkative and pleasant to be with, easing Kayla's first-day jitters. They sat in a booth at the local coffee shop, a mere five-minute walk from the office, and discussed an upcoming marketing campaign the firm was launching that would span several years and highlight a series of historic buildings they had rehabilitated, repurposed, or preserved. Kayla realized how much she had missed her work. She had always loved what she did, and there was something deeply therapeutic about rolling up her sleeves and digging into it again.

"You'll want to go up to Whitefish, near Glacier Park, with your photographer and get shots of the Matheson Lodge," Sylvia said. "The others are a bit farther away, but starting with the Matheson will be a great way for you to get a feel for the work we've done. Then there's the Oregon State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. That one will creep you out, but it's fascinating."

"Oregon? I could have visited it before I came over."

"I know, I thought of suggesting it, but I was afraid that one would have you running for the hills. We needed you to take the job. That building is haunted, and I think the restoration stirred it up."

"I've heard of that place," Kayla said. "It has quite a reputation."

"They've filmed a couple of movies there. That's the sort of creep factor it has. But there's time for that one later. Let's focus on the Matheson Lodge first. It's closer and it's gorgeous."

"Will you come along?" Kayla asked. "I'd like to bring the copywriter and designer, too. You can give us an overview of the project, the important aspects of it, its challenges, and so on."

Sylvia was watching Kayla when she looked up from her notebook page, which was a mess of illegible scribbles that Kayla would never need to consult. The act of writing it down had always committed the content to memory for her.

“What’s your heritage?” Sylvia asked.

Kayla sipped her lemonade. “My mother was Swiss. American, rather. As Swiss as any American is by the third or fourth generation.”

“What about your father? Isn’t Azkari Arab?”

Kayla was familiar with these questions. It seemed the farther outside metropolitan areas she travelled the more conspicuous she became. And here, she may as well be alien green.

“My father is from North Africa,” she said.

“What part of North Africa?”

“Libya.” Kayla took a large bite of her salad and studied her notes in an attempt to fend off more questions.

“Oh, Leptis Magna.”

“What?”

“The Roman ruins in Libya. Have you been? To Libya, I mean.” Sylvia sat back against the booth. The shop was packed with diners, every table taken. Teenagers on one side of the room and elderly couples on the other. Three men in coveralls sat at the bar, and a pair of small children chased each other around the open space drawing verbal reprimands from their distracted mother.

Kayla took her time finishing her mouthful. “Yes. I’ve been there a couple of times. When I was a kid.”

“Wow,” Sylvia said. “What I would give to see that place. It’s an architectural historian’s dream. It was closed to American travel until recently.”

“It’s a dangerous place to visit these days. But I’m sure you’re aware of all that.” Kayla tried to steer the conversation back to the work at hand, but Sylvia was studying her intently, a little lost in thought.

“So your father is full-blood?”

Kayla nodded. She had never heard anyone phrase it quite like that, but she supposed it was accurate.

“I want to know all about this,” Sylvia said with a measure of joy. “Did your family participate in the revolution?”

“Some did. What about you?” Kayla asked. “Obviously, you’re Native American. Which tribe?” She felt awkward asking, but Sylvia had thrown open the door without hesitation. Kayla knew the Reservation was home to several tribes. But Intrinsic Architectural had an Indian-preference hiring policy. Sylvia could be from any tribe in the United States. Even Canada.

“Call me Indian. I mean, you’re a native to America, too. Right?”

“Sure. I guess I’m still navigating unfamiliar water here.” Kayla felt heat in her cheeks and forehead.

Sylvia smiled. “It’s okay. It’s a personal preference. Some like Native American. I like Indian. It sounds fierce.” She laughed. “I’m Pend d’Oreille, but our language is Salish. I don’t speak it, but I plan to learn. Just haven’t had time.”

“Are you a hundred percent Pend d’Oreille?”

Sylvia dug in her wallet to pay the tab. “All the part I count.”

Late Friday afternoon a buggy pulled up in front of Kayla’s rental house and a family dressed in clothes from another century stepped out. The man was bearded and wore wool pants with suspenders. The woman wore a long dress with sleeves to her wrists and a small white bonnet-style cap that covered her hair. Three children in similar garb trailed after the couple as they solemnly made their way up her walk and onto her porch.

Kayla waited for them to ring the bell, pretending she hadn’t already sized them up. Were they here to try and convert her to some old fashioned religion? She readied her rebuff, trying in vain to remember anything about Islam or the Koran, especially since it was a buggy just like this that had run her off the road. She had asked around and learned that there was a sizable Amish community in the valley. If the damage had been worse, she might have tried to find out who it was that hit her, but the whole event seemed oddly surreal now.

“May I help you?” she asked when she opened the door. A cool breeze fluttered the woman’s plain blue dress and brought goose bumps to Kayla’s bare arms.

“Ma’am,” the man said. “I’m Dane Smithson. This is Wanda,” he tipped his chin toward his wife. “Our son, Jerimiah, and our daughters, Adeline and Naomi.”

Kayla nodded, waiting. She wasn’t going to share her name until she understood what they were about.

“My son Jerimiah tells me that you and he had an accident out on Beaver Dam Road about a week past.”

“We did. Fortunately for me Joseph McGill happened along. I wouldn’t have gotten my car out of the ditch, otherwise.” She looked at the boy. He seemed young; ten or eleven. She was ready to insist that he was on the wrong side of the road, but the boy looked up at her clear-eyed and pleasant, offering a shy smile.

“Joseph is a good neighbor,” Dane said. “Jerimiah says he lost control of the horse and that it was his fault.” He turned to his son and nodded, and Jerimiah nodded to his father in return.

“I’m very sorry,” the boy said. “I couldn’t stop him. Even after I hit you. I tried.”

Kayla stood back from the door. “Would you all like to come inside to talk about this?”

“Oh, we couldn’t impose on you, Ma’am,” Dane said.

“Kayla.” She held her hand out and he shook it. She offered it to Wanda who was a little slower in accepting.

“We went back to look for you. That night, I mean.” Dane smiled as if embarrassed. “We’re not the kind to leave people stranded on the road.”

“Well, it turned out not to be that big of a problem, after all. No one was hurt.”

“Is your car damaged?” Dane glanced around as if unsure of which car was hers.

“Just scratched. But it’s okay. Nothing serious.”

The family looked now at the Mustang in unison, inspecting it from the porch.

“We’ll pay to have it fixed. It’ll be good as new. We’ll make it right.”

“No. Really. It’s not worth the expense.”

The family stood in awkward silence on the step for a moment, and Kayla didn't know what to do.

“Thank you for coming, though. It's nice to know that people still take responsibility. But really, I know the value of a dollar and a few scratches on my car is no big deal.” She meant her words. After struggling to pay her bills, and losing at that battle, she simply couldn't see this family spending money on fixing a few scratches.

“Mom,” one of the girls said suddenly, “the jam. Don't forget the jam.”

Wanda near sprinted off the porch and retrieved two small pint jars from the buggy and thrust them into Kayla's hands. “Please accept these. It's last year's strawberry and huckleberry. We preserved them ourselves.”

They thanked each other and smiled and nodded, Kayla suddenly feeling very conspicuous. Then they were gone, leaving her on the porch with two jars of homemade jam. She inspected the gifts, which were without lids. A thick layer of wax sat just below the rim of each jar. She took them inside and pressed a knife against the wax seal on the jar labeled ‘Huckleberry’ in careful script. She had heard about Montana huckleberries, but she had never tasted them. The wax broke free, and she dipped the knife into the smooth purple paste. She hesitated a moment before licking the metal clean. Were these safe? She had never seen fruit preserved this way before. But the family appeared healthy and clean.

The tart jam tasted like a mix of blueberry and marionberry—Oregon flavors she suddenly missed deeply and desperately. A hard ache gripped her middle and she wondered how she could have left her home for this arid place. She stood a moment in the kitchen, looking out at the Mission, reminding herself that she had a job. She was making a living again. And this didn't have to be forever. She put cellophane over the now-open jar and placed it in the refrigerator. She would have to save it for later, when she could manage to

enjoy it without feeling adrift in a foreign land. Then, she would have it on toast or perhaps over vanilla ice cream.

Later, Kayla walked down to Main Street and wandered along the mix of shops and businesses. The post office was busy as usual. It seemed people didn't trust the security of rural mailboxes for the important things like paying bills or correspondence that contained personal information. She could understand why after seeing the dented and smashed boxes sitting like targets on long, open stretches of back roads. A few people had taken the time and spent the money to reinforce their mailboxes with smash-resistant materials, but most had simply pounded them back into reasonable shape to collect coupons and unsolicited catalogs.

"Gotta get your fire starter somewhere," Ethan, the comptroller at work had said when Kayla asked why the locals bothered to keep mailboxes at all. "May as well let the mailman bring it."

She passed the coffee shop, which was crowded with diners even though it was well past lunchtime. The hardware/liquor store offered fifteen minute parking in front, which was perpetually full. But the gallery stood alone, stoic and tall across the street, its brightly colored OPEN flag ruffling on the occasional breeze. A chalkboard sign on the sidewalk advertised the exhibiting artists, and the town folk walked by, oblivious.

Kayla climbed the steps and entered the large, open room. The smell of candles and incense greeted her in a cacophony of cinnamon, orange spice, and sandalwood. Kayla stood a moment in the entry to let her eyes adjust to the interior lighting.

"We need a billboard on the highway," one woman was telling another. "That'll bring people in."

“Oh, it’s you. Kayla!” DeeAnn said. “This is the young woman I was telling you about, Keri. The one I met at the grocery store the other day.”

The two women descended on Kayla, offering their hands and welcoming her into their shop. Keri seemed close to Kayla’s age, but she was dressed in a pastel pantsuit that looked as if she had stolen it from a nursing home resident.

“She’s a cellist,” DeeAnn told Keri.

“A cellist!” Keri shrieked with delight.

“No, no. I’m—”

“We need a cellist. You can play at one of our openings.”

No one actually *needs* a cellist, Kayla thought, looking back at the door. She wished she hadn’t come in. “No. I’m just an amateur. I couldn’t play at your opening.”

“We’re all amateurs,” DeeAnn assured her.

“I mean a *real* amateur,” Kayla insisted. “Besides, I don’t even have a cello right now.”

After assuring her they could secure a cello, and DeeAnn added that it would come with wine, the two women gave Kayla a tour that should have taken fifteen minutes, but lasted nearly forty-five. The artwork surprised her by its quality. She had expected it to be folksy, given the remoteness of the area. But there were remarkable impressionist landscapes in oil of the valley, mountains and lake—an obvious wellspring of inspiration. She lingered over them and their moody colors. The gallery housed the usual mix of fiber art, sculpture, jewelry, and paintings. One large room was dedicated entirely to wildlife art, and though it was somewhat romanticized, the execution was hardly amateur.

Kayla's undergraduate degree had been in the visual arts, which had eventually led her into marketing and her current role as creative director. And now, standing in this gallery, she felt a pang of shame for having made assumptions about what she would find here.

"These are really quite good," she said to the women, who had been narrating the tour and who seemed slightly offended by her surprise.

"Are they all local?"

DeeAnn and Keri nodded vigorously. "We have a thriving art community here," Keri said.

"So it appears." Kayla turned back to the art, wishing for a peaceful moment alone to peruse the work. But the two women followed at her elbow. They shared not simply the names and basic information about each artists, but more intimate details as well. Phillip Ellison, the duck painter, had been suffering from untreated diabetes and recently had to have a foot amputated. Helen Cummins, a weaver whose work Kayla found exquisite, was having an affair with her dentist in Missoula. He sometimes appeared with her at openings, believing that no one here knew he was married and had two small children. Scott French, a sculptor, hadn't produced any new work since his son was killed in Afghanistan nine months ago. Instead, he had erected wooden crosses on the hillside above the highway—one for each soldier lost to that war.

She finally managed to wrench herself free of the women only by promising to come back for the opening next week. She lit down the steps and onto the sidewalk dazed and feeling like a mauled bird.

"A billboard is not going to save you," she muttered.

Sylvia picked up Kayla at seven o'clock Saturday evening, and the two drove out to a small tavern snuggled up against the boundary of the National Bison Range. They sat outside on the deck where they had a commanding view of the soft rolling hills to the west, now richly furred in new green cheat grass and black eyed susans. They waited for the buffalo to show up, but the animals were nowhere to be seen.

"You can't really predict when they'll be here," Sylvia said. "The range is eighteen-thousand acres. They could be anywhere in those hills and gullies."

"Maybe we should've called ahead to find out if they were here first," Kayla said, though she was enjoying the peacefulness of the quiet hillsides bathed in late afternoon light.

"Gordon always tell you on the phone that the buffalo are here. If they haven't shown up before you arrive, he says the herd left right after you called. Sometimes he says they knew that you were coming and got the hell out."

They laughed. "That's smart marketing," Kayla admitted.

"Sometimes a herd of elk comes down and pastures along the fence there," Sylvia said, pointing to the boundary of the range. "Usually during the winter. It's sheltered from the wind."

Kayla could tell that Sylvia was very proud of Montana, and especially the many wildlife preserves. Kayla's expectation of the Reservation had been based on documentaries detailing poverty and addiction. Desolate, treeless places that she realized were probably filmed in the Dakotas or other plains states. Not this landscape cast in twilight below them—this immense and sweeping valley spooned out like an ancient bowl and crowned by a jagged spine of snowcapped peaks. This was something magnificent, and she felt a little embarrassed to have not known it existed just a day's drive east of Portland. I've been a west coast asshole, she thought.

“I’ve always preferred the elk,” Sylvia said softly, as mesmerized by the beauty as Kayla. “But the buffalo are a big draw for people who aren’t from here.”

After a beer and some popcorn, they gathered their things and headed back to Mission where they settled on the Oil Can Saloon, a converted gas station from the 1930s. The garage bays were open and classic rock was blaring out into the blue night sky. A few people danced on the grimy cement floor. When Kayla and Sylvia walked in the six or so men at the bar cleared a path for them.

“That was like parting the Red Sea,” Kayla said to Sylvia who laughed.

“You start shaking that Arab ass and you’ll never have to buy another drink. I promise.”

Kayla waved her off. Her divorce was still a little too fresh to think about men. She needed to carve out a solid life on her own first.

“Hey, Victor,” Sylvia said to a tall man at the bar.

He leaned over and gave her a hug and kiss on the cheek. “How’s my girl?”

“Fine, but I’m not your girl.”

“It’s a term of endearment, Sweetheart.” He ordered two beers and handed them to the ladies. “Who’s your friend?”

“This is Kayla. She’s from Portland. Just started at the firm a couple of days ago.”

Victor looked long at Kayla, and she began to feel like a specimen beneath his gaze. He was a good-looking man with his hair pulled back, but a bit intimidating. He wore cowboy boots and jeans. A leather vest over a western shirt.

“You’re not Indian,” he finally said.

Kayla felt her cheeks burn as she floundered for a comeback.

Sylvia slapped Victor's arm. "Geez. Real subtle there."

Victor smiled apologetically and offered Kayla his hand. "I'm sorry. I got my manners from a toad. Picked them up on my way down here."

"You can say that again," Sylvia said.

"Hey girly, I bought you a beer. Be nice."

Kayla could see that the two knew each other well, and that their insults were not that at all, but there was still an edge to them that made her wonder about the relationship.

"I just heard that you were Indian," he said to Kayla.

"From whom?" Sylvia asked, rolling her eyes.

"Whom?" he mimicked, puckering out his lips and looking at Sylvia. "We say whooooo here on the rez. From McGill."

"Joseph McGill?" Kayla asked.

"The one and only."

Sylvia raised her eyebrows at Kayla.

"He pulled my car out of the ditch," Kayla said. "Nice man."

Victor studied her.

"I should call him," he said and fished in his breast pocket for his cell phone. He disappeared out into the night where it was quiet, leaving the women at the bar.

"We can go somewhere else if you want," Sylvia said.

"No, let's see if he shows up."

The two women ended up back at Kayla's house, a little tipsy and still enjoying the conversation. Sylvia sat on the couch with a glass of red wine and Henry snuggled on her lap.

"It's pretty sparse," Kayla said about the house as she poured herself a glass. "I haven't really decorated or anything."

"You need some artwork," Sylvia said, looking around at the bare white walls. "You're an art director, for god's sake. Act like it."

"And some paint, and some throw rugs, and some lamps, and some decent furniture, and... well, pretty much everything." The wood floor creaked under Kayla as she crossed the room, and she paused to step back and forth, making it creak louder to punctuate her point. "No one will sneak up on me with these floors."

"They have some really nice stuff at the gallery. But it's not in my budget. Plus, I'd have to fight off the women who run the place. Man, they need to lighten up a bit when people come in there and just let them browse."

"Yeah," Sylvia said. "That group is really pushy. I never go in there."

"Too bad. They seem nice enough, just way too clingy."

"You didn't bring anything with you?" Sylvia looked curious.

"I didn't really have anything left. I sold most of my stuff during the months of unemployment. What remained didn't fit in the car and wasn't anything I was attached to, anyway." She sat in the armchair next to cold woodstove. "When they say furnished house, they don't mean nicely furnished."

“You never got married?” Sylvia asked. “Most women around here are married long before thirty—twenty in a lot of cases. Most cases.”

Kayla was getting used to Sylvia’s directness. It didn’t bother her. In fact she found it refreshing after her father’s way. He had taught her never to ask personal questions or share too much about herself. He quickly became uncomfortable when anyone shared medical information more intimate than a stuffed up nose. He had once banned a friend of his wife’s from coming over because she talked about the details of menopause and how it had affected her sex life while they were sitting at the table after supper. But Sylvia was beginning to feel like a friend she had known for years—decades, even. Not mere days. It had been a long time since Kayla had met a friend like that.

“I was married, but we divorced after three years. It hasn’t been that long, actually. The whole thing was just finalized a few months ago. Not a fun day, getting those papers, even though I thought I was prepared.”

“Why did you split?” Sylvia sipped her wine and caressed the kitten

“He cheated on me with a woman in his office. Someone he said was more intellectually stimulating.” She rolled her eyes. “I never knew brain cells were stored in our boobs. I just didn’t get as many as she did, I guess.” She cupped her smallish breasts and looked down at them.

“Good that you had the sense to kick the bastard out,” Sylvia declared a little drunkenly. “Asshole.”

It hadn’t quite happened that way, but Kayla was content to let it seem so. In reality, she had made a terrible fool of herself in a prolonged attempt at trying to keep him. She couldn’t think of Martin now without feeling intense shame for her desperate behavior and

neediness. And she could never again face their closest friends who she had called repeatedly begging them to appeal to his sense of commitment and honor.

“What about you?” Kayla asked, trying to escape the onslaught of emotion.

Sylvia shook her head, a mouth full of wine. “Nope. Never married.”

“So, what’s up with Victor?” Kayla ventured. “He seems like a nice guy.”

Sylvia sighed. “He *is* a nice guy. A nice guy with an excellent job. They’re getting harder and harder to come by.”

“Are you two dating?”

“Why do you ask that?”

“I don’t know. Just the way you talked to each other. It seemed like you were closer than just friends.”

Sylvia set her wine down and buried her face in the sleeping kitten’s belly. She rubbed her nose back and forth, her black hair cascading around her knees, brushing the floor. Henry stretched long, flexing his tiny claws.

“I love this little cat,” she said with muffled joy.

Kayla told her about the way Henry had arrived that first day. Sylvia smiled and looked out the front window at the dark street.

“Someone knows a sucker when they see one,” she laughed.

Though it hurt a little to be called that, Kayla supposed it was true.

IAN

1921

Ian and Elizabeth's first living child was a boy they named Jacob after Ian's father. He was the second born in three years of marriage and the couple spent the spring nervously pacing the oak floors of their newly constructed frame-built home with its real glass window panes and wide staircase. Ian was a good builder with an eye for artistic detail, and during the winter months when there was little to do on the ranch, he traded his labor to local businesses like Moser's in exchange for materials. His house had four bedrooms upstairs and two downstairs, an optimistic statement as bold as the parquet pattern in the oak floor and the painted stucco siding above its foundation of purple cobblestones from the creek. This would be a large and prosperous family it said. And yet, they had already lost one infant—a cherub-faced little girl named Agnes Clementine. Though he wasn't superstitious, Ian imagined that a name like Jacob might impart the stoic strength of his father on this frail little creature with pale skin and bluish lips.

Elizabeth kept the boy within arm's reach, swaddled in cotton and laid in a wicker bassinet, as she hoed the muddy patch of garden where in two years prior she had planted a bartlet pear and a walnut tree on the north side and, last fall, two rows of concord grapes on the west. Alongside the smokehouse that Ian had put up, she planted rhubarb and raspberries, which would be delivering their first crop this season.

“You'll attract bears with all that fruit,” he teased her.

“We needn’t plant fruit to attract bears,” she replied, pushing an orange corkscrew strand behind her ear. Her freckles shone bright against her creamy skin in the early summer sun. Her waist had thickened against the assault of babies, and Ian found it enchanting in a proprietary way. She was *his*. This woman who often intimidated him—a woman who could recite Shakespeare as easily as she turned fierce attention on protecting her new corn shoots against a hail storm—had thrown her lot in with his. Was she fool hearty, he wondered, but never dared voice.

“A momma bear and two cubs were just there,” she said, pointing down to the creek not far from where they stood on the overlook. The lodgepole pines were splintered and ragged from winter storms and the cottonwoods had not yet found new leaves, but the ground was greening under a blanket of yellow buttercups. “Just as Jacob and I got here to work these garden rows. We stayed on the porch until she passed. Grizzly, I’m sure.”

Ian grimaced. When he selected this parcel he had considered the abundant wildlife traversing the creek bottom as a positive attribute. But now, thinking of his wife and child—hopefully many children to come—within easy stride of a bear, let alone a grizzly bear, made him wish he had taken the parcel to the north, farther out on the flat prairie that stretched along the Mission Mountains toward the distant and pale Swans. But he needed water if was to make a proper go of it here, and he’d filed his claim early to get the highest priority. Water was granted on seniority, and there was only one claim ahead of his on Mission Creek.

“I want you to keep a vigilant eye, Beth. Those bears are nothing to get comfortable with. Black bears can be scared off, but grizzlies are mean. Simple as that. Nothing needed to provoke an attack.”

She looked up from the hoeing, her dark green eyes sparkling beneath her brows. Her lips were tight against a closed-lip smile. She tossed her chin toward the low shed he had put

up to keep the tools from rusting, and he saw the double-barrel shotgun leaning against its side. His wife may have grown up in the heart of San Francisco, tutored in an upper-middle class finishing school designed for young women who were destined to marry doctors and lawyers, but she was a country girl when it came down to it, and she had taken to the work and his shooting lessons like a hawk to mice.

He grinned. "Okay, but keep your eyes open."

"I'd spot one before you would," she said, and he knew she was right. "Just like I can spot Indians coming up the lane."

She stood tall, resting her hand on the top of the wooden shaft and smoothed her apron. Ian turned to see a buckboard pulled by two enormous, shaggy mules lumbering down the two-rut lane toward the house. It was Eddie Frye's son Meekum and his wife who went by her nickname Squim because she was from a tribe on the coast of Washington and the locals, both Indian and white labored to get their tongues around the pronunciation of her given name.

"Hiyah," Meekum said, pushing the brake with his foot and leaping down from the buckboard with the grace and ease of a wild cat. He was slight and sinewy. His arms and legs, relaxed in his ease, belied his strength. Ian had watched this man lift dozens of boulders a foot across from the creek bed and carry them up the hill to his wagon. He was collecting stones for the root cellar he was building.

"Good morning," Ian said. Elizabeth smiled up at Squim who glanced away toward the creek. Her face was stony and her eyes puffy. The couples didn't know each other well, but Meekum and Squim routinely made the rounds, selling their wares to the ranches. They had been married for several years and had three children who were usually hanging on the wagon like a pack of monkeys.

“What brings you out this morning?” Ian asked.

Meekum wasted no time. He led Ian and Elizabeth to the back of the wagon, where he dragged a stack of finely tanned hides out and spread them on the dewy ground. “Mountain goat,” he said, pointing at a coarse white fleece. “Hard to get.”

“These are nice,” Ian said, “but I don’t think we need any at the moment.”

“You won’t find anything this good again,” Meekum warned, and there was a distinct edge in his tone. “Squim cured these over the winter. They are new. Fresh.”

Elizabeth lifted a deer hide and ran her calloused fingers over the soft buckskin. “These are very nice,” she said. “Very finely done.”

Squim had climbed down from the buckboard and approached Jacob who was sleeping in his basinet. Elizabeth tensed, but remained still, the soft leather of the hide against her chest. Squim leaned over and cooed quietly to the baby, her long black hair fluttering out from under her dome-topped hat. She lifted him from his basinet and pressed his face to her neck. She bounced softly as she walked out toward the overlook above the creek. Ian didn’t hear Meekum speaking, but watched Squim. *She’s a mother*, he told himself. *She can be trusted*. But his stomach tightened and he wanted to snatch this fragile child from her arms.

“I will give you a very good deal on that one,” Meekum said, pointing at the hide in Elizabeth’s hands. But she was watching Squim cradle her son.

Meekum’s eyes followed Elizabeth’s to his wife. Ian watched the man drop his shoulders in what appeared to be defeat.

“They took the children. Two days ago,” Meekum said.

“Took them where?” Ian asked.

“To the Indian school in Oregon. Chemewa.”

“But why?” Elizabeth asked. “They were so young.”

“Father Grepilloux and the government man came and took them. She has been without a happy moment since.” He gestured at Squim who remained with her back to the trio as she rocked Jacob softly.

“I don’t like this boarding school idea,” Elizabeth said quietly.

“Kill the Indian and save the man’ they say.” Meekum spit in the dirt, startling her.

“It isn’t right,” Elizabeth said.

Ian put a hand on her elbow and squeezed. While he understood her sentiment, he thought it dangerous to voice her opposition in this matter. He didn’t want Meekum, or anyone else, getting the idea that he and Elizabeth had opinions about Indian affairs. It was better left to the agency, and he trusted that they knew what they were doing. Though he wasn’t a church-going man, Elizabeth had tempered him toward the Christian cause. She, of all people, should understand the importance of assimilating these people, he thought. The sooner they lived and acted like everyone else, the sooner they would be successful in life.

“We’ll take this one,” Elizabeth said, avoiding Ian’s suddenly hot gaze.

After an awkward silence, Ian dug in his pocket for the coins that he had intended for the purchase of extra hay to get the livestock through until his pastures were ready to graze. Elizabeth rolled the hide and tucked it under her arm, then walked slowly to the overlook and stood next to Squim.

“He is a good baby,” Squim said, handing him back to Elizabeth.

That evening the McGill household was unusually quiet. The tension between Elizabeth and Ian had only grown and festered through the day. Ian had taken his team and wagon over to Sven Borgstrom's place and loaded it with hay purchased with half-down and half-to-come, a position that he loathed to be in, and that he blamed on Elizabeth.

"We do not borrow or purchase on credit," he said when they finally sat down to supper of roasted chicken. "McGills pay cash, outright. You should've seen Sven's face when I asked for credit. I could tell he'd agreed to sell to me rather than his Swedish neighbor because he knew I'd come with cash."

"I'm sorry, Ian. I just..." she shook her head and looked over her shoulder at Jacob who was babbling in his playpen. "It broke my heart that they took her children. How could they do that?"

"The oldest was almost eleven," he said, now exasperated. "That's nearly five years older than most. He'll have a hard time now, too, because of it. They should've let him go when he was six like the others."

"How can you say that, Ian? Those are their children!" Elizabeth's cheeks flushed and her neck was blotched with red.

"Beth, darling, listen to me. Those kids will learn skills at the boarding school that they would never learn here. They'll speak proper English, practice good hygiene, and come home prepared to support their families."

Her eyes were fierce on him.

"They will become Christians. Isn't that what you want?"

"Of course it is! But they were ripped from the arms of their mother, taken three states away where nothing is familiar. As a mother, I cannot imagine a worse fate for my child."

She fanned tears from her eyes, and he recognized her own frustration at the emotional display. “We have a perfectly good Mission right here. They need not go to Oregon to become Christians.”

“They will be fine. Indian children have been going to boarding school for forty years or more. You’re overreacting. And this was not a reason to purchase a hide we didn’t need nor could afford right now.”

“I’m sorry,” she said again. “It seemed like the least we could do.”

JOSEPH

2014

When Joseph heard to the message from Victor telling him that Kayla was down at the Oil Can and he should come down, too, he laughed. It felt suddenly like the old days. Victor was still finding dates for him, but things were different now. They weren't dealing with girls, and he wasn't in high school. Women his age were a tougher prospect. And while he found Kayla intriguing, he wasn't ready for another lap around the dating track.

His mood had been low these past few days, thinking about the water compact. He could no longer look out on his irrigation pivot without the question of whether he would have water to run it. It didn't simply represent water, but debt. Crippling debt for a rancher without a crop. Their first letter to the Montana legislature had received a cursory 'Thanks for sharing your opinion.' response. He hoped the second would get more attention. He also wondered how Victor could stand by and allow the tribe to strip him of his water rights. Would he step in on behalf of a friend, and reason with them? But it wasn't just Joseph—it was all of the irrigators, some of whom were also Indian, though not many. And Victor wasn't the same as he had been in high school; he had grown up and become more stubborn during his years in Minnesota. His perspective on Indian rights had hardened a little, become more rigid. His consonants clicked a little tighter when he talked about land reclamation, restoration of culture, and the rightful owners to his people's identity.

Joseph had never imagined that anything could put a wedge between them after the altercation that had brought them together as friends in the first place. They were in the seventh grade when Victor moved to Mission. He had grown up in the northern Montana town of Browning, where he had lived on the Blackfeet Reservation. His mother, a white woman, had been a school teacher there. Though Victor Senior was mostly Nez Perce, a band from the central Idaho and eastern Oregon region, the family had been living with the Blackfeet. The Blackfeet and Salish tribes were never friendly, having fought fierce battles going back to the eighteenth century, and the Salish boys had immediately started pushing Victor around, both challenging his fair-skinned Indian-ness and, in particular, his purpose here after living with the Blackfeet. Browning had a mean reputation, and Victor used it to his advantage. But instead of fighting the Indian boys in Mission, he took a smarter path and vowed to kick a white boy's ass, instead.

Joseph was never much of a fighter, but in the fifth grade he had announced that he was Joseph, not Joe. He insisted on the formal use of his name, and the white boys started calling him Chief Joseph, after the venerable Nez Perce leader they had studied. The first time Victor heard this, Joseph became his target. He trash talked Joseph in the hallways and during gym class for a few days, and Joseph, confused, thought it would blow over if he ignored this new kid. He had never like the nickname Chief Joseph, and he made it clear, but the boys wouldn't drop it.

Things finally quieted down for a couple of weeks, and Joseph thought the issue was behind them. He wasn't prepared for the ambush and fistfight that took place one afternoon on the baseball diamond as he walked to the feed store to meet his dad and help load bags of grain. Victor landed the first punch in a surprise attack that knocked Joseph to the ground, split his lip open, and bloodied his nose.

“What the fuck did you do that for?” he howled. “I don’t even know you, you asshole.”

Victor leapt on top of him and began wailing him with both fists, boxing his ears, landing blows to both eyes. He was furious and fast, and Joseph was blinded.

“Chief Joseph, huh? Fight like him then!” Victor shouted amid blows. “Fight like a real warrior, you white fag.”

Joseph’s response was pure instinct and nothing he had taken the time to calculate. He explained that to Victor later. He might not have done it if he had paused a moment to think about it first. But he was under fire and for all he knew this Indian was going to kill him. So he slammed his steel-toed boot straight up into Victor’s crotch, lifting the boy off him and tossing him into a crumpled ball on the grass. Victor groaned and pulled himself up on his knees, doubled over in pain. He immediately puked, and the boys who had gathered to egg him on took off when their guy went down. It was just the two of them now, Joseph bleeding from his face, his eye purpling and swelling, and Victor with tears streaking down his face as he breathlessly retched on the ball field.

“What the fuck did you jump me for?” Joseph asked, feeling bad now that he had kicked him so hard.

Victor couldn’t speak for a long while, and though Joseph knew he would get it from his dad for being late to help, not to mention for fighting, he couldn’t simply leave him there alone until he knew he could get himself home.

“You had it coming,” Joseph warned. “You know you did. You wanna fight, we fight fair. No bullshit surprises like that. You got that?”

Victor nodded and sucked in his breath. A cool breeze rustled the trees overhead, and heavy clouds blotted out the sun. After several long moments he said, “Look, they’re going to bug the shit out of me if they think you won.”

“I did win!”

“You need to quit that shit about Chief Joseph.”

“It was a joke,” Joseph said, wiping blood from his lip. “And I didn’t start it.”

“You white bastard! You don’t have a fucking clue.”

There had always been words between the Indian and white kids at school, but this was the first time that Joseph had been involved.

“Coming from a pretty white-looking Indian, you’ve got a lot of balls,” he said.

“That’s right, I do!” Victor spit. “And they fucking hurt right now.”

Suddenly the two were grinning at each other.

The following day Joseph arrived at school sore. His father had taken the belt to him for fighting in school and not showing up to help with the work. But when he and Victor even glanced at each other they busted up laughing. They ate lunch together, and Victor started calling him Cowboy, which drew curious stares from kids wondering, or hoping, they would fight again. It put an end to Joseph’s nickname as Chief, as well.

“Everyone thinks I won,” Victor said. He gestured at Joseph’s badly bruised face.

“The evidence is obvious.”

“Whatever, man,” Joseph said. “You tell yourself anything you want. Everyone who was there knows who really won.”

There were other kids Victor should have chosen over Joseph, he thought. Like Brad Peterson. His father owned the video store and favored white customers. He was always harping on his staff to keep a vigilant eye on Indians as they browsed. Indians had begun traveling ten miles north to another town for their movies whenever they could. Brad had had to defend himself in the hallways of Mission High School more than once and he had become a fierce fighter. If a newcomer were truly going to prove himself, Joseph imagined Brad would be the one to take down.

It seemed now, as Joseph prepared to clear the dead brush from the creek bottom and move it into a slash pile for burning in the winter, that he and Victor had been through worse than this water compact. But had they? Never was one of their futures at stake. Not in this way.

“C’mon, Weeb,” he said. “You can patrol for bears.”

The dog leapt up and followed Joseph outside, stretching his body in the sun. He sniffed the air and looked at Joseph, waiting.

“Meet me at the creek,” Joseph said as he climbed onto his old tractor. It always felt good to eliminate unwanted debris. The dog dashed down the slope between the smoke house and the root cellar to the bridge, barking at the pheasants he had startled into flight.

KAYLA

The Matheson Lodge stood nestled in the mountains north of Whitefish, just outside the boundaries of Glacier National Park. It was a massive monument of intricately linked beams and banks of tall wavy windows from 1935, which glinted jewel-like in the sun. The building overlooked a sweep of rugged, snow-capped peaks with narrow valleys gouged into existence by glaciers. A powerful telescope was mounted on the veranda so guests could watch the mountain goats traversing the cliffs above.

“When we were working on this project a family of grizzly bears was frequenting the meadow up there,” Sylvia said. “We watched them all summer. A mother and three cubs.”

“And that is as close as I ever want to get to one of those,” Pete, the photographer, said. “Those suckers are just born pissed off.”

Kayla had lost her concentration for work on the drive up from Mission. While her employees and Sylvia chattered about everything from their families to last summer’s company picnic, she took in the natural wonder of the place. Lakes, valleys, mountains, so pristine and rugged. Rimmed by a broken chain of cheap and ugly roadside buildings and billboards advertising smoked bison meat, antiques, espresso stands, and sweet cherries. Trailer houses and ugly little buildings dotted the highway from Mission to the lodge, pulling the eye from the spectacular to the banal with sharp delineation.

“Kayla?” Denise was asking.

“Oh, I’m sorry... this place is just...” She turned to the graphic designer who was grinning unapologetically.

“Just don’t tell anyone. We don’t want a bunch of people moving up here. Especially not from California.”

“But Oregon is okay?”

“Not really, but we’ll give you a pass,” Denise said and laughed.

Sylvia gave the creative team a full tour of the building, pointing out the old-growth beam structure, the wood floor that was inlaid with different types of fruitwood in a braid pattern. The rock fireplace with its smooth red and purple stones hand-plucked from the river below was set into a pattern reminiscent of the current itself.

The lodge now served as a hotel and conference center, and its staff was in the process of opening it for the new season. The parking lot, tucked discretely behind the building contained a handful of Mercedes, Range Rovers, and Jaguars. Pete and Denise ogled the cars, speculating about their price tags, but Kayla found them off-putting, especially here where the average resident barely earned a living wage. This place seemed an unnecessary, even grotesque display of wealth and consumption. It represented attitudes she had left behind after the long months of unemployment. She was new. Practical. And though she appreciated the lodge’s beauty, she could not find anything redeeming about its pretentiousness. As they stood in the dining hall amidst the linen-clad tables with their crystal goblets and porcelain plates, she wished it had become a tavern for the average. She imagined picnic-style benches spanning the long, narrow room packed with beer drinkers devouring pans of pepperoni pizza. Why should something so lovely be reserved only for the rich?

“Do your people get to use the lodge?” she asked Sylvia as they were wrapping up the visit and packing the photo equipment into the company van.

“You mean the tribe?”

“Yes, tribal members.”

Sylvia shrugged. “I guess the council sometimes uses it for retreats. Anyone can use it if they make reservations. But it’s a business. Its purpose is to make money.”

On the return drive, Kayla flipped through the dozens of pages of notes she had taken. Peter selected photos on the small display of his digital camera to show her, and they began discussing concepts for the campaign.

“I’m not sure if we should open the campaign with the Matheson Lodge,” Kayla said.

“Why not?” Sylvia, who was driving, had been quiet as the creative team started their work, and her question startled Kayla.

“I don’t know... I guess it feels too opulent. Shouldn’t we start with something more modest? Something more accessible to regular people?”

“This isn’t a commentary on society,” Sylvia said. “It’s showcasing our work.”

“But that *is* a commentary, whether you intend it to be or not.”

“We have nothing to apologize for,” Sylvia said. “We restored that lodge to its former glory. It was on the brink of being torn down, and no one else stepped up to save it. Everyone said it would be too costly. There were bats living in its walls. If you’ve ever seen the mess bats leave... well, it’s not just gross, it rots everything. We’re proud of what we’ve done with that place.”

“Does it represent the target market? The statement should be about what the firm can do for the person reading about it. How many clients have a derelict lodge from the Depression era just waiting for us to come save it?”

Sylvia thought about the question a moment. Pete nodded, as if he hadn't really considered that angle before.

“Great point,” she finally said. “The building materials we used and how we used them should be focus of the campaign. The various challenges we had to overcome, like the eighty year old plumbing we had to replace without gutting the building, and restoring the stonework so no one can tell it was ever in need of restoration. We completely replaced the chimney on the south end—from the ground up, with reclaimed brick to match the original. Anyone with a building of that age will understand the challenges.”

Pete began looking for photos of the south chimney.

As a special favor to Sylvia, Kayla joined sixty other people at a spaghetti dinner and Indian dance at the community center on Thursday evening. The event was a fund-raiser for Sylvia's cousin whose young daughter had been recently diagnosed with a pancreatic cancer. Kayla had mixed feelings about going, worrying that the barely suppressed grief over losing her mother to cancer would surge forward and out of her control in public. She still suffered unexpected moments of grief in strange places, like the frozen food aisle at the grocery store when she found the brand of frozen peaches her mother loved to eat for dessert. There were others, too. Less easily associated with her mother, like standing in the bank lobby waiting to set up a new account. She had no idea what triggered most of these episodes. Did these places remind her of her mother? She couldn't quite put her finger on why some pedestrian activities invoked violent sadness. But the experience put her on guard as she stood in line at the door with people who offered polite nods, but who did not engage her in conversation. Yet conversation was all around her. Old friends and neighbors seeing each other for the first time

since yesterday or last Thursday when they crossed paths at the post office. The community seemed tightly knit, with no room in the weave for a stranger to slip in.

She paid twenty-five dollars and held her hand out to be stamped with a red star, then wandered into the crowded multi-purpose room. The cover charge hardly seemed enough to benefit the family considering the circumstances, but inside she found a silent auction and raffle items of quilts, hand crocheted clothing, coupons for automotive work, weekend ski packages, and various works of art, donated by individuals and businesses. She recognized several items from the Mission Mountain Gallery.

Sylvia bustled past with an armload of red plastic cups. “Kayla, I’m so glad you made it,” she said.

“Anything I can help with?” Kayla asked, but Sylvia was already gone, disappearing into the kitchen. Feeling self-conscious and highly conspicuous she selected a bottle of beer from the makeshift bar in the corner and spent several minutes slowly sipping on it while studying the items for auction and raffle. She had little money, but bid on the basket of local wines, mostly because she couldn’t fathom wine grapes growing in Montana and figured it would go for less than the other items. As she carefully printed her name and bid amount on the paper, she felt the presence of a man next to her.

“Kayla, right?” he asked.

She looked up to find Joseph McGill in an orange western-style shirt, crisp jeans, and new leather boots.

“Good memory.” She handed him the pen so he could place a bid.

He stared at it for a moment, then looked over the wine, pulling the bottles out and inspecting the labels. He set the pen down. "I'm more of a beer guy," he said offering a handshake. "Joseph."

"Yes, McGill, right?"

He smiled, revealing a mildly chipped tooth that she hadn't noticed the first time they met. But his grin was still electric, and his squinty eyes were softly creased from years in the sun.

"You clean up well," she said.

"So do you. I have to say."

"I wasn't dirty the first time we met," she said putting on a glint. She liked the way he dished it right back at her.

"No, but your hair was all wild. It really was." He smirked. "I was a bit concerned that you might be crazy at first."

She touched the smooth braid at her shoulder and wished she had left her hair down. "Terrible thing about that little girl."

"Yeah," he said, looking across the room at the family who sat stoic at a table in the corner. An Indian woman and a white man, neither openly enjoyed the festivities. A large photo of their daughter wearing a pastel blue dress, her big brown eyes soft and thoughtful, hung on the wall behind them.

"Aida is the only child of my good friend," he said.

"Oh, Paula? Sylvia Des Champ's cousin?"

"Her husband, Ron."

Kayla nodded, and they watched as a group of young men took their places around a collection of drums and started a slow rhythm. Soon they began to sing in a low, soft chant. The crowd quieted and listened. Joseph tipped his chin up as if to hear the words, though there were none, and Kayla was immediately swept into the chanting rhythm. It was arresting in some distant, unknowable way, and she wondered if it was her own tribal heritage on another continent in another time that tugged through her DNA in recognition. But of course it wasn't, and she shook off the strange idea that there was a connection here. How could there possibly be?

"I never get tired of the sound of drumming and singing," Joseph said, turning to Kayla. "But I do feel awkward at these types of things."

"Yeah, me too." She looked out at the room full of tables. Despite the fact that everyone was friendly, especially at the raffle lines, the attendees had neatly divided into groups of Indians and non-Indians.

"Are you here alone?" he asked.

"Yes. And awkwardly walking around looking for a welcoming table to join. Not an easy thing to find in this town."

"We'll have the whole county talking, but how about we pretend that we came together so we don't have to stand here looking stupid all night?"

She smiled, but resisted the urge to tell him that she did not look stupid and he should speak for himself. Her tendency to resort to humor seemed inappropriate at an event of such gravity. But she followed Joseph to a table at the back of the room, far from the festivities, and unlikely to attract other attendees. She appreciated his selection. "A great place to sit."

When they were settled and Joseph had retrieved each of them a fresh beer, he asked if she knew Aida.

“No, but I’m friends with Sylvia and she invited me.”

“Ron and Paula are really struggling with all of this,” he said. “The prognosis is grim.”

They listened to the soft thumping of leather mallets, and an Indian man raised his voice in a plaintive chant, then dropped it low again.

“I can’t imagine what they’re going through. They need more than financial support.” He stared across the room at the couple. “They’ve aged a decade in the last three months.”

“My mother recently passed away from cancer,” she said. It had come out so suddenly and without premeditation that she was startled by her own words. She preferred to remain outside the circle of knowledge about this little girl, but she reasoned that it was too late for that.

“I’m sorry,” he said. He fiddled with his beer bottle, and she realized that she had made him uncomfortable. The pair sat in silence listening to the chanting, which remained soft and low, while servers placed heaping plates of spaghetti in front of each guest. Kayla stared down at the sticky pile of red noodles and wondered who could eat knowing why they were here. But people did eat, and chatted politely all the while. She and Joseph talked about the weather and how different the climate was between the interior west and the coast.

“You have to talk about the weather in Montana, I’ve discovered,” she said.

“Yes. It’s a requirement.” He nodded, but didn’t laugh. “Some people discuss sports, we discuss weather. It’s how we sort out who to be friends with.”

“So, if I’m at the post office I should ask the person in front of me what he thought of the wind storm the prior evening, and I’ll be in the club?”

“It’s not that easy. People know if you mean it,” he said. She couldn’t tell if he was teasing. He was so good at keeping a straight face. “Practice on me.”

She thought as she ate. “Okay, Mr. McGill, I hear the snowpack is low in the mountains. They’re concerned about not having enough irrigation water this summer.”

He grimaced, nearly wincing in pain.

“Wow, I thought that was pretty good,” she said.

“The execution was fine. But don’t talk about irrigation water. If you do that, you’ll have to state your position on the water compact. And unless you’re looking for allies or enemies, that topic should be left behind closed doors.”

She shook her head, deciding not to ask what the water compact was—lesson number one in action. “You people are so complex.”

After the plates were cleared, the servers placed a single plate stacked with brownies on each table.

“You have a lot of brownies to eat,” Joseph said, gesturing at the dozen or so they were given to share.

“I won’t eat half that plate, but I’ll take one,” she said and sunk her teeth into the moist chocolate.

“A girl who eats brownies. I like you.” He put one on his plate, and bit into a second.

A group of Indian men dressed in full pow wow regalia entered the room and formed a circle. The audience was suddenly animated with anticipation. Kayla studied their

beadwork and feathers. She had never seen Indian dancing in person, and when the drumming and chanting started she leaned forward to get a better view. She almost stood up, but decided it would bring attention to her status as a newcomer, and leaned back casually as if she had seen a thousand Indian dances. Yet she could not take her eyes off the men as they crouched and swirled and hopped from foot to foot, knees bent, heads bobbing. They looked like brightly colored birds in some sort of mating ritual, the way they focused on their poise and steps.

“You said something earlier that I’m curious about,” Joseph said, breaking her concentration on the dancers. “Why did you say that about it being hard to fit in here in Mission? I would think someone like you would get a warm welcome here.”

“Someone like me?” She hadn’t meant to sound challenging, but it came out a little brusque over the sound of the drumming.

“I mean, you know.” He fumbled for words. “An attractive Indian woman.”

She stared at him for a second. She was getting used to being mistaken for Indian by non-Indians, but it still took her by surprise in the moment. “Did you see how many Indians were flocking over to welcome me?”

“Come to think of it...” He turned with his entire body and gazed at the raffle table for a long moment, then back at her. “Are you some sort of pariah, then?”

She snorted involuntarily. Horrified, she pressed her hand over her nose and mouth, but she couldn’t stop laughing at her own clumsy mannerism.

“Oh, so you are!” He studied her, his eyes glinting. “Dammit, I always pick the pariahs. It’s an affliction I have.”

“A pariah affliction,” she said through giggles.

“Yeah, they have medication for it, but it makes me woozy.”

Kayla’s stomach ached from suppressing her laughter. “I guess you’ll have to suffer your fate, then.”

“This always happens.” He nodded to the table next to them. A couple seated there appeared to be listening now to Kayla and Joseph’s conversation.

When she had recovered her composure, she said, “I’m not an Indian.”

He stared at her as if she had told him she was not really a woman.

“And,” she lowered her voice conspiratorially, “the Indians know it.”

Sylvia brought Kayla review feedback on the Matheson collateral the following morning, closing Kayla’s door and spreading the concept pages out on her conference table. She made a few comments about photo selection and technical information, but it was the voice she didn’t like, wanting it to sound more matter-of-fact, more “we did this” and less tentative.

“Be bold,” she said. “We’re a bold brand.”

Kayla was still learning the company brand and persona, and though she had worked on bold brands before, seeing it as the voice of Intrinsic Architectural was proving difficult.

“Why am I having such a hard time getting the brand voice?” she wondered aloud.

“I’ll tell you why,” Sylvia said. “It’s because we’re Indians. We were supposed to vanish. And we didn’t.”

“That’s not it.”

“Yes it is. Of course it is. And it’s precisely why we aren’t going to apologize in our literature or anything else we do.”

Kayla sat back in her chair and thought about this. Of course she had brought preconceived ideas with her. Everyone does. But she of all people should be tuned into that kind of thinking. She *was* tuned in, she decided.

“So...” Sylvia said, an expression of delight on her face. “You and Joseph?”

Kayla rolled her eyes. “He said we’d have the whole town talking, and I guess he was right.”

“Well? Tell me everything.” Sylvia plopped into Kayla’s guest chair. “Did you sleep with him?”

“No! And there’s nothing to tell. We sat together because we both showed up alone and felt a little awkward. It was purely practical. I don’t know if you know it, but it’s hard for a woman like me to make friends here.”

“What do you mean? That’s crazy.”

“Not really. Indians spot me as ‘not Indian’ from a mile away.” She made air quotes with her fingers. “And non-Indians think I’m an Indian. I’m perpetually on the other side of some invisible divide here.”

Sylvia contemplated this idea for a moment. “Well, Joseph didn’t seem to think too much about it.”

“Oh, please.” Kayla waved her off. “You should have seen the look on his face when I explained that I’m Arab. I could see the gears turning in his brain shouting, ‘Run like hell, man! Run like hell!’”

“I’m sure that’s not true.”

Kayla looked at her friend with seriousness. “Listen, you fight the vanishing Indian myth, and I’ve seen people on the street shout at my father to go back to his own country when they hear his accent. Strangers. Shouting at a well-dressed, polite man who’s been living in America for forty-five years.”

“Assholes.”

“I’m just saying, I don’t need to hook up with anyone while I’m working out here. This isn’t my home, and while I like the job plenty, it’s not the end of the road for me.”

“I hate to hear you say that,” Sylvia said. “We’re good people when you get to know us.”

That evening, Kayla took a bowl of stew she had heated in the microwave oven and sat on the front porch of her rental house. It was nearing summer solstice, and the sky appeared to have no intention of darkening into night though it was well past nine o’clock. The day had been clear, and the fields to the north were bathed in soft gold and green. The air was sweet and cool, and the mountains purpled in the glow of a sun stalled on the western horizon.

Henry played with last year’s dead leaves at her feet as she wished she hadn’t told Sylvia that she had no plans of staying long-term. It was job security rule number one: make them believe you are dedicated for the long haul. She hoped the friendship would shelter the mistake. It wasn’t that she didn’t like the job, or that she thought Indians weren’t nice people. It was that she missed home. And she missed it so desperately that her stomach ached as she fell asleep at night.

She set her empty bowl on the railing and pulled her cell phone from her pocket.

“Dad? It’s Kayla,” she said.

“Kaylaaaa!” he sang. “You haven’t forgotten your old dad after all.”

“Oh, stop! I called you last week. I haven’t let a single week pass yet.”

“When are you coming back from that place?” he asked.

And she was suddenly fighting tears. “I don’t know.”

“Why are you crying?” He could always detect her tears, even when she worked to conceal them.

She couldn’t answer. She gripped her stomach and let herself sob into the safety of her father’s understanding.

“Bunny?”

“I’m okay, dad,” she sniffed. “I’m okay.”

“You miss your mother,” he said softly, and she knew he said it for both of them.

“God, I miss her so much. I would give anything in the world to bring her back. Anything.” They shared silent grief for several minutes. There was nothing to say.

“How is Prince?” she finally asked.

“I changed his name. I call him The King now. He is the damn king of the world.”

Kayla laughed.

“I was going to call him Qaddafi the way he takes over the house, but I felt sorry for the dog to do something like that to him.”

“Quit spoiling him. I told you he would be horrible if you don’t show him who is in charge.”

“He is in charge.”

“How is everyone back home? Aunt Khansa?”

“They are fine.” His voice was strained a little.

Kayla thought of her cousin Yousef who was killed in the revolution, but not during the fighting. He had been hit by stray gunfire during the celebration in Green Square after Qaddafi was killed. She had met Yousef twice—a happy boy ten years younger than her. When she visited, he constantly peppered her with English words in nonsensical strings while grinning proudly. It was funny, and she peppered him with Arabic words in return. She had never learned to speak the language; she had simply amassed a large arsenal of nouns. She could point out airplanes, refrigerators, roses, cars, forks, chairs, and many other random objects. Yousef would laugh and shake his head, clucking his tongue at her.

“Your Aunt Khansa wants a new pair of those good walking shoes your mother sent two summers ago, but I don’t know where she found them. She sent me a picture, but that’s like pointing at the hill and saying, ‘That tree. The green one.’”

“Send it to me. I’ll see if I can tell you where she got them.”

Kayla told her father about the Matheson Lodge, about the little girl with the pancreatic cancer and the fundraiser the community had held. She talked about the mountains, and about her friend Sylvia. She corrected his use of b and p when he told her about the bear tree in the yard and how many flowers it had. She did it softly, gently.

“It’s a pear tree, dad. With a p.”

Before her mother's death Kayla would have said it differently. She would have made fun. Rolled her eyes, and asserted it with exasperation. But he no longer had his wife to guide him through the English language the way he once had.

JOSEPH

“Hey, cowboy,” Victor said by way of greeting when he answered the phone. That name, which had started as a derogatory slur when they were in middle school, had become a comfortable nickname that still made others a little uneasy—something they both found some fun in, even as adults.

“She’s not Indian.”

“Kayla? I know. That’s what I was going to tell you, man.”

“She’s Arab.”

“I know. That’s what Sylvia said.”

“She said you all know she’s not an Indian. That true?”

“Course it’s true. You think we don’t know our own kind?” Victor grunted indignantly into the phone. “Did you sleep with her?”

“No.”

“Why not, man?”

Weeb stared forlornly at his empty food bowl, then up at Joseph. The kitchen floor was dirty and the filtered sunlight brought it to Joseph’s attention. He hated dirty floors, but he hated sweeping more.

“It wasn’t a date or anything. We just sat together at the benefit. That’s all.”

“What’s the difference? Since when is any place not good enough to hook up with a good-looking woman like that?”

“Never mind. I shouldn’t have called you. I just wanted you to know that she’s not Indian. In case you got it into your stubborn head that she was.”

“Yeah, okay.”

Joseph fed Weeb and made himself a fresh pot of coffee. He stared at the drip maker thinking about Kayla until the machine beeped. *Arab*. That was a whole different thing entirely, he thought. He relived his initial reaction—a powerful urge to retreat. And now he parsed that idea. Why did he feel that way? He wasn’t prejudiced.

His knowledge of Arabs was based entirely on what he had heard on the evening news. Religious bigotry. Oppression of women. Violent justice. Terrorism. September 11th. These were the people who attacked us, he thought. But then he was reminded of Kayla laughing, unrestrained, making light of her inability to blend in the community. Her brazen teasing. He liked her for those things. She hardly seemed dangerous, or even different for that matter. When she claimed roots in Libya, Joseph immediately recalled his high school’s model United Nations trip. It had been the late ‘80s, and the delegation representing Libya showed up in combat fatigues decked out with fake machine guns and ammunition belts. The entire body of students present had laughed, and then promptly censored Libya from the General Assembly. It had all felt so righteous at a time when Reagan was bombing that country for its part in the Lockerby plane downing. Now he wondered where that delegation of Government class juniors and seniors had hailed from; what corner of Montana had gleefully accepted Libya as their country? Had it been their choice, or was it assigned? He wished he had paid better attention in that class, but he was an average student, adept at

meeting the bare minimum requirements. Cruising along under the radar, never letting his grades drop low or spike high enough to attract attention. He and his fellow delegates representing the less politically-charged country of Denmark had discovered a bowling alley on the main floor of the Student Union where the Model UN event had been held, and they skipped as many of the activities as they could reasonably get away with to bowl a few frames.

He sipped coffee, looking out at the mountains. They were shrouded by a late spring storm this morning that remained politely to the east. There would be a pristine layer of new snow when finally the clouds moved off. He wondered if he should call Kayla, see if she would like to get bite to eat. But then what? He drank down the rest of his coffee, poured the remainder of the pot into a thermos, and went outside to work on the ancient flatbed truck he used to haul hay. Its carburetor was threatening to go out.

Twenty-three people gathered at the First Presbyterian social hall on Monday evening for the monthly meeting of MIA members. It was a record turn-out, and Joseph was heartened that his fellow ranchers were beginning to understand what the water compact could mean to their futures. But it was also becoming harder to keep things orderly, and Louise Pike was a disruptive addition.

She reiterated the points of the treaty of 1855 several more times to various people before the meeting got underway, asserting that she was going to file a lawsuit to protect her trout fishing spot on Harper Creek if the tribe could so easily claim water rights under the wording of that agreement.

“Has she been drinking?” Joseph asked Ted Charbonneau who was sitting placidly beneath a picture of Jesus with a lamb draped about his shoulders.

“No. She’s like that all the damn time,” Ted said under his breath. “Can you just imagine what she’s like when she does drink?”

“I’d rather not.”

Ted called the meeting to order and they reviewed the draft letter to the Montana legislature, taking down points as to where it might seem confusing or misleading. This was the second attempt at outlining the impact to irrigators, and the poor response from the first had caused the group to be hyper-attentive to every word. The initial draft of this second letter had totaled fourteen pages, and everyone agreed that it needed to be trimmed. But trimming it had become contentious. And yet another round of revisions seemed necessary.

“Listen,” Joseph said, “we can’t wordsmith this thing to death. We have to get it finalized and sent off. We don’t have months to fool around here.”

Ted nodded slowly.

“It has to be right,” Louise asserted. The veins in her neck roped up and her cheeks flushed red. “Otherwise it’ll be no better than this damn treaty we’ve got.”

Three of the men attending were Indian: Olan Wilson, Walter D’Alene, and Quinten Fisk Junior. They sat together, but not apart from the larger group. Olan served on his church board at the First Community. He had been a rancher his entire life, and he worked the land that was allotted to his grandfather. They listened, but didn’t speak, making Joseph wonder what they thought about Louise and her outspoken comments about a treaty that protected their unique rights in other ways.

“The letter is not a binding document,” Joseph reminded everyone, feeling his ire coming up. “It’s a letter spelling out the impact to agriculture, and individual irrigators specifically, that the formation of the compact will have. It’s the same as what we already

testified about last summer. This is to reinforce what we've said. Perfection is not required here. Speed is."

The room erupted in arguments about whether speed was more important than accurate wording, and Joseph dropped his head into his hands in frustration.

"Ted here is an attorney. Remember?" Joseph said, rising to his feet and shouting over the crowd. "We hired him to help us. I think he's capable of finalizing this letter and getting it off to the right people. Let's let the man do his job."

Ted stared down at the paper in his hands now scribbled with revisions, and Joseph wanted to kick him to his feet. He wanted to tell the old boy to step up and be the goddamn attorney they hired him to be. But he was rapidly coming to see that Ted was in this, and likely everything else he got involved with, strictly for social reasons. A man who liked these meetings for the coffee and doughnuts. He enjoyed the leg work of visiting all the MIA members at their kitchen tables, where he petted their dogs and ate their cobbler. He feigned progress with regular phone calls to keep Joseph and the other founders of the MIA abreast of his activities, which seemed to yield little true forward movement.

"I worked for Judge Shaw for a few years," Louise said. "Why don't you let me take it and revise it?"

Joseph held his breath. Ted looked dejected.

"That was twenty years ago, Louise," someone from the back shouted.

She was sitting in the front row and turned to the group, her spiky gray hair bobbing in the florescent light. "So?"

Joseph wondered if maybe Louise actually could get this letter drafted and off to the right representatives. It would give her something useful to do, and certainly she had shown more gumption than their own attorney.

“All right,” he said, which caused the room to explode again in argument. “You have three days, Louise. The board will review it, and if we approve, Ted here,” he motioned at the lethargic attorney, “can send it from his office, to be official.”

“Shouldn’t we vote?” Philip Council, a second-generation rancher, asked.

Joseph looked as his fellow board members, each staring out at the small group from behind the long folding table at the front of the room. They shrugged.

“Okay,” Joseph said with a measure of sarcasm. “In favor?”

Hands went up and he could see that the majority of the members were likewise frustrated with their lack of progress on completing something as simple as a letter.

“Opposed?”

Six people held their hands up, looking around the room for alliances. Billy Westhouse, a man nearing ninety, sheepishly pulled his hand down when he realized he stood with the minority.

“You get that count?” Joseph asked the secretary, who nodded. He turned to Louise. “You’ve got three days.”

At home, Joseph turned on the evening news. A clash in Egypt between the Muslim Brotherhood and secular protestors caught his attention, and he sat down to watch the volley of rocks and tear gas. These images were so familiar, and yet so foreign. That place was one

he understood only by way of geography and Bible stories, Pharaohs and pyramids. But this... this seemingly never-ending round of terrorism, bloodshed, infighting—this he didn't understand. He thought of Kayla. He wondered if she could explain these images, these conflicts. Or was she like him? American. Removed.

He fixed himself supper and ate it staring at the phone. Finally, he pushed his plate aside and called Victor.

“You have Kayla’s number?”

“Well, hello to you too, Cowboy.”

“Hello. Do you have her number?” The room was darkening around him, but he didn't turn on lights. Sometimes he sat in the dark. It was easier to think.

“You spent all of Thursday evening with the woman and didn't get her number?” Victor snorted into the phone. “You should have your man card revoked.”

“It's a small town. I figured it would be easy enough to get. If I decided I wanted it.”

“You're such a fucking retard sometimes.” Victor laughed sarcastically. “If you wanted it...”

“Just give me the goddamn number.”

“Why would you think I have it?”

Joseph could hear Victor shuffling around on the other end.

“I'll call you back. I have to get it from Sylvia.”

“Good. It'll give you an excuse to call her. You're always looking for a reason to do that.”

“I don’t need a fucking excuse to call Sylvia. I can call her any damn time I want.”

Irritation rattled through Victor’s usual good nature, and Joseph reminded himself to go easy.

“Just get me her number, would you?”

IAN

1935

The drought that had overtaken the Midwest was especially cruel to Montanans east of the Divide. And with the economic crash, Ian's eldest brother Ivan was unable to hold onto the homestead that had belonged to the McGills since 1871. He was forced to sell the sprawling, and once fertile, ranch near Billings at auction in 1934. Ivan brought his family to the Reservation to stay with Ian and took employment in a Public Works Project the following spring, building the *Going to the Sun Road* from McDonald Lake to Logan Summit in Glacier Park. Montana had been in financial crisis long before the stock market crashed, and with the rest of the country now in turmoil as well it seemed that better times might never return. But the Reservation had always been on the margins of civilized life, and Ian's parcel had fortunately been spared the worst of the drought. The water rights he had secured in 1914 held a senior rank and he had been able to sustain a reasonable crop of alfalfa and maintain an underfed herd, despite the plague of grasshoppers the drought had forced westward during those years.

The public works projects had begun to bring reliable work back to the state, and that included the construction of a hulking new summer lodge near the gates of the park. It was designed to draw tourists, an idea that Ian found ridiculous. Montana had fewer than fifty miles of paved road. The government works projects, to him, were simply "make work" in a

land too remote to support the grand concept of state parks and tourism. He was grateful that his brother had benefited, though, and he didn't voice his opinions about the value of that work in the company of his family.

While Ivan was north in Glacier along the Canadian border his wife, Mary, and their six children lived in Ian and Elizabeth's house, occupying the upstairs bedrooms—rooms that had scarcely been visited by the patter of tiny feet.

In June of that year Ian, gently prodded by Elizabeth, had ordered a sturdy and ornate wrought iron fence to surround a pair of small weeping willow trees that stood like sentinels over the tiny graves of three of their five children. Jacob was now fifteen, and little Joanne was almost a year. She had passed the final tender ages of the two siblings ahead of her by months now, and though Ian and Elizabeth watched with a weary vigilance, they were coming to relax a little more with each month that she, at first survived, and now thrived. A robust girl, she had fat little legs and an endless appetite. Ian was only now allowing this redheaded miniature of Elizabeth into his heart, and Joanne's excited squeal upon seeing him return from working outside brought a smile to his lips and levity to his heart that he hadn't felt in some years. He had taken to playing his harmonica for her as she drifted to sleep. Soft lullabies that reminded him of his own childhood near Billings.

It was late—almost nine o'clock—when he came in with his son and two eldest nephews, muddy and aching in his bones. They were famished. The solstice sun was still perched over the Bison Range and the first cutting of his alfalfa halfway completed. They washed up in the wide new kitchen sink Ian had installed during the winter, a luxury that Elizabeth could not stop remarking on. Mary found it considerably less impressive, having recently lost more modern conveniences like electricity—something Ian and Elizabeth still waited for on the Reservation. Only the most prosperous commercial buildings and the

Mission in the town center were hooked up. But there was talk of a government program to bring electricity to the outlying areas as a part of the rural electrical plan, though he doubted that the plan included the Reservation. They seldom did.

“We had a flush toilet,” Mary said this evening when Elizabeth thanked Ian again for the new drain-board sink with cold running water. “A real indoor bathroom.”

Elizabeth, her back to Mary, rolled her eyes at Ian and he pecked her on the cheek in understanding.

“Someday, Mary. Someday,” he said, taking his place at the head of the table. He looked over the ruddy faces and messy heads of the children. The younger ones had stayed at the house to help their mothers with the endless summer chores of weeding, feeding chickens, collecting and washing eggs, hanging the laundry out, and so on. Jacob was third in age among the cousins, and Ian regretted that he couldn’t be the eldest in his own home. But if they needed to provide shelter for his brother’s family, he was at least glad for the strong backs of his teenaged nephews. He was making record time on the cutting this year for their help. The family joined hands, Elizabeth on one side of him and Mary on the other down the chain of McGills, and he said grace.

“Mary and I need the wagon tomorrow,” Elizabeth said. “We’re taking the quilts the Ladies Auxiliary made this winter down to the Mission. There is so much need, and come fall these will be a Godsend for the poor. If you think we can spare it, I’d like to take some of last year’s preserves we didn’t use, as well.”

“Whatever you think is best,” Ian said. He knew his wife was a frugal woman and would see to it that they retained enough to feed the family. And he understood the urgent need beyond their farm. He had seen Indian children so thin he wondered how they had the strength to stand. The price of everything had plummeted—overalls were now, in this Great

Depression, twenty-five cents per pair. But no one had twenty-five cents. The Catholic Mission had opened a soup kitchen and food pantry, but it handled more than food, and the recipients had swelled beyond the intended Indian population. Pride had fallen by the wayside, and a separate line for food and clothing had formed for white settlers as well. Anything that could be reused from clothing to tools were donated and reused. It was up to people like himself and Elizabeth to make sure the Mission had enough to fill the direst of that need, as long as they could give it. He had been spared the worst of this disaster, and he understood the burden that carried.

“It seems a shame to have these beautiful quilts go to the Indians,” Mary said. “But I suppose they’ll be happy to have them. And it is God’s work.”

Ian could feel Elizabeth bristle next to him.

“You should donate those old hides, too, Beth,” Mary said, gesturing at the deer and goat skins that Elizabeth had purchased from Meekum over the years and now used as rugs. “In fact, maybe we can donate those to the Mission and take the quilts to Missoula this summer. We can sell them at the County Fair there, instead.”

“The quilts are not mine to decide that with,” Elizabeth said. “The Auxiliary made them especially for the poor *here*—where we live. That was our intention from the very beginning.”

“But imagine what you could do with the money,” Mary said. “You could provide even more. And the quilts are so lovely. I hate to see them end up on the dirty floor of a tipi—or worse.”

“They are not mine,” Elizabeth said in a low, hot tone, her eyes intent on Mary.

Mary cut her pork chop in silence, her lips tight. She gave her children an occasional harsh glance to keep them quiet as the family ate. Her face was creased and grayish with the burden of losing their home and the uncertain future they faced. Ian dug deep to find charity in his heart for her, though she tested his patience as much as he could see that she tested Elizabeth's. Older than his wife by a decade, Mary had rearranged Elizabeth's kitchen upon arrival, and had taken on a superior tone about all things domestic. She now dictated washing, canning, gardening, cleaning, sewing—everything that had been Elizabeth's satisfied domain. And Ian was tired of calming his angry wife at night, reminding her that this arrangement would not be forever. But he held Mary personally responsible for the extreme drop in marital affection he had received since she and her children arrived.

After supper, Ian and Elizabeth walked out to the weeping willow cemetery, which skirted the alfalfa field. In the late evening light, beneath a pale sky, they looked to the north along the spine of the magenta-colored Mission Mountains. Verdant hay stalks glowed in the last golden rays of the setting sun. She leaned into him and he put both arms around her, pulling her back against his chest and resting his chin lightly on the crown of her head. They stood there for a time, silent, contemplating the painful beauty of their cemetery. The markers were not engraved, but carefully selected smooth stones in a hard to find shade of red-orange that the two of them had pulled from the creek.

"I have more work to get at this evening," he said at last and they disengaged. The long summer light assured longer yet work days.

Mary came and stood alongside them for a moment, looking north in the direction where her husband was some three days ride away in the grandest heights of the Rocky Mountains, breaking a path through glacier and rock.

“It seems like we have lost so much. And you have been so spared,” Mary said absently.

Elizabeth turned to her, and Ian put his hand on his wife’s shoulder. She brushed it away. “Tell that to my dead children, *sister*.” She turned toward the house, striding hard.

“I—I’m sorry,” Mary said, breathless. “I didn’t mean it as it sounded.”

Ian gazed at the woman who now seemed diminished. He thought to tell her that this was Elizabeth’s home. *Her* domain. To give his wife the respect and peace she deserved, and to have some gratitude for the sacrifices they had made on her behalf. But the woman was on her way back to the house, in pursuit of Elizabeth, her shoulders stooped and her hair falling out of its bun.

When Meekum and Squim’s youngest son, Russell, returned from Indian boarding school, he wore a suit and tie, and he carried a pre-owned trumpet in a battered case. He had been home for a few summers during his first five years at the school, but during the remaining ten he had stayed in Oregon to work small jobs and improve his music. His grammar was perfect, and when Ian encountered him at Moser’s he didn’t at first recognize the boy.

Russell was holding court in front of the store, standing next to the carved wooden Indian in tribal attire foreign to any Montana Indians. Moser had had it shipped in from the East Coast during his optimistic years. Its paint had faded, and its face was scarred by the covert work of multiple pocket knife owners, but Moser could never catch the perpetrators in the act. The statue’s forehead and cheeks now resembled the inner workings of a clock. A group of Indian boys gathered around, listening to Russell tell about how he had played in the Blue Jazz Club in Spokane for the bus fare to Missoula, then he had caught a ride with the

mail truck north to the Reservation. He would convince his father to sell his land and purchase an automobile, he told them. There was no future here on the Reservation, but with a car, a man could go anywhere.

Ian wondered about that statement as he entered the store. He supposed that if the government succeeded in putting in the roads and bridges they planned that might be true. But this was Montana. This would always be the land of horses and buckboards. It was folly to imagine it different. A boy like that should head out for the city—Chicago, New Orleans, maybe San Francisco.

Cars had proliferated on the Reservation in recent years, despite the ratty dirt roads. And most were shortly ruined and abandoned on rocks or in ditches. Still, an automobile was the going price for many of the Indian-owned parcels. They were not ranching people, preferring to hunt and fish, instead. Some had erected permanent structures on their allotments, but most had moved into the village surrounding the Catholic Church. A zigzag of streets with little or no planning fanned out from the central cathedral. And a few Indian families persisted in migrating from allotment to allotment in their traditional tipis the way their ancestors had migrated from mountains to plains and back with the changing seasons.

One local builder had begun to put up bungalows, small cookie-cutter houses with wide front porches and low-ceilinged second-story lofts, on the other side of the creek. He had surveyed clean straight lines, and the semblance of city blocks were beginning to emerge. These new houses attracted the teachers, banker, postal clerk, creating a white enclave that promised to become the commercial center of their tiny town.

“That Frye kid is back,” Moser said gloomily from behind the counter as Ian entered the dim room. Moser’s wife had passed two years after Ian purchased his land, though Ian had been surprised every time he found her behind the counter during those last months.

Moser had apparently decided to remain in Montana. At least he seldom talked of returning to Pennsylvania after she was gone. Ian suspected that his choice had more to do with finances and the amount of land he still owned here in the valley than a love for this place.

Ian turned and stared out the plate glass window at the boy. He had guessed he was a returned son—they showed up every summer—but not anyone he knew. “Russell Frye, you say?”

“Yeah, Meekum has been by on horseback three times already today trying to convince his son to return home and spend some time with his mother. But Russell is a celebrity.” He tossed his hand toward the window. “For the moment, anyway. I’d chase him off if I could afford to deny service to Injuns.”

“He’s looking good,” Ian said. Seeing Russell made him miss the boy’s grandfather, Eddie. Eddie had been much older than Ian, and he had always intimidated him. But Eddie was a good neighbor. Ian owed the man his life, and they had forged a quiet, though tenuous, friendship. Eddie had showed up in the heaviest snows and coldest days with meat during those first two winters. He pretended to trade it to Ian for blankets or cut wood, but he never got around to taking those things with him. It was a ritual of saving face, and Ian was deeply grateful. In return he showed up with whiskey on rare occasions and the two men sat on Eddie’s log and looked out at the creek together.

“It won’t last,” Moser said of Russell’s new-found popularity. “He’ll be on the bottle or in the pen just like his brothers in no time.”

As they spoke, Russell broke away from his admirers and stepped inside the store. He had recognized Ian and he walked directly to him.

“Mr. McGill,” he said, extending his hand to shake. He grinned and looked Ian in the eye, man to man. “Remember me? I was just a kid the last time you saw me. Russell Frye.”

Ian smiled and shook his hand. “Welcome home, Russell. Are you back for good?”

Russell grimaced. “I don’t believe so. I’m just stopping in for a visit, and to take care of some business. Then I’m heading for Seattle.”

Ian noticed Russell’s short hair, neatly parted in the middle. The young people always returned looking civilized, well groomed. The pride they carried upon their reentry seldom lasted, as Moser had observed. Soon enough Russell would leave off with the trimmings, whether that would be his own decision or a response to the ribbing he was certainly getting from the other Indians who wore their hair long, even now.

“Are you still interested in that parcel of land to the east of you?” Russell asked.

Ian nodded. It was Meekum’s land, but he hadn’t been seen in town after suffering a bad femur break in a horse accident. It had left him partially crippled. No one had seen much of him in almost two winters.

“I aim to look into selling it,” Russell said.

“You talk to your father about this?” Ian asked. Moser listened to the conversation, staring from one man to the next without shame.

“Not yet. But he’ll sell. He has no use for it.” Russell smiled and his broad white teeth gleamed.

“Have him come see me, then.”

“I’ll come see you. Expect *me*.” He browsed the store a moment, testing the texture of a bolt of cloth, picking up a bundle of candles and sniffing them, then scanning the sugar and preserves that neatly lined a shelf.

“You thinking to purchase something?” Moser asked, a hard eye following Russell around his store.

Russell shrugged. “Maybe. If I find something I want.” But he wandered to the door and slipped out onto the steps where the boys were waiting for more of his stories.

“Kid is full of himself,” Moser sneered. “I hate the way those haughty Injuns come back from boarding school. As if it weren’t Injun school and they ain’t Injuns now.”

Ian laid a bent screw on the counter. “I need a replacement for this,” he said.

KAYLA

2014

Kayla's office phone rang and, engrossed in reviewing the images Peter had selected for the final layouts of the Matheson brochure and ads, she answered it without looking at the incoming number.

"Marketing, this is Kayla," she said.

"Did you just call me Marketing?" the voice asked. It was familiar, but she couldn't quite place it.

"I'm sorry?"

"You lose your sense of humor between last week and now?"

"Joseph?"

He laughed.

"Why are you calling me at work?"

"You're not going to get in trouble for it, are you?" He sounded concerned.

"No. Of course not. I just...wasn't expecting it, that's all." She looked out the window at the brick mission, red and pulsing against the deep blue mountains. She scanned the valley approximating his location along the ribbon of cottonwoods meandering eastward that marked Mission Creek.

“Well, I tried to get your cell number but it’s apparently a well-guarded secret.”

“Is it?” She enjoyed hearing that.

“In fact, if you want to get a date in this town, you should tell your friend Sylvia to loosen up with the digits. Just a little friendly advice.”

“A date?” She pushed her door closed. “Well, I guess I’d have to decide if I *wanted* a date.”

“Guess you will, because I’m about to ask.”

She waited, giving him no indication of her willingness.

“It occurred to me that you might like to go fishing with me,” he said.

“It occurred to you that I might like to go fishing?” Kayla repeated slowly. She had been fishing once with her father and a Libyan friend of his when she was a child. They took a two-man raft across a swift, but shallow river where the two men caught fifteen fish. But when they started back, the little raft was caught in the current and it swept them miles downstream. They ended up carrying the fish and raft over six miles of rough terrain after dark, cold and looking for the highway.

“Well,” Joseph said slowly, “if you don’t want to go fishing...”

“Um,” she hesitated. She really didn’t want to go fishing. But then...

“I guess we can get a bite to eat, instead.” He laughed quietly, and she wondered if he was nervous. “I was just stringing you along about the fishing.” He laughed again at his joke.

“I think I’ll take that second offer.”

“Alright. Friday good for you?”

“Let me check my calendar. I’m a very busy woman, you know.”

“Oh, okay. I’ll just wait while you check to see if you can squeeze me in.”

She waited a moment. “I’ll have to move my meeting with the Dalai Lama, but I’m pretty sure he’ll understand. After all, you called me at work and all.”

“Who?”

“You know, His Holiness?” When she received no response, she said, “Never mind.”

Sylvia popped her head into Kayla’s office and whispered, “Joseph wants your number. I didn’t give it to him. Do you want me to?”

Kayla pointed at the phone and mouthed, “Too late.”

Sylvia rocked back on her heels in silent laughter before closing the door.

“My house is the little green one at the corner of Fourth and Main.”

“Thought you said it was pink? Or orange. Or something like that.”

“I lied.”

“I’ve been driving all over this town looking for the right pink or orange house. I’ve talked to more people in pink and oranges houses in the last three days. I was run off one porch by a man with a gun, and another by a vicious dog. And now you’re telling me you lied?”

“What? You haven’t been!”

He was silent, and she wondered if he actually had gone house to house. What seemed completely out of the question in a place like Portland, was not so hard to fathom here where everyone knew everyone.

“No,” he said with a laugh “I lied. I know where you live. It is a hazard of moving to a town this size. *Everyone* knows where you live.”

Kayla stopped at the grocery store on her way home, suddenly interested in the beauty supplies that she had not bothered with since her divorce. Would she find lip wax or a mud mask at the tiny little IGA? And if she did, would she pay a fortune for them? She wandered the aisles, but found no evidence of such things. Finally she asked the clerk, and was directed to the hardware store.

“Hardware?” she asked.

“It’s a pharmacy and drugstore, too,” the woman said and returned to stocking the toilet paper aisle.

“Of course it is.”

On the next block at the far back of the hardware store, Kayla found a fully stocked pharmacy and rows of hair dye, nail polish, makeup, and the like. She shook her head in wonder. How would anyone know to find them here? As she browsed colors of toenail polish, Paula turned down the same aisle and stood next to her staring at the tiny bottles of nail polish. She fingered the light pink hues, lifting each up to catch the light and placing it back on the shelf. Kayla didn’t know what to say, so she pretended to be preoccupied with her own hunt for the right color.

“Thank you for coming to the benefit,” Paula said without looking at Kayla.

“You’re welcome. How is Aida?”

Paula paused, her fingers poised on the tip of a lavender bottle. Kayla watched as her hand trembled.

“I promised she could paint her nails when she turned ten,” she said in a breathless tone.

Though Kayla was still focused on the shelf, she sensed the wracking emotion about to erupt from this woman she didn't know. This mother who knew her daughter would not see ten. Kayla placed her hand lightly on Paula's shoulder.

"I've been through this," she whispered. And Paula fell into her, sobbing. They stood in a strangely comforting embrace as the handful of shoppers in the store glanced tentatively at them and away again. Paula's tears soaked into Kayla's blouse as the women held each other. Finally, Paula pulled away embarrassed.

"I'm sorry. God, I'm so sorry," she said wiping wildly at her eyes. She didn't make eye contact with Kayla, but plucked the lavender polish from the shelf and turned to go.

"It's okay," Kayla said after her, but Paula gave no indication that she'd heard her. "It's okay," she whispered to herself.

With a towel wrapped around her wet hair and a mud mask drying on her face, Kayla dialed her father's number. He answered on the first ring, and she winced at his loneliness. He had never even carried his phone with him before her mother passed. Now it was ever-present in case someone needed him. He needed to be needed.

"Kaylaaaa," he said, but it was softer than usual.

"Dad, how are you?"

"I'm good," he said. "Good. You know. Just..."

Kayla struggled for something to say. He had always been the one with so much to talk about. She would need to be better prepared, have a list of things to discuss.

"How's Prince?"

“A lady at the greenhouse took him. It’s better this way.”

Kayla reached out for Henry, a lump unexpectedly caught in her throat. “Oh.”

“I think he is very much happy now. She takes him in her car everywhere. He barks at me now when he sees me.” Her father was quiet a moment. “I think he always hated me and now he can say it.”

“No, he didn’t,” she said through silent tears. “He’s just looking for bones.”

“Maybe.” Another long pause stretched between them. Neither would say aloud how much it felt like one more part of her mother was now forever gone.

“How is Montana?”

“It’s okay. I have a date on Friday.”

“A date? Good. That is a good thing for you.”

“Well, I don’t know if it’s a good thing, but it’s something to do, anyway. He owns a ranch nearby, raises cattle. Not exactly my thing. He’s the man I told you about—the one who pulled my car out of the ditch after that Amish kid ran me down with his buggy.”

“You are finding a life there,” he said as if to himself.

“No. Dad, I’m coming home. It’s just a matter of time.” The mud mask was drying hard between her eyes and across the bridge of her nose, making her skin itch. She picked at it, trying not to flake the mud into her lap.

“I have been thinking of going home to Libya,” he said.

“That’s a good idea. A visit home will be good for you. Go see the family.” She worried about the stability of the country and the dangers of traveling there, but if anyone could do it, it was her father. He was a smart traveler and he had a dual citizenship, allowing

him to travel as an American in the West and an Arab in the Middle East. He spoke both languages, understood the customs, and he was always keeping up on the politics. But above all, he was kind, and he gave every authority figure who questioned him his undivided, polite attention, sprinkling his answers with humor that never failed to ease the situation.

“I mean for more than a visit. Kayla, Bunny, you have a whole life in another place—first it was Portland, and now you are in Montana.”

“What are you saying, Dad?” She scratched the mud away, letting it scatter across the front of her robe in green clumps. He never called her Bunny unless he was telling her something difficult—convincing her to see things she didn’t want to. It was a nickname from her childhood, when she was little and he was comforting her after a nightmare or coaxing her into the deep end of the pool.

“I think it’s time for me to go live in my land—my home. Now that your mother is gone. What do I have here?”

Kayla took a hard breath, new tears spilling. “But you’ve lived in America for over forty years. This *is* your home.”

“No.”

“But, Dad...”

“I waited all this time to see Gadhafi killed like the swine he was. I want to go home now.”

“But there’s a civil war now. It’s dangerous.”

“I will be okay. And I will visit you. In Montana or Portland or France—wherever you go, Bunny. I am not abandoning you, Kayla. You are a grown woman who doesn’t need

her old father. You have a life that is separate from me. I can't sit here waiting for you to come home to Ashland. It's not fair for you that I expect it."

They talked about Libya, and he attempted to assuage her fears. When they hung up, Kayla scrubbed the mud mask from her face with tears and warm water. Who was she to deny her father his wish to return to his homeland? She was coming to understand homesickness in concrete, stomach-aching ways. But this decision seemed so sudden, so unforeseen. Was her mother the only thing that had rooted him here? Could the loss of his wife suddenly unwind four decades of life in his adopted homeland?

JOSEPH

Alice waved at Joseph from the driveway of her compact 1950s single-story house. Both the house and its trim were the same shade of drab white, and it had always reminded him of an oversized toolshed. He could never understand why his parents chose that specific house in the middle of a run-down block in town after years in the beautiful house his father's grandfather had built with its generous porches, deep eaves, and buttery pine wainscoting. When Joseph and Eilene were engaged to marry, Joseph's father, Gil, immediately made arrangements to pass the ranch on to them. It was as if he had been waiting for the opportunity to rid himself of the place. And, oddly, Gil seemed to lose his way in the world once he was unshackled of the place. After taking a long-planned trip to the Houston Space Center, he returned home sad, seemingly defeated. But no one could quite understand why. He often remarked that he had become useless to everyone, that he was an old man underfoot and in the way. And this ugly house with its tiny yard, surrounded by cyclone fencing, required little of him to keep it up. Looking back, it seemed to Joseph that his father had quit more than ranching—he had quit life in that transaction of passing the work down.

Alice set her pole and fishing tackle in the bed of his pickup and climbed up onto the passenger seat. The two smiled at each other, but said nothing as Joseph wended his way through Mission and out onto the highway heading toward the Placid River.

“Let's try that place where Victor caught that little trout you showed me,” she said.

He smiled to himself. “That wasn’t a *little* fish.”

“Sure, it was,” she said and tuned his radio to a Christian music station. He didn’t say anything. He rarely listened to the radio when he drove, and her choice was better than the Country music his father had always insisted on. In fact, Gil had forbidden anything *but* Country music in his presence. Being forced to listen to those repeated songs about patriotism, the superiority of rural living, and cheating wives day in and day out had ruined Joseph on Country music forever. The sound of it grated on him, and if he was subjected to it for long periods he found himself irritable and apt to snap at people.

“Someday, you know, someone is going to catch a bigger fish than you. It’s not healthy for you to have so much of your self-esteem wrapped up in the size of your fish,” he said.

Alice burst out laughing.

“Size doesn’t matter,” he said, but he could no longer keep a straight face and he looked away to hide his grin.

“I’ll worry about my self-esteem. You worry about size.”

They parked along the highway and crossed the river on foot, over the railroad bridge where Joseph paused to look at the clouds reflected on the glassy water, then hiked down into the river canyon along the opposite shore. They did not go all the way downriver to the abandoned cabin because Alice found a deep pool above it that looked promising. She carefully assembled her pole, strung the line, and began casting a soft, yellow arc over the quiet water. This was like a meditation for her, he had observed. She went into her own world when she was out here. Whether she focused on form, fish, or simply the silence, she was lost to him in these moments.

Joseph sat on a river-smoothed log and put his own pole together. He watched his mother a long moment, and wondered if she had ever regretted marrying his father. He thought of the lineage of McGill men and their temperaments. His great-grandfather, Ian—a man he couldn't remember—had a reputation within the family and the community as tough, but fair. A pioneer; one of the first white men to settle on the Reservation. He had forged friendships and partnerships that even today, Joseph benefited from. Joseph's grandfather, Jacob, was a warm, generous man who spent a lot of time with him when he was growing up. He had learned almost everything he knew about ranching from his grandfather. But Joseph's father had not inherited the good traits of either man. Gil was an angry man who spent much of his time cultivating hostilities toward everyone and everything around him as if it were a hobby. He was perpetually at war with his equipment, his neighbors, the government, and the land. Joseph's mother was the only person who was ever successful at taming the man's temper, and even then, her success rate was low. Joseph never felt close to his father, and when the man died, he wondered if he had known him at all. Joseph hoped that he hadn't—that there was a different, kinder man inside who hadn't shown himself for some important, unspoken reason. But he couldn't imagine what that reason would be. He had tried to talk to his mother about it at different times throughout the years, but she protected Gil. Why? He would ask her again about his father.

Louise Pike was true to her word, and when she showed up at Joseph's house unannounced, and spread copies of the new letter out on his dining room table, he was impressed. Not only was it well written, concise, and to the point, but she had already shared it with most of the MIA members and gotten pre-approval.

“You must have worked non-stop on this,” he said, after carefully reading it and laying it back on the table.

“You wanted it done. I got it done,” she said, smiling. Her lipstick was cadmium red, and it made her lips look as though they were somehow floating above her creased and pale skin.

“What else can you do?”

“I can do anything you need me to do.” Her spiked gray hair bobbed back and forth, punctuating her confidence. She had the wiry energy of a woman with decades of physical work under her skin. The kind of manual labor required for ranching. People out here seemed to age in two directions—as their skin wrinkled and their hearing went bad, their arms and legs hardened into ropy, muscular knots that gave them the strength and stamina of people half their age.

He wondered about Louise now—her experience, her education, and work history. He thought of his mother and how she often complained that once she had turned forty she became invisible. No one took her seriously anymore. He suffered a pang of guilt for having done exactly that to Louise.

Louise gathered up the papers and carefully returned them to her satchel, which was neatly organized with rows of pens lining the interior like tiny, brightly-colored warriors. “As soon as you call a meeting, we can get this approved and send it off.”

He nodded. “I’ll call a special meeting on Monday. Let’s get this damn thing done, finally.”

“It’s just the beginning, you know,” she said, looking him in the eye.

“I know.”

She sat back and sipped the coffee he had poured for her. “When that treaty was signed in 1855, there is no way the government imagined the tribe would still be viable a hundred-and-fifty years later. Why else would they have created a sovereign nation within our own borders? A country within the country.”

“If that’s what they are, it’s not just one,” he said, looking out the window.

“The more I think about this, the bigger it gets.” She was contemplative today, staring into her coffee. Joseph had never seen her like this.

“A tribe in southern Oregon won this battle,” he said.

She turned to him, worried. “That doesn’t mean this tribe will win.” Her tone of uncertainty undermined her words.

“It’s a precedent that the courts will consider.”

“It’s a completely different state. How can they compare it to this?”

“The treaty reads almost exactly the same. It’s as if once they drew up the first treaty, they just carbon-copied it and replaced the names. They read almost the same all across the West. And most of them were signed in 1855. It was a system, a government production.”

She placed her hand on his and squeezed. “My father would turn over in his grave if he knew his land could lose its water rights. What’s America coming to that private, land-holding, law abiding citizens can lose everything? What did we ever do wrong?”

Joseph pulled up in front of Kayla’s house and slid out of his freshly gutted and spruced pickup. He had vacuumed the dog hair off the seats and thrown out the piles of junk mail that had accumulated against the windshield over the winter months. He had recycled

the empty Pepsi cans that usually rolled around on the passenger-side floor, and he had used a wet rag to scrape off the caked dust that had settled on everything. But he didn't bother with the floor mats or the truck bed, which carried the mild fragrance of fish and fresh cow manure. He wanted his truck to look respectably cowboy, yet be clean enough for a city girl like Kayla. But above all, he did not want it to appear as if he had cleaned it specifically for her.

She met him on the front steps wearing a blue sun dress with a cardigan and white sandals. Her legs were bare, and her bronze skin look soft enough to touch.

“Guess we're not going fishing,” he said.

“Oh, yeah. Fishing. Let's definitely do that.” Her smile was warm, and he was glad he had asked her out.

He opened the passenger door and admired her grace as she climbed in.

As they drove through town Joseph pointed out all of the pink houses, which were numerous, and he made up stories about what kind of confrontation he had engaged in at each one while he was looking for her.

“That one has a pet wolf that chased me down to the creek,” he said. “I barely escaped with my life. And the guy in that house,” he said, pointing to pale pink cottage next to the Mormon Church, “was wearing a long lacey red robe and had curlers in his hair.”

“You're out of your mind,” she said, laughing.

“I'm only half joking, actually. His name is Willard, and about six years ago he started wearing women's clothes out in public. It took us a while to get used to it, that's for sure.”

“Are you serious? Not here.”

“Oh, yeah. You haven’t seen him?”

“No. And if I was him I’d be worried that some of these cowboys would take me out and beat the crap out of me with a crowbar for something like that.” Kayla swept her black hair off her shoulder, and Joseph watched it shimmer in the evening sun.

“What kind of backwoods rednecks do you take us for? Willard is an excellent accountant. No one really cares what he’s wearing when he’s doing our taxes.” Joseph pulled onto the highway and headed north toward the lake.

“Are you for real? People are fine with this guy cross-dressing? Here in Montana?”

He bugged his eyes at her. “Yes.”

“Huh.”

“Well, I suppose there are some who find it a little off-putting, and they take their business elsewhere. But no one would hurt him. He grew up here. Everyone knows him. He’s a soft-hearted soul. Obviously.”

“I never would’ve guessed that in a community like this people would be so accepting.”

“What do you mean? A community like *this*?”

“You know,” she said, pointing out at the valley and mountains.

“No, I don’t know.” He tried not to sound annoyed, but the stereotypes people from the big city applied to communities like his and people like him had long been a sore spot. As if living in the rural west made a person racist, uneducated, overly religious, and intolerant by default.

“I didn’t mean anything by it,” she said.

“Sorry, it’s a sore subject. I get tired of people coming out here and making inaccurate assumptions about us. I mean, for god sakes, this is an Indian Reservation. If we were as intolerant as people expect us to be, why would we live here in the first place?”

“You’re right.” She gave him an apologetic smile. “I’m sorry. I was making an assumption. I should know better.”

“No, I’m sorry. It’s a normal response.” They rode along in silence for several miles, and Joseph wished he hadn’t come off so defensive. He could have just as successfully shown her. “Have you ever been to the Middle East,” he finally asked.

“Yeah, I’ve been there a few times. Not for a while now. The last time I went was ten years ago, before the revolution. Now it’s pretty dangerous. Especially for an American.”

“What’s it like there?”

“That’s a hard question to answer. It’s so different from here. My family is from Tripoli. It’s on the Mediterranean and it’s beautiful. But Qaddafi ruined the country. It’s really polluted and most of the people are poor now. My father’s family had some money before Qaddafi—not a lot, but they were middle class. My grandfather owned a business importing spices from Nigeria and other parts of sub-Saharan Africa. And he had some land and buildings. Qaddafi took all that away when he overthrew the king. Now the family has just the apartments that they live in. Sometimes the electricity goes out and no one knows when it will come on again. It can be out for twenty hours a day for weeks. My dad talks about the way it was before Qaddafi, when it was a kingdom. He remembers it that way, but I don’t.” She gazed out the window, and Joseph wondered if she missed it.

“We all thought it would be better now that Qaddafi’s gone. But it seems worse, to me, anyway.” He was careful not to state his opinions too directly. He had disagreed with the US getting involved in the revolution, and now the country was in utter chaos.

“It’s still better, no matter how chaotic it seems. But forty years of rule by someone like that—I mean he hanged students in the square and barricaded streets so people had to drive past their rotting corpses. People went missing for minor infractions, or with no explanation at all. He used systematic fear to control the people. I don’t know how they will be able to have a democracy when they’ve never experienced one. And now these extremist groups are trying to take over and set up a Muslim state.”

“Like what’s going on in Egypt,” he said, trying to appear as though he followed international politics a little more closely than he actually did.

“Kind of, but Egypt and Libya are different. Egypt is much poorer, and most of the population is uneducated. Illiterate even. But Libya produces some of the purest oil in the world; as a state, they have a lot of money, and their citizens are pretty well educated.”

Joseph noted the pride with which she talked about Libya. He recognized an allegiance to it that made him a little uncomfortable. Was she American, or was she Libyan?

“That’s one thing Qaddafi did right—he sent a lot of young people abroad to get Western educations. Even my female cousins have college degrees, but from Libya. They don’t get to travel out of the country like the men. Our grandmother was illiterate, but all of the girls in my generation have attended college.”

“Really?” Joseph realized how little he knew of that region—or the rest of the world. No wonder no one was listening to the MIA about the water compact. No one ever spent much time thinking about other people’s problems. And the farther removed, either geographically or as a way of life, the less likely a person was to invest in solving, or even understanding, the problem.

She smiled at him. “Does it surprise you that my female cousins are college educated?”

He felt himself blushing. “Well, yeah. All I’ve ever heard about that part of the world is that women wear burkas and men plot terrorist attacks. Of course, I know that’s not how everyone is. It’s just all we hear about.”

“You know us Arabs. We like to keep people on edge.” She grinned at him, and he couldn’t help but grin back.

They ate dinner at the Silver Tip Steakhouse, which overlooked the lake. They sat on the deck where they had a sweeping southern view of the smooth water—a glassy sapphire blue that appeared unfathomably deep. Small islands dotted the horizon, floating green and soft in the distance. As the sun perched in the western sky, he asked her questions about her childhood in Oregon, and she asked him about his ranch and what a ‘day in the life’ was really like for a modern cowboy. He confessed to having traded his horse for a four-wheeler when he was a teenager, and being somewhat wary of the animals now that he was out of practice.

“You can tell a real horseman by his scars,” he said. “Horses are powerful animals. Unpredictable—not the docile do-anything-you-ask creatures you see in the movies.”

“I’ve never ridden, though I always wanted to.” Kayla had a soft voice, and he found her diction soothing and warm.

“I could arrange it,” he said.

“Let me decide how serious I am,” she said. She seemed so open and easy to be with, it scared him a little. He had imagined that this date would be an exercise in reminding himself of why he wanted to be alone. But instead, he wanted to run his fingers along her cheek and jaw and see if her skin was truly as soft as it looked.

As they talked, he mentioned the water compact issues that he was working on, but decided it was poor conversation for a date, and turned instead to his project to renovate an old bunkhouse on his property before it tumbled down the hill and into the creek.

“It’s the only one of its kind left in the valley—that I know of, anyway. It was built in the 1920s from stones and clay from the creek. It’s a historic building, though I have no idea what to do with it. Seems like I should save it, leastwise. Then I’ll park a tractor in it or something.”

That made her giggle. “I’d like to see it sometime. I love architecture, as you probably guessed by my job.” She told him about the marketing work she did and how they were highlighting the renovation of the Matheson Lodge as their first feature.

“My great-uncle worked on that building, back when it was first constructed.” He thought of the stash of family photos and letters. There were references to the place in that pile, he knew.

“Really? What do you know about its history?”

“Not much, but I can dig out the family photos. I know there are some of the place when it was going up. And some letters between my uncle and his wife while he was away working in Glacier Park during the Depression.”

“I’d love to see them.” Kayla eyes sparkled, and Joseph could see that she enjoyed her work. It was exciting to her, and that made her exciting to him.

“You can probably tell me something about this bunkhouse, too.”

“Sylvia is the one you need to talk to. She’s an architectural historian.”

“I know Sylvia. She’s a friend of a friend.”

“Must be Victor,” Kayla said with a sideways smile.

Joseph laughed. “Yeah, that’s the guy. I forgot that you’ve met him.”

Kayla was tentative with her next question. “What’s going on between Victor and Sylvia? They have a palpable chemistry. But they act like there’s nothing there.”

“Oh, there’s plenty there. They’ve been in love since she moved here. And all the years Victor was in Minnesota didn’t change a damn thing.”

“So what’s the deal?”

“She hasn’t told you?”

Kayla shook her head. “She’s really open about most things. But not him.”

“Well, I don’t know either. I was hoping she told you so you could tell me.” They laughed, and Joseph ordered them another round of drinks.

They shared a plate of stuffed mushrooms—one of Joseph’s favorites, and ordered steaks, rare, with horseradish. He was glad she didn’t order her meat well done, or worse, a vegetarian dish. As the alcohol warmed them, he asked if she had ever been married.

“Yes,” she said with a friendly grimace. “Yes, I have. I thought I found true love, even defended him to my parents who thought he was pretentious. What I really found is that I suck at picking a mate. I’d have done better to follow in Sylvia’s footsteps.”

“Me, too,” he admitted.

“That you were married or that you suck?”

Joseph loved her sense of humor. The last time he had been with a woman she had tried so hard to say all the right things that he went home wondering who the hell she was.

But Kayla didn't seem too invested in making sure this worked into another date. And that was refreshing.

“I was married. And I sucked at it.”

“This bullshit about it's better to have loved and lost was coined by someone who never went through a divorce.” She sipped her drink and folded her napkin into a bird, then flattened it out again and started over making a boat.

“Boy, you can say that again.” He looked out at the lake, wondering if he really wanted to talk about this. He had succeeded in being evasive about the details of his marriage and divorce since the very beginning, a tactic that had inadvertently hurt his mother's feelings because she felt shut out of his life. It made Kayla more interesting, though, that she had been through similar experiences in her life. He imagined he wouldn't need to find ways to convey the pain and loss he had felt during that time—and even now, at unexpected moments, like when he sometimes accidentally ran across something his wife had handwritten. The suddenness of holding something she had touched—inscribed, no matter how banal—always took his breath away.

“My husband fell in love with his co-worker. She was from Singapore. Tiny, bright-eyed, and apparently very intelligent. She ran the International Marketing department at his company and had moved to Portland to work in the home office. I hated her for a long time. But my anger was misplaced—or maybe she deserved some of it, but it was my husband who destroyed our marriage. I hope that woman has fallen in love with someone new by now and left him brokenhearted. Asshole.”

“Wow. That's a hard thing to go through. I'm sorry.”

“I'm probably better off.” She smiled weakly.

“My wife couldn’t take life in Montana.”

“Where was she from?”

“Montana.”

“Oh.”

They both laughed. “You’d think she could have figured that out before she married a fourth-generation cattle rancher from Montana.”

“How long were you married?”

“Five years. Well... three good years. Then she started talking about moving to Spokane or Seattle. She wanted to be where there was cultural stuff, like bookstores, poetry readings, live theatre, and open-air concerts. She didn’t think the summer playhouse here in the park was real theatre.”

“You attend the plays in the park?” Kayla’s eyebrow arched in a flirtatious way that made his stomach twitch every time she did it.

“No.” He laughed.

“Whew. I thought you were going to drag me out to some local rendition of Othello on our next date. That would suck.”

“Who says we’re having a next date?”

“So you don’t like me, then?” she stated, tossing her hair over her shoulder. She had a soft jawline and large, full lips.

“Nope. Not one bit.”

“Well I’m glad to hear it, because I don’t like you either.”

“I know it. I can tell.”

KAYLA

When the two pulled up in front of Kayla's house it was late, and a waxing gibbous lit the remnants of snow on the mountains in a pale yellow glow. The sight of the darkened porch and the vacant-looking windows reminded her of her conversation with her father. It brought an ache deep down in her center. She didn't want to go inside—not alone, anyway.

“I had a really nice evening,” she said. “Thank you.”

Joseph grinned down at the gearshift, suddenly shy. “Get some waders. Next time we're going fishing.”

She studied him to know if he was serious. She might enjoy fishing if for only a chance to spend a day outside with him.

“Do you have time for a glass of wine?” Her voice sounded tentative, and she wished she had been more casual, easier about it. Now if he said no, it would feel like rejection. But he killed the engine and slid out.

On the porch, she fumbled with the key, trying to find the lock in the dark.

“You sure this is your house?” he said.

She stepped back and made a big production of looking it over, examining the windows and the porch. “Hard to say with all the pink houses in this town.”

She felt his hand on her shoulder then, warm and strong. He slipped his other hand over hers and guided the key into the lock. It went in smooth and clicked, and together they turned the knob. He let go, and she led him inside.

“That’s Henry.” She pointed at the cat, awake, but yawning on the couch. “Make yourself at home. I’ll get the wine.”

Joseph followed her into the kitchen, and when she set her purse and keys on the counter, he leaned in, pinning her against the sink, kissing her on the lips softly. A shiver raced through her—it had been so long since she had felt the tender touch of a man. His mouth moved across her cheek to her ear, nuzzling her, leaving an electric trail that pulsed long after his lips were gone.

“You smell good,” he whispered.

She murmured approval, and he kissed her deeply.

“Who needs wine?” She led him to the bedroom.

He peeled her sweater down. She unsnapped his shirt. He pulled his boots off, hopping across the floor on first one foot and then the other, dropping them on the pine planks with a hollow thud. She unzipped her dress, but stood while he took her bare shoulders in both hands and kissed her collarbone. She unhooked his belt and ran her hand down his jeans. He was hard under the denim, and she pressed her palm against him.

“God,” he said with a soft gasp. “It’s been a long time. That feels good.”

She opened the buttons of his fly, and he pulled her dress over her head and admired her in a white bra and lacey panties.

“You’re beautiful,” he said.

His lovemaking was tender, deliberate. He took his time exploring her and letting her do the same to him. And when he entered her she cried out involuntarily. He paused there, and they both took long, deep breaths at the sensation of the other. She wrapped her legs around his waist and pulled him deeper. How long it lasted, she didn't know. She pretended to climax as she had always done, but only to bring him to the place she wanted him to be. She had learned that sometimes that was okay.

As they lay entwined, Kayla couldn't help but assess his position in her list of lovers—some twelve or fifteen men. Joseph was attentive in ways that were new to her. Her husband had been enthusiastic, but clumsy, and entirely focused on his own gratification. Before they divorced she had stopped hoping for sexual satisfaction from him and had begun relying on herself in stolen moments when she changed out of her work clothes, before he got home. She imagined that it wouldn't be that way with Joseph, but they needed more time together for her to know for sure.

“I guess we can have another date,” Joseph said, pulling her closer and pressing his face into her hair.

“Maybe,” she said quietly into her pillow. “We'll see.” But she could already feel her insides pulling into a tight little knot the way they always did when she gave too much of herself to someone. She didn't want to cling too tightly to his promise of another date. She had learned how to let go—allow the relationship be what it is—but they were simply motions, rote and unaccompanied by the enlightened, liberated attitude they were designed to portray.

Joseph had risen early, kissed her gently on the cheek and said his goodbye.

“I have a ranch to run. I can’t stay,” he had said. And she nodded, watching him collect his things and make his way into the bathroom. She closed her eyes against a few small tears, feeling silly for having them. What did she expect of him?

She remained in bed until late in the morning, dozing off and on, recalling the previous evening and Joseph’s tender kisses. Pushing away the reality of her father’s exodus home—that was too much to consider yet. It was Paula, though, who kept intruding on her thoughts. An image of her wracking sobs in the aisle of the hardware store, clutching a bottle of nail polish, that would not dislodge itself from Kayla’s mind. She understood Paula’s pain, somewhat. She knew the loss of a parent was no comparison to that of a child, but the freshness of her mother’s battle made Kayla realize that Paula’s grief right now was tempered by the activities of caring for her daughter. There would be empty days ahead for her when there was nothing left to do—no child whose needs could outweigh a mother’s fear. Then she would be lost, drifting in that giant void that death creates.

She showered and dressed, fed Henry, and walked through town. Under her arm she carried a jar of sun tea, the only thing she could think to offer that wouldn’t appear odd or patronizing. Kayla had a vague notion of where Paula lived. There was a trailer park on the south side of the creek, which divided the mishmash of streets dating back to the signing of a treaty, and the clean, square blocks of later progress.

The sun was high and a hot, dry breeze caressed the valley, bowing the grass in gentle waves. Her hair fluttered across her face as she walked up one row and down the next looking for an oxidized Jeep Cherokee she thought was Paula’s. Children played ball in the unpaved road, and an occasional resident peered out a window at her, staring with curiosity. She felt awkward, and the poverty of this part of town was impossible to overlook. It was the sort of reservation scene she had expected to find when she first arrived. The trailers were old,

battered, and some were missing pieces of their siding. The tiny yards were seedy and littered with toys and rotting cars. Clotheslines stretched between houses, and feral cats slunk under porches.

“Which house is Aida’s,” she asked a little girl who appeared to be about ten.

The girl stared at Kayla with suspicion, refusing to answer. She held a large bottle of Mountain Dew that was sweating in the heat, and she wiped it on her dirty cotton dress as she ground a bare foot into the dust.

“I’m a friend of her mother’s?”

“Are you an Indian?” the girl blurted.

Kayla almost lied, thinking she might get an answer if she were. But she shook her head. “I’m a friend of Aida’s mom.”

“What are you, if you’re not an Indian?”

“I’m just a girl. Like you.”

“No, you’re not!” The girl disappeared inside the trailer behind her, leaving Kayla standing in the street, feeling abandoned and absurd.

“What the hell?” she muttered to herself and kept walking. She hadn’t gone far when a woman called to her from behind.

“Excuse me. Miss?”

Kayla turned, apprehensive and wishing she had not come.

“Are you looking for Paula?”

“Yes, do you know which house is hers?”

The woman approached, a hard look on her plump face as she scrutinized Kayla.

“Why are you looking for her? You know that her daughter is very sick, don’t you?”

“Yes. I’ve come to offer my help.”

“What help can you give her?”

Kayla could see that the woman meant well. She was protecting Paula from the potential insensitivity of a stranger.

“I lost my mother to cancer. Not very long ago. I—I just wanted to offer my help.”

She realized how asinine she sounded. So many people have lost loved ones to cancer and other illnesses. People right here in Paula’s own community. People Paula knows, who love her. What could Kayla do that these people could not?

The woman softened. “It’s the yellow one on the end.” She pointed up the lane to where an enormous poplar tree shaded an enclave of tiny metal trailers in mismatched colors.

“Thank you.” Kayla turned in the direction the woman had pointed, committed now to her mission by the simple fact that someone had helped her.

As she approached the trailer, Kayla’s mouth went dry. Why was she doing this? She tapped lightly on the door and looked around at the yard with its broken-down swing set and unkempt flower beds. Weeds poked out from under the wooden steps, and a thistle that was nearly as tall as she was spread wide its prickly arms. When no one answered, she turned to go. But then the door opened with the pop of a seal being broken.

“Oh, it’s you.” Paula said.

Kayla smiled as if apologizing and held the jar of tea up. “Thought you might like a little company. And if not, maybe just some tea.”

Paula seemed dazed as she looked down at Kayla and her tea. She peered behind her into the dark trailer a moment, then back at her visitor. “Give me just a minute.” She disappeared inside. When she returned, she carried two glasses filled with ice, and descended the steps into the yard. “We can sit at the picnic table,” she said, gesturing at a rotting wooden table behind the house nearly obscured by tall grass.

Kayla followed as Paula cut a trail in the overgrowth. She brushed the table clear of debris that might have been calcified bird droppings and insect carcasses, but which Kayla did not stop to ponder. Kayla opened the tea jar and poured them each a glass, and the two sat opposite each other in silence.

Paula drank down half her tea in a long, smooth sip and set the glass on the table. She stared at it a long time, fingering the dew on the outside of the glass. “Thanks.”

Kayla refilled her glass. After another prolonged silence, she said, “I hope I’m not intruding. I just wanted to offer you some company. If you want it.” Her words were rushed. “Of course, I understand if you want me to go.”

“No.” Paula touched Kayla’s hand briefly and pulled away. “Don’t go.” Her face was swollen, her eyes rimmed in red. Her hair was oily, pulled back in a tight bun. And Kayla noticed that her t-shirt was inside out.

The two women sat quietly in the shade of the tree, drinking iced tea and not looking at each other. It was oddly comfortable there and Kayla marveled at the ability of two strangers to sit like this in each other’s company and not say anything. She took in the poverty of the neighborhood—a place she would have avoided when she lived in Portland. But it was different here. The community was too small to draw hard lines, even though the lines were there, and she wondered how she fit in here, or *if* she fit in.

After twenty minutes or so, Paula rose. “I need to get back inside. But thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” Kayla rose too and collected her now empty jar.

Paula mounted the steps, then turned back to Kayla. “Thank you,” she said again.

IAN

1955

Ian and Elizabeth had held their breath when Jacob and his wife Teresa had their first, and what turned out to be their only, child. But the younger couple escaped the heartbreak of infant death that had plagued Ian and Elizabeth. Teresa gave birth to Gilbert in the modern new hospital in Missoula under the care of an obstetric doctor in the spring of 1948. Ian had been flabbergasted that there were doctors who treated strictly female conditions like pregnancy and the rest of that business. Elizabeth had laughed aloud at him—one of the few times in their long relationship when he felt inferior to her. Yet his wife had settled into ranching as if it had always been her life. She complained so infrequently about the hardships of their existence that he often forgot that he had come from a different sort of people. In this matter of the doctor Ian recognized how little he truly knew. How out of touch rural, but more-so Reservation, life could leave a man.

But the boy thrived. Gilbert was a pudgy toddler, and as he grew taller he also seemed to grow wider. This bothered Ian. He wondered how the boy would handle the physical work of ranching. But he kept his opinion to himself, hoping that Gil would slim down and put on lean muscle as he worked.

Both families were sharing the house now—Jacob and Teresa upstairs and Ian and Elizabeth down. He and Elizabeth enjoyed being surrounded by family and hoped that Jacob and his wife would have more children. Their own daughter, Joanne, had gone away to

college in Bozeman a few years ago where she became engaged to a car dealer. She returned home to visit each summer now, driving whichever brand new car her fiancé, Erick, loaned her from the dealership his father owned. Last summer it had been a Chevy Fleetline DeLux, and the entire McGill family had giddily climbed inside and admired it. Joanne drove them up and around the lake, talking about how wonderful Erick was all the way. They had stopped in Sommers for a picnic overlooking the water, and Ian had marveled at the beauty of that yellow automobile. He had never been able to afford a new car, and there was something satisfying about knowing that his daughter would be well taken care of financially.

This summer she arrived in a baby blue Bel Air coupe, but no one climbed inside, and she parked it inconspicuously under the weeping willow trees near the family cemetery. She stepped out, dressed in a tailored pink suit and high heels. Ian stared at her impractical footwear. They were pale pink to match her dress and leather handbag. Her hair was short and styled, carefully pinned beneath a small hat. Who was this woman? he had wondered. She barely resembled the tomboy who had fished for trout alone at the creek to chase away her blues, or the girl who had won grand champion at the county fair for her giant New Zealand rabbits.

“Did you forget that this was a ranch?” he asked, gesturing at her shoes.

“Oh, dad! Of course not. I have other shoes.” She gave him a gentle hug and pecked him on the cheek. She smelled of spicy perfume, perhaps a hint of tobacco. She was a creature he couldn’t fathom now with her town life working as a secretary, her studio apartment, and her wealthy fiancé.

“How is Erick?” he asked.

“He’s doing well. Busy. Always busy. Always working. But he loves it. He sends his regards.” She paused to look at the cemetery, which was recently mowed and edged. Each

grave weeded, each stone carefully brushed clean of the ever-encroaching lichen. The sight seemed to take her by surprise, and she turned away from it toward the house, craning to look up at the gables. “How’s she doing?”

“Some days are good. Some...” Ian shrugged.

Joanne pulled her suitcase from the trunk, and Ian took it from her. She sucked in her breath as if preparing for the worst and walked up the steps into the house.

The living room was dark and Joanne immediately started for the drapes with the intent to open it up and let in some light. But Ian stopped her.

“The medicine gives her headaches.”

Teresa came to the living room to greet her sister-in-law and they held each other in a long embrace. She was a stout woman with blunt cut, dark brown hair. She and Jacob had met in Missoula where she worked at a department store, but she had been born and raised in North Dakota. Jacob courted her for less than three months before they decided to marry. “How are you?” Joanne whispered to Teresa, looking her in the eye as if to ensure that her answer be truthful.

“Fine,” Teresa said, smoothing her limp brown hair behind her ear. She was the one who bore the most weight in this situation. An unfair fact of life. Ian tried to help, but the business of bathing and personal care seemed best left to the women.

Joanne squeezed Teresa’s shoulders, then crouched near her mother’s reclining chair. “Mom? It’s me, Jo.”

Ian left the women and went out onto the back porch where he sat in the swing he had put up for Elizabeth when their children were still small. He could hardly fathom what life was going to be like when his wife was gone. He forced himself to think about it, though. To

prepare for it. She had been battling breast cancer for three years, and she was not getting better. She was suffering, and her pain was nothing he could fix. He had never experience helplessness like this before, and it showed in his meager offerings to her. Lilacs from the tree she had planted years ago, or daisies from the creek bottom. Fresh pears, washed and sliced, from the old tree next to the root cellar. He had tried to clean the house a few times, but she broke down in tears when he removed the deer hide rugs to the workshop. He had had to climb up on the orchard ladder in the dark to pull them down from the rafters and return them to the house before she could rest. She was fragile in ways that were new—prone to tears over the slightest things. She could no longer walk to the barn to see her horses, and he had bought a Jeep from the government surplus auction so he could take her there, or down to the creek, or out into the field where the sunsets were most stunning.

Ian dozed on the swing a while, the sun warming his shoulders. But he was awakened by his grandson. At seven, Gil had an insatiable need to chatter. He questioned everything, and Ian, at first perturbed by the constant noise, had taken to giving the boy direct and honest answers as often as he could and fantastical answers when he couldn't. He had decided that the single worst thing for a boy with such a voracious appetite for knowledge was to be stymied by adults who didn't take the time engage with him. Now that Ian was retired and Jacob was in charge of the ranch, he had plenty of time to answer Gil's questions, and he took this duty seriously.

“Why is Aunt Joanne here?” Gil asked.

“Why not?” Ian replied.

Gil shrugged, and Ian recognized in the boy a deeper understanding of the circumstances than seemed normal for a boy of his age.

“She's visiting with grandma,” Ian said.

Gil climbed up onto the swing next to Ian and handed him a toy airplane that he had made from a kit of balsa wood. "Is grandma gonna die?"

Ian sent the plane soaring out into the yard. "We're all going to die someday."

Gil climbed down and retrieved the plane. He set it to flight, but it nose-dived into the grass. He brought it back to Ian. "I mean right now."

"Oh," Ian said. "Well, not *right* now. Not today. But I think grandma is going to heaven very soon." He studied the boy for emotions. It was a blunt thing to say, but it seemed more cruel to give him false hope and then have him suffer the loss without time to prepare. "We have to spend as much time as we can with her now."

"I gave her a candy bar," Gil said, and smiled proudly.

"Where did you get a candy bar?"

"Aunt Joanne brought it for me." Gil sent the plane soaring out over the creek bank, surprising them both that it had managed so much lift.

"I bet grandma really liked that," Ian said. "That was very generous of you."

"I want to be an airplane pilot when I grow up," Gil said, patiently climbing down from the swing to retrieve his plane again. But it had landed on the other side of the woven-wire fence Ian had put up when his own children were small. The creek was off limits to children under ten, unless they were with an adult, and they were conditioned to that rule from infancy.

"Don't you want to be a rancher like your dad?"

Gil shook his head without even considering the question. Ian followed him to the fence, sharp pain stabbing his right knee as he stepped off the porch. It had never been right

after he rolled the tractor onto it. He was lucky it had only been his knee; tractor accidents killed people—three men he'd personally known and several others he'd heard about. Elizabeth tried to get him to see the doctor, but Ian didn't think there was anything a doctor could do that time wouldn't heal on its own. Now it was prone to arthritic stiffness, and he had to be careful not to aggravate it. He wished he had taken her advice at the time, but it was too late now to fix.

He opened the gate for Gil and watched the boy slide down the steep hill his on his bottom to get to the airplane that was wedged between the rocks along the creek bank. Gil returned dusty, but triumphant, the plane held high so it wouldn't touch the dirt as he struggled back up the slope.

“Why don't you want to be a rancher?” Ian asked, latching the gate behind Gil.

“I want to fly airplanes,” he said with a measure of frustration that his grandfather hadn't understood that the first time he had said it.

Ian lifted Gil up into the crotch of a walnut tree where he sailed his plane out over the level lawn.

“I don't like cows,” Gil added after some thought.

“But you're a McGill,” Ian said, picking up the toy and handing it to the boy. “You're a fourth-generation cattle rancher. Third one in line for this place. All this is going to be yours.” He swept his arm out at the field.

“I want to fly airplanes,” he repeated and launched his balsa wood plane into the air.

Ian laughed. He had wanted to be an astronomer when he had first learned about Halley's Comet in the third grade. Then he had wanted to be railroad engineer. But he was born to ranching, just like Jacob, and now Gil. He wouldn't force the issue with his grandson.

He would let the boy come to the inevitable conclusion in his own time—in his own way. But sooner or later Gil would understand the value of what was destined to be his.

“Billy White Horse says we took their land,” Gil said. He was occupied with straightening the wings of his plane before setting it aflight again.

“We didn’t take anyone’s land,” Ian said. “I bought this place myself. I have the papers.”

“He said white people are murderers.”

Ian cupped the boy’s chin and looked him in the eye. “Listen to me, Gil. We have as much right to be here as anyone. This land was for sale by the government. And we didn’t kill anyone to get it. Do you understand?”

Gil nodded and launched the plane. Ian had always held reservations about Indians and whites attending school together. But there were too few resources out here to have more than one community school. Jacob and Joanne had reported similar declarations from their Indian playmates, and Ian resented that these accusations persisted so long after the conflict was over. When were these people going to let the past alone and focus on being productive citizens in the present?

“Billy doesn’t have his facts right,” Ian said, retrieving the toy again. “What happened with the Indians was long before we moved here. We didn’t do anything wrong.”

As Ian handed the plane up to his grandson again, Jacob drove in, dust roiling up behind him, his pickup bed full of neat, square hay bales. He waved at Ian and Gil, and when he had parked near the shop, he walked toward them. Ian was proud of Jacob. He couldn’t imagine a better son—didn’t believe one existed. Jacob was strong and tall and golden-haired. They had joked that he wasn’t a true McGill because the odds of being born with

anything but fiery red hair had to have been astronomically slim. But Jacob looked too much like Ian to deny the connection. They shared the same broad cheekbones and green eyes. Long limbed and sinewy, they masked their strength in stealthy, fluid movements.

Jacob taught adult Sunday school at their church, and he had organized a local hockey team that met at Canim Pond once a week during the dark winter months when ranching was done in bursts of feeding livestock, chopping ice, and warming new calves next to the woodstove in the workshop.

“Joanne must be home,” Jacob said.

“What tipped you off?” Ian’s eyes wandered to the Bel Air under the willow trees, but he couldn’t keep the smile off his face. “That’s some good-looking hay you got.”

“It should be good-lucking. Cost me an arm and a leg.” Jacob shook his head. “Gil keeping you busy?”

Ian ruffled Gil’s hair. “He’s telling me about his plans to become an airplane pilot. We need to get this boy involved in the ranch so he has a shot at becoming a cowboy instead.”

Jacob nodded thoughtfully. “I guess he’s getting old enough to be going with me on some of these errands.”

“You were about his age when you started.”

Gil looked up at his father, then his grandfather, the balsa wood plane resting delicately in his fingers. “But I don’t like cows.”

SYLVIA

Sylvia sat in her office carefully reviewing the latest version of collateral from the creative department. The images of the Matteson Lodge were elegant, highlighting the craftsmanship of the renovation. The headlines and copy were bold in their statements about Intrinsic Architectural and its commitment to quality. Everything exuded strength. Pride, not simply in the firm and its work, but in its tribal heritage, its community. She nodded and laid the brochure and ads on the desk, smiling. Kayla had nailed the company's brand image in these pieces and proven that she was indeed the correct choice to lead that department. Sylvia hoped that Kayla would stay, and she intended to do whatever she could to convince Kayla that life here was richer than she might be thinking at the moment. Sylvia understood how difficult moving to a new place could be—and the Reservation was not exactly Seattle or San Francisco. Though its charms, such as the bear with her cub that had wandered into town the previous morning, forcing everyone to stay inside until the pair slowly meandered through, were precisely what most locals loved. Still, it took time for outsiders to appreciate these things in the same way.

She had experienced her share of moving, but none was as traumatic as the first. When her mother died, Sylvia had been sent to Missoula where she lived with a white foster family. It was a long year during which Nona fought desperately to gain custody of her. It still infuriated Sylvia—twenty-five years later—that anyone believed she would be better off in a strange home in another county than with her own grandmother, simply because she was Indian. She knew things had changed since then. There were laws now that kept Indian

children with Indian families, their own or foster families. But it didn't ease the pitted feeling in her stomach when she thought of that time in her life. As an adult, Sylvia had learned to deflect those memories, but she could only do it for so long before one would slip in and take her by surprise. Sylvia had often wondered why those memories were so painful; she hadn't suffered any specific trauma during that year, yet she *had* been traumatized. The family, the Barlows, was nice. They lived on the north side of Missoula in a threadbare house, not much different from those on the Reservation, in a working-class neighborhood. Mr. Barlow was a quiet man who worked at the sawmill and smiled shyly at Sylvia, as if he scarcely knew what to say to her. He rose very early, when the house was still quiet, and read from his Bible every single morning before leaving for work. In the evenings he sat by the woodstove and watched the news, then fell asleep in his chair while his children played near his feet. Mrs. Barlow was a high school art teacher, bubbly and prone to trying too hard to be friends with Sylvia. She had taken Sylvia school shopping and bought her very nice new clothes—the brands Sylvia had only wished for before. Expensive brands she was sure, looking back, that the Barlows couldn't afford, either. They had wanted her to be happy, and she felt bad that they tried so hard give her what they had called “a better life.” In response, she had been a sullen girl who simply wanted to go home to the Reservation.

The Barlows had two preschool boys that Sylvia often looked after, not because they expected her to, but because she volunteered every chance she got. It was an excuse to stay out of extracurricular activities at school. A reason not to be hanging out with the white girls in the neighborhood who would never hang out with Sylvia, anyway. That was the year she discovered that Indians were invisible. The kids had eyed her curiously for the first few days, and one large and raggedy-looking boy tried to bully her out of her seat on the bus. But Sylvia stomped his toe so effectively that he was forced to turn his attention to holding back tears, and he never bothered her again. She was left alone, simply alone. Even the teacher,

who gave her a desk in the back of the classroom, rarely said a word to her. She handed back papers with a grade scribbled on top, usually a C, but without commentary. Sylvia spied the smiley faces, stars, and long explanations scrawled on her classmates pages and wondered how to get better at her work. That year had been a single, long moment of isolation that stretched on for what had seemed an eternity.

Sylvia gathered her things and turned off her office light, locking the door. She had worked late again, and the building was now quiet. She tried to think of what she had at home to fix for supper, but she had forgotten to grocery shop. She would have to pick something up on the way.

As she sat at the bar in the café, waiting for her take-out salad, she listened to the myriad conversations around her. Two men in coveralls down the bar argued politics, one insisting that liberals were a bunch of stupid morons who simply wanted government to take care of them. He slapped his hand on the counter to punctuate his point. The other attempted vainly to steer the conversation back to specific points about the economy. She tuned in, noting how the second man's jaw tensed as he repeated the same statement about super pacs buying candidates. What was the point of talking about politics with this man, she wondered. Some people simply preferred to name call and villainize the opposition. She had encountered plenty of people like him here in the right-leaning West. Her politics were aligned with the tribe, which tended to employ a community doctrine that was often in conflict with the individualist politics of the region.

“He isn't going to listen,” she said, but not loud enough for anyone to hear. “Give it up.”

Victor slid onto the stool next to her. He placed his large hand warmly against the small of her back, startling her. “Who isn't going to listen?”

She gently removed his hand and nodded toward the men. “I was just listening to their political discussion.”

“Eating alone again?” he asked. His wary eyes didn’t match his soft smile, and she thought he looked tired. He had cultivated fine lines at the corners of his eyes and across his forehead. Streaks of gray had shown up at his temples, and she wondered when this happened.

She didn’t answer his question. What was the point? “How are you, Victor?”

He looked at her a long moment, the overhead fan blowing fine strands of hair across his cheek. “I could be better. We could both be better.”

“We’ve been through this before.” She swiveled away from him, facing the window, and looked at her watch. The waitress handed her a bag with the receipt carefully stapled to it.

“Thanks,” Sylvia said and stepped off the stool. Victor walked with her, holding the door open and following her out onto the sunny walk.

“Please, Sylvia,” he said. “Talk to me.”

She paused and gave him her full attention, craning up and shielding her eyes with her free hand. She liked the way he looked now; it seemed that he had perfected his presentation while he was away. His black leather vest and colorful western shirt gave his complexion a dark and ruddy quality. He had always worn boots, but now he polished them to a high reddish-brown shine. He was as handsome as he had ever been, and his presence here now, after she had believed he would stay in Minnesota forever, was not making this easy for her. At least when he lived far away she could pretend that distance had come between them.

“What is there to talk about?” She turned to go, but he caught her arm and held her.

“Neither one of us is getting any younger,” he said.

“It doesn’t change anything.” She pulled free, but did not leave.

“What difference will it make that your children aren’t tribal members when you don’t have any?” He stared down at her defiantly. These were harsher and more direct questions than he had asked before.

“It matters,” she insisted. “The tribe isn’t growing. It’s declining.”

“What are you going to do, wait until the last possible moment and then get yourself knocked up by some drunk bastard like Bill Coulee?” Victor’s nostrils flared, and his lips were thin and bloodless. She was stunned by his words. “Huh, is that what you’re going to do so you can have your tribally qualified kids?”

“You motherfucker! How dare you?” she said, her tone low and forced. It gained the attention of a couple at one of the outdoor tables.

“Your stubbornness is going to get you nothing. When you could have so much more.”

She turned away from him and gazed at the western mountains, biting her lip until it hurt. A breeze brought in the sweet scent of freshly cut alfalfa hay. She wondered if Victor was right that her stubborn insistence on a husband with tribal membership would end in nothing. She thought of Bill Coulee, that man she had known since the seventh grade. Blade thin, pockmarked, and scabbed bloody from meth use. He spent his days sleeping off his hangover on any couch he find, and his nights at the Buffalo Tavern drinking vodka on credit until his monthly welfare check came in and he could afford to get Vicodin or crack or meth.

“I love you,” Victor said. “But I won’t wait forever, you know?” He leaned in close to her face. His anger had given way to sadness, and she could hear his voice tremble.

“Please, Victor,” she whispered in desperation. “Don’t do this. It’s hard enough.”

“Do what? Offer you my love? Is it so unworthy to you?”

She blinked back tears.

“I’m not good enough to father your children. Just say it.” He stared at her. “Say it!”

“Stop it. Stop it! Please, Victor, stop this.”

“Geeze, Sylvia. You treat me like I’m dog shit. ”

She started to protest, to assure him that she had only the highest regard for him, but he was walking away. She watched him go. What could she say that wouldn’t bring him back imploring her to change her mind?

She dropped the bag in the trashcan and walked in the opposite direction home where she sat in the seclusion of her patio, under a great shady elm tree, and cried until her eyes ached and her mouth went dry.

JOSEPH

At the MIA meeting Monday evening Joseph was distracted. He had been lost in thought since waking up at Kayla's house the other morning. Sometimes he found himself absently smiling like an idiot, and sometimes he suffered a pang of anxiety about getting involved. But then wasn't he already involved? He couldn't get much more involved than sleeping with her, he thought. And that made him want to call her. He had called her Sunday evening—he wasn't one of those guys who didn't call. He didn't sleep around as a matter of course now that he was an adult, and he hadn't planned to sleep with Kayla on their first date.

Their phone conversation had been a bit awkward. They discussed the weather, and she told him about having iced tea with Paula while sitting in the weeds. At the time he had listened politely, but later he had considered that a very strange thing to do, to drink iced tea in the weeds without speaking. Was that an Arab thing, he wondered? He told her about his new heifers and how one had gotten into the fresh alfalfa and bloated. He had spent the better part of Sunday afternoon threading a plastic tube into her and pouring castor oil down her gullet. But after hours of trying to save her she had dropped to the ground, rolled onto her side and expired with her tongue sticking out.

"If I'd known she was going to that, I'd have shot her first and saved myself the time and trouble," he had said. "Not to mention her suffering. Should have just put her down."

"Wow. Does this happen often," Kayla asked.

He went into graphic detail about shooting the cow in the head as a precaution before butchering her. That's when he realized how barbaric the topic was for someone he hoped to impress. Thinking of it now he was kind of glad he had told her about it, including all the sordid details. She needed to understand what ranching life was all about, and there were few better examples than that one. And maybe Kayla would decide it wasn't her cup of tea. He thought that would be okay, too. He didn't want to invest a lot of time in getting to know someone who didn't want to live his lifestyle.

"Hey, you with us, Joseph?" Louise Pike said.

"Huh?" he asked, looking around the room of expectant faces. The group tittered nervously.

"He's got his mind on a matter of great importance," Leo Rathdrum said. "She's a pretty one, too."

The group erupted in laughter, and Joseph felt his face burn hot.

"We're voting to finalize and send the second letter," Louise said with a measure of annoyance.

"Oh, yes. Yes. All in favor," he said. The group raised their hands and Louise counted aloud.

"Against," Joseph said. Three people raised their hands, one of whom was Leo who held it stoically in the air and stared from under his grease-stained ball cap at Joseph and Louise.

"Leo," Louise shouted. "Time is of the essence. The governor is ready to sign the compact into law. All he needs is a yes vote from the legislature. Aren't you keeping up?"

“He’s on the other side,” someone muttered, but Joseph didn’t catch who it was. He put his hand up to calm the room, but it was too late. Leo was swinging at someone in the back row, and everyone was rushing in to pull him away.

At home, Joseph debated calling Kayla. It was 8:45, and the evening had taken a lot out of him. He believed Leo was on the opposition’s side, attending the MIA meetings as a mole. Joseph knew someone was feeding them information; they always knew details about conversations at the meetings that had to come from someone who attended. But nothing they were doing was secret. Unlike the tribal compact meetings, the MIA meetings were open to everyone. Their minutes could be read by asking for them at the irrigation management office, and their proceedings were public information. They couldn’t afford not to be completely open, both for the benefit of irrigators who could not attend, and for the desire to show transparency in their dealings. For these reasons, they hadn’t concerned themselves with the idea of a spy in their midst, except to look about the room suspiciously, wondering who it might be.

Joseph had wanted to discuss the need for the MIA to go to Helena and testify to the legislature in person. But the meeting ended in chaos and that discussion would have to wait for cooler heads. He wondered if it was worth it. Of course it was. They had to do everything within their powers to defeat the compact, but public opinion seemed stacked against them. Lawmakers in Helena didn’t understand the plight of the local ranchers, only that they were living within the borders of an Indian reservation—land that, in their minds, belonged to the tribe. They had forgotten their own government’s actions to allocate parcels to Indians and deem the remainder as surplus. It was done to entice white settlement, and that’s why Joseph

was here, because the government had opened it up to pioneers like his great-grandfather. But public opinion and a poor understanding of historical precedence seemed against him now.

He wondered if it too late to call Kayla. He had lost track of what was polite. He finally picked up the phone and tapped in her number.

She answered on the second ring, and he wondered if she had been waiting for him.

“Hey. It’s not too late is it?”

“Oh, well, yes actually. It is. I’ve just finished slathering Ben-Gay on my joints and I was about to soak my teeth.”

He realized he was grinning. “You rent a place with one of those walk-in tubs and handrails so you don’t fall and break a hip?”

“In Mission? You must be out of your mind. All the places with handicapped bathrooms are instantly snapped up. They go like hotcakes.”

“You’re funny.”

She giggled. “So are you.”

“Drink tea in the weeds with anyone today?” He scooped dog food into Weeb’s bowl and patted the dog on the head. Weeb never ate until he got an official okay from Joseph, which he found charmingly odd.

“Well, since it’s Monday I thought I would go into work, instead. You know how they are about expecting you to show up every day. I mean, geez, they think they own you or something.” Her voice was light and flirty, and he wondered how anyone could do her wrong the way her husband had.

“You should go in for ranching then. No one expects anything of you.” He settled into his leather arm chair and turned on the television, but muted the sound. He liked it for the company, but rarely paid any attention to it.

“Right. After that little story about the bloated cow I’m not sure I have the stomach for it. And that happened on a Sunday when I was home taking a bubble bath and painting my nails.”

He imagined her taking a bubble bath, her hair wet and her lovely breasts dripping with suds. “I bet that was relaxing. I guess I should get one of those big soaking tubs and give it a try myself.”

“You should.”

“I know. You can maybe help me pick out the right bubble bath for it. I understand there are dozens to choose from. I would hate to screw that up.” Weeb laid his head in Joseph’s lap, looking for affection, and Joseph scratched his ears. The dog panted contentedly.

“I’ll probably need to show you how to use the tub. It’s not as straight forward as you think.”

“I’m sure it isn’t.”

“How’s your water compact thingy coming?”

He sighed. “Sending the second, more urgent letter off tomorrow. But it may be too late. It appears that our governor is poised to sign this thing into law.”

“What does that mean?”

“Means my water rights are null and what I get for irrigation will be at the tribe’s mercy.” It had taken him a long time to say these words aloud, and doing so without the choke of emotion even longer. But each time he said it, he was deadened a little more to its sting.

She made a little gasping sound as if understanding for the first time, and he felt his stomach hollow out again at the prospect of it. His stoicism crumbled and he was suddenly thinking about the financial ruin it would bring if it passed. He wouldn’t be able to predict whether he had get enough water to raise a crop. Anything short of what he currently received would cause him to default on the loan he had taken to pay for the pivot. It seemed inconceivable.

“But he hasn’t signed it yet, right?”

“No. It has to pass the legislature first, but he’s made it clear that he hopes it will.”

Joseph tried to reassure himself that there was still time to convince them otherwise.

“I’m sorry,” she said.

“Let’s not borrow trouble. This isn’t over yet.” Joseph had lost his desire to chat, and he told her he was tired. They said goodnight, and he pulled his boots on again. Outside, he wandered into the alfalfa field and gazed up at the mountains. They were deep purple-blue with crisp new snow crowning the peaks. A cool breeze swept down from the falls, and he wondered whose side these mountains were on. Did they care who won the water war? Did they have a preference for the indigenous people over the invaders, the colonizers, the industrializers? He said these names aloud, “Invaders, colonizers, industrializers.” These labels had been bounced around this place for as long as he could remember, but that was ancient history and those words had lost their bite. He stared long at the mountains. No, this was recent history, he realized, in the face of this landscape carved out over millennia in the

pace of glaciers. This was the newest chapter in a fight for land that everyone had believed was over.

KAYLA

Kayla and Sylvia sat in the large conference room at Intrinsic Architectural. Laid out across the table between them were concepts for the second phase of the historic preservation campaign—a small fur trapper’s cabin in the Swan Valley. It was thought to be the oldest remaining log cabin of its type in Montana, and a couple from New Jersey had bought it and hired the firm to restore the original structure as a guest house and build a large, modern dwelling nearby in the same style. The brochure and web pages would discuss both the restoration of the historic building and how the firm had used reclaimed materials to keep the period feel, as well as the construction of a modern, comfortable home that looked as if it had been on the same site for two-hundred years.

“Do these bother you?” Kayla said, holding up a shot of the cabin. She felt she could ask these questions now that she and Sylvia had become such close friends. “I mean restoring a cabin from the time when white settlers were just arriving here.”

Sylvia sighed and sat back in the plush leather chair. She swiveled it toward the window, framing the ever-present Catholic Church. “It used to. But fur trappers weren’t really settlers. Not that they weren’t disruptive—they were. They decimated the wildlife. But they never intended to stay. And they preferred to befriend Indians in order to make their work easier. Hell, half the Reservation has fur trapper ancestors. Where do you think my last name comes from? They were a horny bunch!”

Kayla laughed.

“Besides, I love architecture, and that’s not exactly a traditional Indian profession.”

“I see your point.” Kayla leafed through more images of the cabin and placed them over the brochure layout to see how they looked.

“Besides, it’s water under the bridge. White people are here now. There isn’t much to do about it but make money from them.” She returned to reviewing copy.

The mention of water reminded Kayla of Joseph’s fight. She had been meaning to ask Sylvia about it. “What do you think of the water compact?”

Sylvia looked up and studied Kayla. “You ask because of Joseph, I assume.”

Kayla nodded. “He says he’ll lose all the value of his land and his ability to produce anything on it if the compact goes into law.” She was careful to sound neutral. And she really didn’t know which side she was on. She cared about Joseph, but this was Reservation, after all. She had become much more aware of Native American history since working at the firm and spending time with Sylvia.

“I’m not intimately familiar with the compact,” Sylvia said. “But I’ve heard enough about it. I don’t know that he’s being realistic in his assessment.”

“What do you mean?”

Sylvia pulled her reading glasses off and set them on the table. She had beautiful dark eyes, and Kayla thought the glasses hid them while at the same time making her look intelligent and wise.

“Well, there will be provisions for irrigators. Just not the same as what they have now. The compact is about prioritizing fish habitat. To do that, we might have to cut back on irrigation allotments for agriculture,” Sylvia said.

“How far will you have to cut back?” Kayla noticed the way Sylvia said *we*. It was attractive, the idea of being a member of a tribe—a collective of people who banded together as one. She had never been a part of anything like that. She wondered if everyone in the tribe felt this way, or if there were cliques and inner circles. Were there members on the margins, disenfranchised?

“I don’t know,” Sylvia said. “You should be talking to Victor. He’s the water expert.”

“I gather from Joseph that he operates on a pretty thin margin. Any loss could cause him to default. And he just invested in that big irrigation system. You know the kind he’s got. They span the whole field in a big circle.”

Sylvia nodded. “A pivot. Not a cheap piece of equipment.”

Kayla felt somehow reassured that Indians, at least one, understood Joseph’s predicament.

Sylvia faced Kayla head-on. “I like Joseph. I don’t want to see him lose his ranch. I really don’t.”

Kayla sensed that there was more unsaid in that statement than said. She didn’t look away, waiting for Sylvia to elaborate. Sylvia put her glasses on and returned to the copy, but Kayla waited. At last Sylvia looked up, removed her glasses again, and sat back in her chair.

“Listen, this is Reservation. It’s treaty land. The US government gave it to us in exchange for the vast expanse of sacred and hunting lands it took by force. And it was a pittance. If they had had their way, we would all be dead now. The erosion of Indian rights up to, and since the signing of that treaty, is a well-trod trail. Don’t you think it’s reasonable that the Reservation finally be management by Indians? For Indians?”

Kayla felt a little ashamed for having pushed the issue. She could see both sides.

At home, Kayla pressed the phone to her ear with one hand and with the other petted Henry who was stretched out long across her belly. The cat had grown up, no longer a kitten, but a lanky juvenile with boundless energy and affection. It was a warm evening, and she had purchased a reclining lawn chair that she had set on the back patio where she could lean back and stare up into the canopy of a weeping willow tree. It was peaceful and quiet, and when she was lying all the way back she couldn't see the overgrown lawn that she had failed to maintain. The grass was too long now to mow, even if she had a mower. She hoped it wouldn't come out of her deposit when she left.

“Hi, dad,” she said when he answered.

“Kaylaaaaa!”

She thought he sounded a little more chipper than he had recently, and that made her feel good. “How are things with you?”

“They are going okay,” he said. “I sold the house.”

She felt a sharp stab deep in her gut, and she tried to not let the pain come through in the sound of her voice. “Oh, really?”

“It's a good time to sell a house, I guess,” he went on. “It was only listed for two weeks. I got what I wanted for it, but they make me fix the roof. I don't want to fix it, and I told them that from the beginning. I know it's a bad roof when I sold it. I did so much other stuff to this place—it was a money sink hole. But their bank says fix it.”

She thought of her mother's things. “What are you going to do with...” She didn't know how to ask these questions. Part of her still hadn't fully believed that he was going back

home to live. She had let herself believe that he would change his mind. Visit a few months and return.

“I will come to see you before I go. I will bring you some things.” There was a long pause. “I don’t know what to do with all of this stuff.”

She tried to imagine having those things he was talking about—furniture, household items, keepsakes—her mother’s collection of antique jars—here in Montana. Where would she put it? This wasn’t her home. She didn’t want those things here—she wanted them there, in Oregon, in her father’s house where they belong. It brought her to tears, and she sniffed them back.

“Bunny,” he said, “it’s going to be okay.”

“I know, I know. I just miss you. It will be good to see you.”

“You can visit me, too,” he said. “Your aunts and cousins will like to see you. They ask about you all the time.”

She knew it was unlikely in the present state of Libya that she would be visiting. Her father, ever the optimist, was talking about a future time. A better time. When his homeland would no longer be at war, but the way he remembered it as a boy. If she told him that she was going with him now, he would tell her to wait. She was an American in every respect when it came to this. An outsider in a dangerous place. A target for kidnapping... or worse. But he would blend into local society as if he had never been away. She could never do that.

She stilled her emotions and tried to think only of him and what he needed from her. This is what he wanted. And without her mother—his wife—it was what would make him happy, it seemed. “When are you going? Have you set a date?”

“The end of August,” he said quietly.

She bit her lip, tears springing anew. She tried to respond, but the words caught in her throat. And the two of them remained silent for several long seconds.

“Can you get away from work to show me around Montana in August?” he finally said.

“Yes,” she whispered. “I can’t wait to see you, dad.”

“Do you want my car?”

She thought of her Mustang and its high monthly payment and terrible gas mileage. Though she loved the car, it had been a source of stress for her. And his car still had low miles, though it was nearly ten years old. An Audi station wagon, it wasn’t as sporty as hers, but it was comfortable and paid for.

“Yeah. I’ve been thinking of selling the Mustang. I can’t really afford it.”

“Good. I’ll make arrangements.”

When they hung up Kayla realized that the real reason she wanted her father’s car was because she didn’t want him to have to buy a new one if he came back. Was that wishful thinking? Perhaps. But she couldn’t stand the idea of him selling it, and it being lost to her forever.

JOSEPH

Alice glanced often at Joseph as they drove north toward the lake. They rarely fished the lake, but he was frustrated by his mother's good fortune on the Flathead River. It seemed everyone was getting lucky there, but him. She stared at the side of his head as he turned up the east side of the lake toward Jetty Point. He ignored her, looking in the side-view mirror to see that the boat trailer cleared the turn. She persisted.

"What?" he finally said. But he knew what it she wanted.

"Well? Aren't you going to tell me about her?"

"Who?"

"Joe! Everyone knows you're seeing that new girl in town. Everyone! Don't you think you owe it to your mother to fill her in a little? How do you think I feel having all these people asking me about her when I've never met her?"

He sighed. "Sometimes I really hate living in a small town."

She stared, waiting.

"There's nothing to tell. We've only been out on one date."

"Did that include the benefit dinner?"

He gave his mother an exasperated look. “That wasn’t a date. That was the night I got to know her. I asked her out one time after that, no big deal.”

She smiled, satisfied and turned forward again. The cherries were coming on bright red in the orchards above the lake, and Joseph had the idea to bring Kayla up when the roadside stands opened. There was nothing like a day floating on the water, eating sweet cherries and spitting the pits into the water. She would enjoy it, whether she fished or not. Maybe he would inflate a couple of inner tubes.

“When are you going to introduce her to me?” Alice asked.

“Never.”

She laughed.

“If you and I are going to be trapped in that fishing boat all morning, we better think of something else to talk about.” The aluminum boat was eight feet long with a bench in the front and one in the back near the small outboard motor. They had spent plenty of time in it together, something he had never done with his father. He knew his mother had packed tuna or salami sandwiches with dill pickle slices and apples, and he had brought cheddar cheese potato chips and soft drinks; Coke for him and orange Shasta for her. They had a routine—each his or her own responsibilities that they now carried out in preparation without discussion.

“Okay, I’ll leave you alone about it. But it would be nice to meet this woman.”

“Make you a deal,” he said. “If I’m still seeing her in a month, I’ll bring her by and introduce her. In exchange, you quit asking all these questions, which you know I’m not going to answer anyway.”

“Fair enough,” she said. “Besides, you’re not the only one in town who knows her.”

He shot a hot scowl at his mother.

“Oh, quit!” she said. “I’m just teasing. You are so sensitive.”

Joseph pulled into the park entrance and coasted down the long hill toward the boat ramp. He admired the inviting sapphire blue of the water stretched out before them. The natural beauty of this place was never lost on him. The hue of glacier-fed water made the lake shimmer like an opal, glinting out of a sea of emerald conifers, and he wished the hill were twice as long so he could gaze longer. He swung the truck and trailer around in a wide arc and backed the aluminum boat into the water. There were a handful of trucks and empty trailers parked nearby, but the best part of being a rancher, as opposed to the manager of a hydro-electric plant like Victor, was that Joseph could fish on any random weekday morning while others attended meetings and answered email. He slid out to release the boat and secure it to the dock. His mother followed, collecting the cooler and their fishing tackle from the bed of the pickup and setting them in a neat stack on the sun-bleached wood.

When he had parked the truck and returned to the dock, his mother was in the boat, the gear neatly in its place. She sat in the bow, putting her pole together, wearing large sunglasses and a floppy, wide-brimmed hat to protect herself from the sun. He shoved off and started the motor, making his way out onto the immense lake, which never seemed as big as from inside a tiny aluminum fishing boat.

“Try Wild Horse Island,” she said.

“That’s where I’m headed.” The island was named for its herds of feral horses, descendants of those left behind by the Salish who pastured them on the island to prevent other tribes from stealing them. It was now a park, but accessible only by boat. And some of its steeper, rocky shorelines made for prime fishing. Joseph liked fishing farther out in open water, but he felt a little safer keeping land within swimming distance, especially when his

mother was with him. She would never admit to slowing down in her older age, but he could see that she was less sure in her step at times, grasping onto railings and other sturdy aids when she thought no one was paying attention.

After selecting a promising spot, Joseph cut the engine and let the boat drift on the waves a few minutes. “This is good,” he said, dropping the short anchor line.

“Maybe, if you two get married and have babies,” Alice said, “those little Indian children will secure you water under the new compact deal.”

“That’s not going to happen.”

“Famous last words,” Alice said good-naturedly.

He cast a line and settled in to the rhythm of the rocking boat. “She’s not Indian.”

“She’s not Indian?” Alice stared at Joseph once again, her arm poised to cast.

“She’s Arab.” He revealed a little in that statement. It was provocative in its way. A little bombshell that would detonate a variety of thoughts in his mother’s mind all day.

Joseph got lucky early and landed a nice, fat cutthroat trout, followed by two rainbow. His mother changed flies multiple times, eyeing Joseph’s fish basket where he had quietly, but very slowly, stashed his fish, admiring them ridiculously as he did so. She had pretended not to notice, but now he could tell that they were bothering her.

They beached the boat and climbed onto the shore at the island for lunch. As she took the sandwiches out of the cooler, Alice casually suggested that they move out a little into open water.

“I don’t know,” he said. “This seems like a pretty nice spot to me.”

“I’d like to try for something else, and I think they’ll be farther out.”

“If you want,” he said, sipping his Coke and smiling. “I’ve caught my supper already. Want to see ‘em?”

She kept her eyes on the lake, pretending he hadn’t offered to show her his catch.

“Mighty pretty, they are.”

She ignored him, and when they had finished their lunch and returned to the boat, Joseph took them out into the deeper part of the lake. Alice changed lures and started anew, as if the day had only just begun. Joseph was sun-tired and full, and he stretched out in the gently rocking boat with his ball cap pulled down over his eyes and his outer shirt waded up as a pillow, and he napped.

He awoke sometime later to his mother nudging his foot. “C’mon, Joe. Let’s get your fish home and gutted.”

He sat up and surveyed the boat, but he couldn’t see that she had caught anything. Was it possible that he had finally bested his mother on a day of fishing? It was about damned time, he thought. He would enjoy this day for many many months to come. But he had be careful about how he rubbed it in—savoring his victory as long as possible.

They stacked the cooler and gear on the dock and Joseph loaded the boat onto the trailer.

“Can you grab me a soda?” Alice asked as he lifted the cooler into the truck bed.

“Sure, I could use one too.” He opened the cooler to find a perfect Kokanee salmon gently laid out on the ice. He stared at the bright red fish, stunned. Salmon! How had she done that? He slept long enough to miss her landing a salmon, had he? He gazed out at the

lake. Maybe she bought it off another fisherman—someone passing by in another boat? He had to move the salmon aside to reach the soda cans.

In the truck he handed her the soda, pretending that he hadn't seen the fish. She smiled out the window as they pulled onto the highway toward home.

"I think I'll smoke that salmon," she finally said. They were a few miles from Mission, and it was the first they had spoken since leaving the lake.

"I can't believe your luck. You should be a fishing guide or something."

"And give away all my secrets?" She chuckled. "But seriously, Joe, there is something I need to say."

He listened, and it took her longer than normal to say what she had on her mind.

"I don't approve of you dating an Arab woman."

Joseph almost laughed out loud. But when he realized she wasn't joking, his mood turned dark. "What do you mean, you don't approve?"

"I think you would be better off with a Christian woman. I don't know anything about Moslems, and I suspect neither do you. I mean, other than what I've seen on television. And that hasn't been too positive, and I think you'll agree with me on that. I think it's a violent religion, full of extremists. If you two had children, it would be a nightmare."

"First of all, I'm old enough that I don't need parental approval to see whoever I want, mom," he said, giving her a purposeful glance. He gripped the steering wheel hard. "And second, who's talking about having children? Aren't you jumping out way ahead of the cart here?"

“You know how these things go, Joe. You think, ‘oh, I’ll just see her for a little while’ and then before you know it you’re in love and getting married and starting a family.”

“I’m not having this conversation with you.”

He pulled up in front of her house and they both sat quietly staring at it.

“Joe—”

He put his hand up to halt her words.

She watched him, her jaw clenched. “Seems you’re already pretty attached to have this kind of reaction to my feelings.”

He wondered if that were true. He imagined that he just hated being told what to do. As a grown man, he didn’t need his mother approving or forbidding his dating choices.

“I think I’ll go home. I’m tired. It’s been a long day.”

“Joe. Please. Let’s fry these fish up and have a nice supper.”

He remained still, thinking. If he left now it would not only make a very loud statement about Kayla and his feelings for her, but it would also hurt his mother’s feelings in ways he would be sorry about for a long time.

“I’m not talking about this with you,” he said again. “Whether I choose to see her or not is my business. You’ve said your piece.”

She nodded, though her disappointment was visible. They got slowly out of the truck and he went to work cleaning the fish over the utility sink in the garage.

Several days passed as Joseph worked on securing promises from MIA members to attend a public hearing on the water compact at the State House in Helena. It was coming up

quickly, and he had hand selected a few people he felt were critical to showing the impact. Olan Wilson, Walter D'Alene, and Quinten Fisk were prime among them. Joseph wanted the legislature to understand that this wasn't an Indian versus white issue; these men were Indians. If they could get the legislature to see that Indians themselves would be hurt by this compact, it might make them stop and actually look at its potential devastation. He dialed Olan's number first, then Walter's. But neither man answered. He tried Quinten.

"Hello?" Quinten was in his seventies and had a smoker's rasp. He wore a perpetual scowl on his grizzled face, but Joseph had known him for most of his life and he knew that underneath the gruff veneer was a generous, kind man. Quinten would give the shirt off his back to anyone who needed it, but he would grouse about it the whole time. Joseph wished his father hadn't done everything in his power while he was alive and in charge of the McGill ranch to make Quinten's life miserable. He wasn't sure how the feud had gotten started, but no one needed to convince Joseph that it was Gil's, and not Quinten's, doing. The argument had been over an easement, not on the McGill ranch, but on the one bordering it to the west, for irrigating Quinten's landlocked field across the road. It was nothing Gil should've been concerned about, and now that he thought about it, Joseph wondered if the bad blood his father had stirred up with Quinten would cause the tribe to become punitive with him if the compact passed. He grimaced at the prospect. Tribal politics made little sense to him, and often seemed to him punitive towards people who were not in agreement with those in power.

"Quinten, it's McGill."

"I was just getting ready to call you, Joseph," the old man said. "Wilson and D'Alene are here."

"No wonder I can't reach anyone," Joseph replied.

“Yeah, listen.” Quinten said something to the others, but Joseph couldn’t make it out.
“We’re pulling out of the irrigator’s alliance.”

“What? Why? And what do you mean *we*?”

“All three of us. We... don’t think it’s worth the fight. The compact is going through.
We can’t stop it.”

“Wait. *We can*. We have to fight this. We need you guys—especially you guys.”

“Can’t do it. Sorry.”

“But why?” Joseph felt his pulse pounding in his neck. “Last week you were on
board. What happened?”

“You know how it is.” The old man sounded defeated, and that was new. Joseph had
never known Quinten to give up on anything, which is why it had taken so long for him to
befriend the man after his father passed. The old Indian had claimed victory in the feud based
on the fact that Gil was dead and he was still alive, though he had nothing to do with Gil’s
death. He didn’t need Joseph’s apology or his friendship. It had taken years for Joseph to
convince him that his motive for friendliness were not a trap, but that were neighbors, and
Joseph liked to be surrounded by friends, not enemies.

“I *don’t* know how it is. Maybe you can spell it out for me.” Joseph’s voice was hot
and stiff.

“Look, it’s not the same for us.”

Joseph waited, and it took a protracted period of awkward silence to convince the man
to speak again.

“I’m telling you, there is this one Indian guy who had a lease for over fifty years on a piece of land and when his lease came due last month they gave it to someone else. He doesn’t need water now.”

“What are you saying?” Joseph understood that the ‘story of another guy’ was an indirect way of telling one of their own stories. “When did this guy start his lease? 1958? Sometime around then?”

“1959.”

Joseph understood now. Quinten didn’t own his field. He leased it from the tribe.

“Who’d they give this guy’s lease to?”

“Bill Coulee.” A distinct bitterness rode through on the man’s voice.

Joseph knew who Bill Coulee was, and he was as far being a ranching man as one could get. Coulee didn’t own cattle or equipment. He was a bum. He spent his nights high or drunk, and his days passed out or scrounging for money to get high or drunk. No one seriously imagined that a fine parcel of land like the one Quinten had been ranching for a half-century could be handed over to Bill Coulee. This was a message. A loud, clear message from the tribe to its members who opposed their plans.

“Walter and Olan, too?”

“Olan owns his, but Walter leases,” Quinten said.

There was a long pause in which Joseph didn’t know what to say.

“Good luck. That’s all I can offer you,” Quinten said and hung up.

Joseph wandered outside and sat in the porch swing overlooking the creek and bridge. His grandfather had always talked about putting a cabin up on the other side, just inside the

woods. He could see level ground through the trees, high enough to be out of the flood plain, but close to water. Both his father and his grandfather had talked of fishing from the deck of this imaginary cabin, and Joseph also thought that might be a nice way to spend his days.

Better than this business of ranching and fighting for water rights. Maybe he would do that; put up the cabin. Sell the rest of the place. If he all got was the cost of that damn pivot, he could start over without debt at least. He took a deep breath and tipped his head back, closing his eyes. “And start over doing what?”

KAYLA

More than a week had passed since Kayla had heard from Joseph. She thought of him often, and each time she told herself that he was busy with the water compact, or his cattle, or the various and mysterious things ranchers did all day, but she couldn't shake the nagging feeling of rejection. Was it a holdover from her failed marriage—a sort of romantic post-traumatic stress syndrome—that made her mind leap to the worst possible conclusion? Or were things cooling off between them? Of course, she could call him. Nothing was stopping her. But yet, she didn't feel quite right about doing that, either.

She found Sylvia in the break room and asked if she wanted to get lunch with her at the café.

“Ugh,” Sylvia said, rolling her eyes. “I’ve eaten nearly every meal of the last two weeks from that menu. I can’t take another.” She tossed her paper sack with its stapled receipt from the café back into the employee refrigerator and slammed it shut. “Let’s go to Polson and eat at the A&W. I need a burger and fries. And so do you!”

Kayla looked at her watch. She had a weekly meeting at one with her staff.

“Cancel it,” Sylvia said. “Whatever you have on your agenda can wait.”

Kayla had forgotten what an old fashioned burger and fries tasted like, and she savored it, sitting in the passenger seat of Sylvia's Toyota Camry, looking out at the summer lake.

"God, that's good," Sylvia said with her mouth full, wiping the grease away with a wadded napkin.

Kayla nodded, but she was too involved with the melted cheese and bacon to comment properly.

"I never get to sit and enjoy the fries," Sylvia said, shoving a few into her mouth. "I'm always fryving." She glanced at Kayla and read her mind. "You know, when you drive and eat fries? Fryving."

"You make that up yourself?"

"Got it from a friend, an architecture geek named Rochelle. She lives on the coast."

When they had finished, they sat in momentary bliss, watching sailboats leave the small marina and slide out into the open expanse of blue to the north.

"How're things with Joseph?" Sylvia finally asked.

Kayla rattled the ice in her cup and slurped the last bit of watered down soda up the straw. "I don't know. I haven't heard from him in more than a week. I don't know what to make of it."

"He's probably just busy."

"Yeah, I suppose." Kayla opened the car door and dumped the ice onto the asphalt.

"What about you? Any new men on the horizon?"

“I’d have to be some place other than work to meet new men,” Sylvia said. “At the rate that’s going, I’m doomed.”

“What about Victor?” Kayla wanted to know the situation between them, and she felt their friendship was up to the question.

Sylvia leaned back in her seat and looked over at Kayla. “Wanna know the truth about Victor?”

“Yes, I do.”

“I was in love with him once. But it’s complicated. You see I’m not full blood Indian—hence the very French name Deschamp. So if I don’t marry someone with enough Indian blood to be a tribal member, my kids probably won’t be tribal members, either.”

Kayla thought about this a moment. She didn’t want to give Sylvia the impression that her choice was wrong, but Kayla had trouble understanding it.

“I know what you’re thinking.”

“Do you?” Kayla asked.

“Sure. You’re wondering why it matters. Isn’t love more important?” She didn’t wait for confirmation from Kayla, as if this were the question everyone asked. “I made a commitment to my people when I was a little girl living in a white foster home in Missoula. I promised to do only things that would better our circumstances. Too many of us don’t. It sounds weird to someone from the outside, I’m sure, but if more Indians put the tribe first, we would rise from the devastation of these last few centuries in a powerful way. We would be a people to be reckoned with once again.”

“But Victor is doing that, too. Isn’t he? He works for the tribe. He’s got the tribe’s best interest in mind.”

“Sure.” Sylvia stared at the lake, deep in the thought a moment. “But tribal membership is critically important to our cause. The more of us who marry out, the fewer and fewer children are born in. And without membership numbers, we have no fight in the courts. No tribe, no Indigenous rights.”

“I understand it, but it makes me feel bad for Victor.”

“I know.”

“In Libya they have arranged marriages. They believe love comes to couples who work together to keep a house and raise a family. It seems to be true, most of the time. The divorce rate is very low.”

“Women aren’t allowed to divorce there,” Sylvia said.

The statement stung Kayla. It was the sort of knee jerk response she was accustomed to from people who didn’t understand the culture. She expected more of Sylvia.

“That’s not actually true.” Her voice carried an edge that she found satisfying.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to assume,” Sylvia said. The two were quiet a moment. “I wish Victor would find someone and fall in love. It’s the best thing that could happen.”

“You wouldn’t be hurt?”

“No. I want him to be happy.”

At home that evening, Kayla decided to call Joseph. She imagined that she was being silly worrying about the lapse in time since he had called her. Perhaps he was home doing the same—wondering if she was rejecting him.

“Hello,” he said.

“Tube any cows today?”

“Sorry?”

“It’s Kayla. I was wondering if you’d put a tube down any cow throats lately.” She felt awkward and wished she’d opened with something else.

“Oh. No. Just the usual ranching stuff today. How are you?” She could hear the rustling of paper in the background.

“I’m okay. Have you been to the A&W in Polson? I recommend it. Great burgers.”

He was silent, and she was certain that her first instinct had been correct after all.

“Have I caught you at a bad time?”

“Uh... yeah, sort of. Can I call you back?”

Her stomach hardened into a knot. “Yeah, sure.”

“Great. May not be tonight. But I’ll call you.”

“Okay. Goodnight, then.”

“Night.”

She hung up and stared out the window at the brick church. Why did this always happen after she had sex with a guy? She wished she had said goodnight after that date and sent him on his way. But then he would probably still be calling her. He would call her until they had sex, and then this. The pattern was predictable and maddening. She looked down at her thighs. Was she repulsive? She had never bought into the idea that women needed to be physically perfect, choosing instead to believe that a moderate amount of exercise and a balanced diet, most of the time, was enough. Maybe she had been kidding herself.

Henry leapt into her lap and she lifted him by his front legs, stretching him as long as he would go. He purred.

“Henry, men suck.”

On Saturday, Kayla carried another pitcher of iced tea through town, into the mobile home park, straight to the ratty yellow trailer at the end of the lane, and knocked. Paula took a long time to answer, and a strong odor issued from the dark interior when she did. Kayla felt momentary embarrassment, but she held up the pitcher and smiled.

“Just a moment,” Paula said, and closed the door again.

Kayla stepped down into the overgrown yard. The day was heating up and would reach into the mid-90s by late afternoon. The sun was thin and high, and a dry breeze rustled the cottonwood canopy overhead.

Paula appeared on the steps with two glasses still wet from being washed. She said something back into the trailer, but Kayla intentionally occupied herself with an overgrown Shasta daisy that was in full bloom, but lost in the thistles and cheat grass.

“This is beautiful,” she said, pointing it out to Paula who had come down the steps and stood beside her.

“I’d forgotten it was there,” she said, staring absently at it.

“Would you like to pick them and make a bouquet?”

Paula shook her head and led Kayla through the high grass to the rotting picnic table. “Watch out for the bicycle,” she said, motioning toward a rusted frame without wheels.

At the table they drank tea quietly.

“How are you doing?” Kayla asked. She understood something about caretaking the dying; no one ever asked how the caretaker was. They only asked after the dying, and it left the caretaker feeling overlooked and selfish for feeling so.

“I’ve been better,” Paula said. Her plump fingers gripped the glass too tightly. Her nails were ragged from having been chewed. “Tell me about your mother.”

The question surprised Kayla, but she wasn’t sure why. She hadn’t come prepared for this conversation, but she wouldn’t deny this woman, either.

“She was a smart, funny, vivacious woman. Someone I never imagined would die.” Kayla felt the sting of tears, but she suppressed them for Paula’s sake. She needed to be the strong one for a little while. “I am still angry at the world that she was taken. There are so many others who were less deserving of life, and she was the one who died.”

Paula brushed away a tear and nodded vigorously. They sipped their tea for a while, and Kayla thought the conversation was over.

“How do you go on without her?”

Kayla sighed. “I cry a lot.” She put her hand on Paula’s. “You will, too. Let it come.”

“Sometimes I hope for it to be over.” She winced. “Does that make me a terrible person?”

“No. It’s normal. I had those thoughts as well. They don’t last. You are exhausted emotionally and physically. You haven’t slept or eaten. Everyone is asking how she is...” Kayla remembered those final weeks when the end was in sight, and yet it lingered long on the horizon like a solstice sun threatening to remain there, in that state, forever. “You can only say goodbye so many times. But every day they live is a day that you say goodbye.”

“No one understands this,” Paula said.

When the pitcher was empty, the two women sat in silence for some time. Finally, Paula stood and collected the glasses.

“Thank you. You don’t know how much this means—how much it helps.”

“May I come back again?”

Paula nodded. “Give me time. A week or two, but please come.”

SYLVIA

Sylvia seldom got unannounced visitors, and the knock on her door surprised her. She glanced around the room to see if it was presentable, but of course it was. She was a meticulous housekeeper, unable to focus on anything until everything was put away in its proper place.

Victor stood on her porch when she opened the door, hands plunged deep into his pockets, rocking back on his boot heels as if he hardly had the patience to wait for her. The evening sun made the silver in his hair sparkle like diamonds, and she was reminded that they were nearing middle age.

“Victor, we’ve talked about this. It’s over,” she said. He opened his mouth in protest, but she didn’t give him a chance. “I’d really like it if you would start seeing other people. It would be good for you.”

His eyes went wide at the thought, and his mouth dropped open. Yet he said nothing.

Sylvia began to close the door, but he put his hand against it. “I’ll take that under advisement,” he said. “But that wasn’t why I came.”

She took a breath, feeling a little foolish and leaned against the door jamb.

“We need you to come to Helena with us. We’re testifying at the State House and you’re the best one to do the speaking.”

“I don’t know enough about the water compact to speak on it.”

“You will. We’re going to educate you so you’re ready.”

“I don’t know, Victor.” She looked over her shoulder into the empty house, then stepped out onto the porch with him. They sat on the swing she had had mounted from the rafters, but rarely used. Her front porch faced west, and most summer evenings when she could use the swing, she chose the backyard where it was shady, instead.

“Trent and Philip asked me to come talk to you.”

Trent Corntassel and Philip Tully were tribal council members and elders. Their desires were not taken lightly, primarily because they were extremely judicious in imparting those wishes on tribal members.

“There are others who know a lot more about this than me and who are also good speakers.”

He looked at the porch ceiling from under his brows in that ironic way he was so good at. She of all people should understand the importance of branding in this situation. And who could represent both the past atrocities suffered by Native Americans and the well-spoken, educated young Indians who were poised to take a leadership role in water management than an attractive Indian woman with a master’s degree? Her public speaking skills were excellent. She understood the necessity of calm, slow delivery. She would paint the picture through stories, and she would take questions with dignity, pausing to think about her answers. These were skills she was proud of. She had worked for years at honing them, and this request was a testament to her success in public speaking, which would make other people nauseous with nerves at the thought. She was the right person, and she knew it.

“Okay.”

He smiled and leaned back in the swing.

“I’ll let my boss know that I’m working on this project. I don’t have enough spare time to learn this in the evening and on weekends. I’ll need to use the firm’s time.”

He nodded. They both knew that this was an issue of paramount importance to the tribe, and Intrinsic Architectural would rearrange her workload to accommodate it.

“When is the hearing?”

“Middle of July. Three weeks away.”

“Bring your experts and materials to the firm on Monday. I’ll get us a conference room with a projector.”

“Don’t you want to come down to the plant, instead?”

“No. I want to make sure we think of everything, and doing this in a place where you guys only have access to what you thought to bring will help us identify holes and critical materials.”

“You’re so fucking smart.” He grinned and bumped her knee with his.

She rolled her eyes. “Quit cussing.”

“Okay, mom.”

“You know I’m not a prude. But professional Indians need to stay professional at all times.”

“Yeah, ’cause it’s not like we’re sitting a private porch on the Reservation or anything.”

“You know how this works,” she went on, realizing she was sounding like a broken record, but unable to stop herself from lecturing him. “Just like business women have to be

better, more perfect than business men for the same job and the same pay, Indians have to be more knowledgeable of and better at applying the rules of the white world to compete successfully. We can never let them see us with our hair down.”

“That’s why we picked *you*, my dear.”

On Sunday, Sylvia took a roasted chicken and potato salad to Nona’s, helped her grandmother pack a day bag, and the pair went to park overlooking the lake. The day was hot, but a slow and steady breeze kept it pleasant as long as they sat in the shade. Sylvia wore shorts and flip-flops and wandered between the picnic table where Nona had arranged the food and their needlework on a plastic tablecloth and the lake shallows where she waded up to her knees, her sandals dangling from her fingers. She realized that Nona was watching her, but the old woman looked away out of politeness. Sylvia returned to the table, her wet feet picking up flecks of wood and sand as she went.

“You’re so pretty,” Nona said as if to the potato salad.

“I signed up for an Indian only dating site this week.” She giggled. “So far I’ve attracted a lot of suspiciously white-looking Indians, and a couple of the real deal who are unemployed.”

Nona laughed. “At least you’re trying.”

“It’s alarming how these men don’t read your profile. I’ve specifically stated that I’m a tribal member seeking another tribal member. I have in all caps NOT INTERESTED IN NON-TRIBAL MEMBERS! And what do I get? ‘Oh, baby, I’ll be tribal for you.’” She sang the quote, making goo goo eyes at her chicken.

“Just take the first one with a big dick, Chickadee,” Nona said.

Sylvia ignored her grandmother's comment. "When are you going to tell me about the boarding school," she asked. She had taken to approaching it from the assumption that it was a matter of when, not if.

"Have you learned our native language yet?" Nona asked.

"I want to. You know I do. But I don't have time."

"So you haven't." The old woman carefully set the chicken bones to the side of her plate. She had tried to teach Sylvia the old language when she was little, but there were always a thousand seemingly more important things to work on. And Sylvia didn't regret that she had worked on these other things. They seemed more relevant to propelling the tribe forward in the white world than learning the old language, even though she valued the traditional ways.

"I will tell you about the boarding school," Nona announced.

Sylvia was stunned. All these years of asking. Her grandmother's sudden relent caught her unprepared.

"But I'll tell you in Salish."

"What?"

"And I tell it only to you. You may not share it with anyone else."

Sylvia's mind reeled. She couldn't learn the old language well enough to understand the nuances of this important story without years of study. "That will take me forever." She almost said that they didn't have that much time, but realized it would sound like she expected Nona to die soon.

The old woman cackled. “Ah, it’s a deal. I tell you, but only you, and only in Salish.” She was delighted with herself, and she spooned large amounts of cherry Jell-O onto her plate, then offered it to Sylvia.

Sylvia took the bowl, but didn’t serve herself the Jell-O. She wondered how she could do this. She was already burning the candle at both ends. And with this new request from the water compact group... “Can I tape it?”

Nona thought about this. It was clear to Sylvia that her grandmother didn’t want to leave evidence of her story. And that made it all the more powerful. What had she experienced at boarding school that she tried so hard to wipe from her life?

“I promise not to share it. But I need to be able to hear it more than once if you’ll only tell me in Salish. Please, Nona.”

Nona sucked spoonfuls of Jell-O, one by one, into her mouth, her eyes intently on her plate. Sylvia understood this posture, and waited for her grandmother to respond. Finally, she nodded. “You must promise never to share it.”

“I won’t.”

“Then I will tell it to you next week. And you can take your time learning Salish. We will know how much you want to hear that story now.”

IAN

1960

Ian sat in the porch swing overlooking the creek. Spring flooding had brought a barrage of dislodged trees and large boulders down the mountain, crashing into the footbridge he had put up when Jacob was just a boy. It had been sturdy enough for horses and motorcycles, and when the mountain of debris took it out during the night, it brought him out of a sound sleep. He and Jacob, and Jacob's wife Teresa, stood at the dining room window at just past two in the morning, staring out into the darkness, wondering. At first morning light, they walked up and down the overlook, inspecting the new course the creek had forged for itself.

"Where I come from, that's called a river, not a creek," Teresa said.

"It's a river today," Jacob replied. The roiling water was muddy and choked with trees and logs—anything it could collect within its furious spread.

"It's a river every day," she said with resolve. Ian found her sweet, but also without much opinion or personality. He suspected that that was part of her appeal for Jacob. Whatever he decided, she gladly went along with. He reckoned he shouldn't be too hard on her, though. She had stepped in and taken care of Elizabeth in her last year, and had done so without complaint.

Now mid-morning, Ian sketched a new bridge on a sheet of paper as he waited for his joints to loosen up enough to collect some of the dead wood that had been delivered by the

creek—it would make good firewood in the fall. For the bridge, he could get surplus railroad ties to make a better foundation. The creek was wider now, and he would have to bring in an excavator and a cat to place boulders along the edges to serve as piers. They would have to re-grade the path and put down new gravel now that the old one was washed away.

He had planned to put up a cabin on the other side so Jacob and Teresa could have the main house to themselves. They didn't need an old man underfoot, he reckoned, and he longed for the solitude once again. It would be like the cabin here, the one he'd build in 1911 when the Reservation was mostly unsettled. He would build the new bridge strong enough to handle the Forest Service Jeep he'd bought a few years ago. It would make it easier going between the houses, hauling firewood, and so on. The idea of a better bridge and a new project brought a smile to him.

Jacob strode up from the barn in the lower pasture, muddy to his knees.

“Pig pens and stock chutes are flooded with six inches of water and silt,” he said. “But they're still firm, and they should dry out okay when this mess clears.” Jacob noticed his father's sketch and tilted his head to study it. His hair had grayed a little at the temples, and that made Ian feel old.

Ian handed his son the page for a better look. “I'll get the equipment lined up as soon as the flooding has gone down. I would like to get started on that cabin before I'm too damn old to build it.”

“You know you don't have to move out, Dad. It's your house—always has been. And Teresa and I like having you around. So does Gil.”

“I'm not going far. With this new bridge we'll all be within easy reach. But you need your privacy. That family of yours is going to grow. Someday you'll bust the seams of this

old house.” Jacob and Teresa had been trying to have more children, but so far it was only Gil. They had discussed adoption, but Teresa was still hopeful that she might get pregnant.

Ian admired the cottonwood trees, which were yellow-green in their coat of tender new leaves. Soon they would release their sugar down and it would drift through the forest and across the house like summer snow. He loved how it smelled, and the way the mature leaves shimmered in the wind—silver-white on one side and deep green on the other. The cottonwoods had always been his favorite.

“I s’pose we can get that bridge up in a couple of days, once we have the equipment,” Jacob said. “If we get the Frye place it’ll come in handy. Your plan looks like it’ll hold a tractor. Let’s make sure it does.”

“Russell give you a price on that place yet?” Ian asked. It wasn’t exactly a serious question.

“No. He’s been dancing around a figure, wanting me to guess it. But I’m not going to. He needs to come out with it and say what he wants for the place.”

Ian chuckled. He had been talking to the Fryes—first Meekum, then Russell—for a half century. Nothing had changed. “I think they just like to remind themselves that someone else would like to own their land,” Ian said. “It makes them think they have something special.”

“Well, they do have something special. The creek is more accessible on that parcel, not to mention the alfalfa fields. How he escaped the plague of fieldstones that the rest of us contend with is beyond me. Besides, with the house there, you wouldn’t have to build anything,” Jacob said.

“I’m not moving into any Indian cabin,” Ian said.

Jacob knocked one boot against the porch steps, then the other, trying to loosen the caked mud. “It’s hardly an Indian cabin and you know it.”

“Indians live in it. That makes it an Indian cabin.”

“It’s a good frame house. Barely ten years old. And Russell is a decent builder; the place has a huge kitchen.”

Ian thought of the house and its wide, wrap-around porch. He had indeed admired that feature about it. Especially because it looked out on the creek and mountains. The second story appeared low and narrow, of little use. But he guessed Gil wouldn’t mind it as a bedroom when he came to visit his grandpa.

“That boy had grand plans to buy a car and head out for San Francisco, or Seattle or someplace or other.”

“That was a long time ago, dad. He’s a man now; he’s settled with a family.”

Russell’s plans had persisted until he was in his early thirties and had fathered four illegitimate children with Wanda Freemont. Wanda was sixteen when their first daughter was born.

“Still think it’s a shame what happened to Meekum,” Ian said. Meekum had been shot in the head by one of his companions in a hunting accident. He survived for three years, but he was seriously brain damaged. The family tried at first to take care of him at home, but it was too much of a burden, and they eventually put him in a rest home. Everyone who knew him winced when Meekum’s name was brought up. It was the worst thing that could happen to a man, Ian thought—robbed of your senses.

Squim moved home to the Olympic Peninsula in Washington State shortly after Meekum died. Her sudden departure surprised everyone because her children were here, and

she'd been a part of the community for nearly forty years. Elizabeth had always asserted that the years Squim was deprived her children had severed something maternal in her. She never took to her grandchildren—not the way a grandmother typically does. Russell and Wanda lived off and on in the old cabin that Eddie, Meekum's father, had built the same year Ian had put up his own first cabin. While Ian's cabin was eventually converted into the main house they still lived in, Eddie's cabin deteriorated from neglect. Russell's hair grew long and he found the bottom of innumerable liquor bottles as the cabin roof rotted, the outhouse collapsed, and the shed tilted so severely that Ian had forbidden his own children from going anywhere near it. But when the third child was born—a little boy they named Eddie—Russell decided to make something of himself, quit drinking, and started raising cattle.

Everyone expected Russell to give up on ranching the same way he had given up on his dream; it was difficult, thankless work, and most Indians didn't want any part of it, for reasons Ian could never understand. It was slow going for Russell at first, and he had often stopped by unannounced to ask Ian for advice about breeding, feed ratios, calving, field irrigation, and so on. But gradually he saw enough success to build himself a new house.

“That place has a formal dining room,” Jacob said, still working the mud off his boots.

“What do I want with a formal dining room?”

“It has a good water claim. If I can get that land, I'll negotiate for the wheel-line, too.”

Ian could see that Jacob wanted the parcel too much. He himself had spent his lifetime imagining his ranch with the Frye parcel annexed onto it. But he'd given that up. It was a game to the Frye's to get the McGill's excited about buying it.

“They're never going to sell,” Ian said. “It's the Indian way. Tantalize you with it until you're nuts.”

“That isn’t the Indian way. Listen to you, dad. You sound prejudice with all your talk about Indian cabins and Indian ways.”

Ian grunted. He didn’t consider himself anti-Indian. “I have lots of Indian friends.”

Jacob pulled his boots off and set them on the step, then joined Ian on the porch. “Teresa, we have any coffee in there?” he hollered through the screen door. “You know Indians. But that doesn’t mean they’re friends.”

Ian wasn’t in the mood to fight about this. They’d been down this road before. He wasn’t prejudiced like Jacob thought he was. And Jacob didn’t know what it had been like to be one of the first white people on the Reservation. He was friendly with the Native people here. He had made many acquaintances, and he transacted business with them his whole life here.

“I just see the other white people here as my community, that doesn’t make me prejudiced.” And that community had grown over the years. The Reservation was nearly half white now, and Ian thought this mix was good for the Indians; a stable community of white land owners could set an example for them.

Teresa appeared on the porch with coffee for the men. She was in her housecoat and her hair was uncombed. It annoyed Ian. Elizabeth wouldn’t have dreamed of spending half the day in her nightgown, and likely would’ve had the garden weeded and two chickens butchered for supper by this late morning hour. But Teresa was younger, a part of the spoiled class of Americans who bought her bread and preserves at the grocery store. While they raised livestock, it was squarely Jacob’s responsibility to kill and dress it now.

As Teresa disappeared into the house Gil sat down with Ian on the porch swing. Gil was twelve and reminded Ian of Elizabeth in ways he could not quite identify. He had dark, straight hair like his mother. He was stout, still a bit chubby. His skin was creamy and

unblemished, not freckled like hers, and his eyes were deep brown. Yet there was something of his grandmother in his mannerisms—something refreshing and even a little humorous.

Ian passed the bridge plan to Gil. “What d’ya think of that bridge?”

Gil studied it a long while. He was old enough to help construct it now. It would be a good learning experience for him, Ian thought.

“And when we’re done with that, you can help me put up my cabin.”

Gil’s eyes sparkled with delight. He had been anxiously awaiting his grandfather’s cabin-building project. The two had discussed it many times, and Ian had promised to include a loft with a ladder where Gil could sleep.

“Your dad wants me to live in an Indian cabin,” Ian said, mostly to rib Jacob.

Jacob shook his head and sipped his coffee. A breeze riffled his hair, and he combed it down with his fingers. “C’mon, Dad, quit that. You’ll give the boy bad ideas.”

Gil sneered. “I wouldn’t live in no Indian cabin.”

“Maybe a cabin of your own is a good idea,” Jacob said to Ian.

JOSEPH

2014

“The tribe has published a modified version of the water compact in preparation for the legislative hearing.” Ted Charbonneau, the MIA attorney, sounded dejected as he delivered the news over the phone.

“That’s good! We’ve been waiting for this. What did they change?” Joseph stood at his kitchen window and watched a rainbow of mist blowing off the top of his pivot as it watered his field. So far this summer, irrigating had been business as usual, but he was anxious. The last hearing had resulted in a no vote on the compact, but only because there were things in it that lawmakers wanted clarified or changed. Everyone was waiting on the tribe to modify the compact in order to get it passed. And this was it. Did they allocate water to irrigators in the new plan? Did they promise that historic water rights would be honored? Would he have water?

“Remember that wording about in-flowing streams and other indigenous subsistence regions?”

“Yeah. Streams outside the borders of the Reservation.”

“They’ve given up the streams east of the Divide. The Mussellshell, the Yellowstone, the Missouri... those are all released from the compact.”

“That’s good, I suppose. They’re finally being reasonable about what water should be managed by the tribe.”

“It’s good for Montana as a whole, but not necessarily for us.”

Joseph could guess why.

“Including those streams would open up tens of thousands of lawsuits and the tribe’s claim on that water is tenuous at best,” the attorney said. “The legislature has a lot fewer angry land-owners to deal with now that those are not included.”

“So our numbers have effectively been reduced,” Joseph said, mostly to himself.

“Divide and conquer.”

Charbonneau cleared his throat. “Here’s the biggest change. Are you sitting down?”

“Just say it.”

“Agricultural water has been relegated to a junior position.”

“That’s unconstitutional!” Joseph exploded into the phone. “All water is equal if it’s used for beneficial purposes. Farming, city municipalities, industrial uses: equal. It’s spelled out clear as day in the state constitution.”

“Not in this compact. Not on the Reservation.”

“I can’t *fucking* believe this!”

After the phone call, Joseph didn’t know what to do with himself. Everything reminded him of the situation he was in. He couldn’t even look out his own window without seeing the creek that supplied water to his field or the goddamn pivot that delivered it. He wandered around the house, flexing his hands, pacing, then he went out onto the porch. Finally he stalked to the shop and looked at the mess there. His mind was abuzz and he could not calm it. What would he do? He was screwed if this compact passed.

On the work bench was the sculpture he had nearly finished for his niece's birthday. Seeing it now infuriated him. This was not *his* land. This was not *his* country. He had no rights under the law here on the Reservation. He was not an American citizen here with rights guaranteed by the constitution. He was an interloper, an alien, a casualty in a war the Indians were still fighting. Abandoned by his government—the government that had coaxed his ancestors here with the lure of affordable land.

He swept the sculpture onto the floor and it broke in half, dividing the valley down the middle—the grand Mission Mountains on one side and the rolling Bisons on the other, an enormous fissure running through the center. He kicked the sculpture, and it skidded across the floor, lodging between his air compressor and the tire of his grandfather's old red International tractor. He took up an axe sitting on an empty oil drum and hacked the sculpture into fine splinters. When he was finished, it was reduced to so much colored dust, and he was sweating.

He sat down on the floor amongst the ruins and leaned his head back against the wall. He held the axe in both hands and closed his eyes.

"I'm sorry, Taylor," he rasped. "This is no place for you or me."

When Joseph was fifteen his parents had gotten into a lengthy battle that he didn't fully understand, except that it involved his younger sister, Lori. He holed up in his room above the stairs during those weeks—or perhaps they were months—cracked the door open and listened. He was certain that the battle would end with divorce, and he was conflicted about whether he would stay with his father on the ranch, which he was being groomed to take over, or go with his mother back to Lewiston, Idaho where her family lived on a few

acres outside of town. She never talked about going home to Idaho, but his grandmother hinted at it every time they visited.

He asked his mother whether she thought she could run the ranch alone because he imagined she was more capable than his father, an opinion he later understood was unrealistic, if not downright optimistic. She was the calm one, though. She made friends with people, invited them over for coffee, and came to his school events. She was talkative and bubbly, and when Joseph's father, Gil, wasn't around, she was fun.

"It's not my ranch, sweetheart. It was your dad's. It belonged to his grandfather, and then his father." That's what she had said. Not that she and his father weren't going to divorce, confirming his suspicions.

"I don't want my girls going to that Reservation school, and I especially don't want Lori going to junior high and high school there," his father had said as his mother washed the dishes after supper. All three of the girls were outside, but Joseph was at the dining table working on algebra.

"I want you to take the girls and move to Missoula."

"What are you talking about?" his mother had said. She gripped a saucepan, suds rolled down her forearms.

"Joe can fend for himself. Besides, I need his help here on the ranch. But the girls should be where they'll get a good education that will prepare them for becoming respectable young women."

"They'll get a decent education here," Alice said. "Lori and Joseph have had good teachers so far; and all the girls' friends are here."

“Have you forgotten that your son came home beat to hell a couple of weeks ago?”

Joseph had wanted to interrupt. He didn't come home beat to hell. And Victor got the worst of it.

“You don't think he would've gotten into a fight in another school?”

That's right, Joseph thought. But he knew better. He wasn't a fighter.

“No, Alice, I don't. He won't talk about it, but other people have.” Gil looked at Joseph, pointedly, and Joseph gathered his books to go upstairs. “He got into it with that new Indian kid he's now all chummy with. It was Indian versus white, and look at how he came out of it.”

Joseph wished he had left visible evidence of his win on Victor.

“Well, at least they worked out their differences,” she said. “Whatever it was, it's over now.”

Upstairs, Joseph leaned against the wall with his ear to the crack in the door. His bedroom was directly above the kitchen and stairway created something of a sound chamber that seeped through the rail banister.

“I went to that school,” Gil said. “And so did my father. It's always been a rough place because of the Indians—they don't want us here. And most of them don't want to learn, either. I want my girls somewhere besides a Reservation school.”

Alice protested, but Gil was determined. “You can rent a small apartment there. I've worked out a budget. It'll be tight, but you can do it as long as you don't spend money on things you don't need. Joe and I will visit on the weekends, or you can come up. It's not a difficult drive.”

“You’re deliberately splitting our home? Our family?” The hurt was apparent.

“Now, Alice, you’re overreacting.”

“You’re asking me to move into an apartment forty miles away with just the girls. Forty miles from my only son? From my husband?” The husband part sounded like an afterthought. A jab at his conscience.

“It’s only temporary,” he said. “Stop acting like I’m asking for a divorce.”

“Temporary? The twins are going into the first grade. A twelve year temporary arrangement? Maybe you *should* ask for a divorce.”

The word had never been spoken aloud, but that was a technicality. Gil had always been aggressive, accusing Alice of being silly, stupid, or inept. She couldn’t scrub the kitchen sink adequately in his opinion. She spent too much time gossiping with neighbors, or down at the local art gallery *pretending* to be an artist. He wanted her home, cooking or helping him with livestock. And she spent too much money. These were grievances Joseph and Lori were well aware of, and perhaps the twins, too. He recalled his mother “losing” receipts so Gil wouldn’t know she had bought new gym shorts for Joseph or shoes for Lori. Once she had gotten all four of the kids ice cream cones on a sweltering hot afternoon when they were stuck waiting in the park for her while she had a doctor appointment.

“This’ll be our little secret. Okay, kids?” she had said as she handed them the melting soft-serve cones. When Ellen, the youngest, blurted out at supper that they had gotten treats in town, Joseph quickly covered for his mother.

“Mrs. McCollum gave us ice cream cones while mom saw the doctor.” He was careful to specify doctor or his father would launch into his questions. “They were just little ones, but

it was real nice.” McCollum’s owned the Dairy Queen, and they were a generous family. It didn’t sound out of the ordinary.

Gil had perked up, looking from face to face to see if he was being lied to. But the girls remembered their mother’s words and kept the secret as it had been reinvented.

It would have been easy for his mother to go. Joseph wanted her to go for her own sake. He hated how his father criticize her.

The argument eventually reached a shrill that sent all three of Joseph’s sisters outside—into the barn, down along the banks of the creek, or out into the woods. Anywhere to escape the escalating pitch. Lori was in agreement with their father, but not likely for the same reasons. But Alice dug in, offering every rationale she could, until her arguments were finally stripped down to the one true reason she wouldn’t go. Joseph.

“Okay,” she said one night while cleaning up dishes after supper. It was this time of day that they always took up the conflict. With full bellies and nothing to look ahead to but an evening trapped together in the same house. “You want me and the girls to move to Missoula, we’ll do it. But only on one condition.”

Gil set his newspaper down and smiled as if believing he had at last won. “What’s that?”

“Joe comes with us. I won’t leave him behind.”

Gil’s response was powerful and violent. He kicked the dining table over, upending the leftovers that Alice hadn’t yet stashed in the refrigerator. Dishes lay broken across the floor. Meatloaf and ketchup had splattered the walls. Flecks of milk reached as high as the overhead cabinets, and their mild mannered cat, Haley, had flown from the room and

cowered under the sofa. Alice stared at the mess, her neck turning blotchy red as she pressed her lips tightly together, then at Gil.

“You are a child,” she said with disgust.

To Joseph’s knowledge, they never discussed the matter again. His father wouldn’t permit him to leave, and his mother wouldn’t leave without him. That’s how it was. She kept her family together in the physical sense, but the damage was done. Lori had been drinking since the sixth grade, which was the reason that Gil held up for wanting the girls to move. Now in the eighth grade, she was a rebel who wouldn’t be disciplined into anyone’s idea of a good girl. She was often seen about town flipping people off or shouting at them to go fuck themselves for no better reason than they looked at her. When she was seventeen she dropped out of school, having already skipped most of the eleventh grade to get high in the old grain depot on the west side of town. There were rumors that she had gotten pregnant by Bill Coulee, an Indian boy she was seen about town with, and that she had had an abortion at the Indian clinic. But Joseph never believed that about his sister.

Gil believed the rumors, at least to a point, and he kicked Lori out of the house. He had gone into her room and gathered up a handful of her clothing, carried them downstairs and out into the yard, and tossed them in the muddy grass. Alice and Lori clung to his arms as he went back for a second load, shouting and screaming at him to stop.

Joseph didn’t know what to do. He stared at the spectacle afraid to cross his father, and furious at Lori for doing the things she did to make him so angry. When he realized that the twins were also watching at this scene, wide-eyed and trembling, he took them each by the hand and led them down to the barn where he showed them the new kittens he’d found that morning. They stayed in the barn until well after dark, using an old camping lantern that

Joseph had stashed there for his own purposes. Alice finally came searching for them, her eyes red and puffy. Her cheeks streaked with tear stains.

Looking now at the sculpture he had demolished with his hammer it worried him that he was more like his father than he had thought. He would clean up the mess. Make it seem as if this thing he had created and then destroyed never existed in the first place. And then he would call his mother, whose two remaining daughters now lived far away, and make sure she was doing okay.

KAYLA

At first it was days. Then it was a week. Then two. Then three. The summer solstice had come and gone, the days were getting shorter, but there was no evidence of that here in Montana. Kayla's creative team had finished three of the four planned subjects in the firm's historic renovation campaign, and she had played shortstop at the company picnic where Marketing, HR, and Customer Service squared off against Sales, Engineering, and the administrators. Her team had eked out a narrow victory that she lorded over Sylvia, who reported into Engineering.

Joseph never did call her back. And his silence was a statement that she could no longer rationalize away. It made her angry with herself for moving too fast in the first place, and angry with him for being an ass and taking advantage. She worried about the inevitable surprise meeting. Mission was too small to expect never to encounter each other. She had rehearsed it in her head—she had play it cool, like it had never mattered to her at all. She would act as if time had gotten away from her and she hadn't even realized that he didn't call.

She prepared for her father's visit, buying new sheets for the small bed in the guest room. The ritual of making it up for him gave her a strange sense of home in this rental house that she had been occupying for three months. As she lit the scented candle she had bought from DeeAnn at the art gallery and set it on the bedside table to chase out the stale mustiness of a room unused, she realized that she had made many friends here, and when the time came, it would be difficult to leave this place. Life suddenly felt too short, and when she had done all the things she could think of for her father's visit next week, she made a decision. She went to the music shop and purchased, on payment plan, a used but lovely cello. That evening at home, she unpacked the sheet music she had brought from Portland and forged a tenuous bond with the new instrument.

The cello was appointed its own prominent corner, and every time Kayla passed through the living room, she paused to look at it. To admire its glossy wood finish and beguiling curves. It was not simply a cello, but a symbol of victory. She was getting back on her feet, and this was sweet proof.

Kayla had hoped to see Sylvia this coming weekend so she could tell her about the cello. Sylvia had been urging her to replace it since she found out that Kayla played; she would be pleased. But now Sylvia was away in Helena on tribal business, which she didn't talk about, even when Kayla asked straight out. Kayla had learned that Sylvia had two lives:

one public and open, which their friendship was a part, and one tribal, which Kayla was excluded from. She wondered if this was a cultural thing among Indians, or if it were Sylvia's specific personality. She was friendly with many Indians who worked at the firm, but Sylvia was the only close friend there. Kayla was at first hurt by the seeming secrecy with which Sylvia conducted her tribal activities, but she had come to see that it was a code of honor rather than a matter of trust. There were similarities to when she visited Libya with her father. The men often went off together, returning hours later with cash or gifts or other men that they invited in for sweet coffee and dates. When Kayla asked her father about these outings he scowled and ignored her question. She came to understand that this was the realm of Libyan men, which she was not a part. But she reaped the rewards of their excursions in watermelon, bitter soda, shortbread cookies with dates, toy camels made of leather, or new slippers with brightly embroidered designs.

Kayla had changed into her bathrobe and was settling in to read a book when an unfamiliar man knocked on her door.

"Can I help you?" she asked through the narrow opening of the door, pulling her robe tightly against her neck.

"It's Paula," he said, looking as uncomfortable standing on her porch as she felt having him there. She'd never seen this stranger before, and his urgency startled her.

"What about her?"

"She's asking for you. Aida is... She's..." He looked down at his hands as if the words were there, gripped in his fingers. "Aida has slipped into a coma. It's the end."

"And she wants *me*?" Kayla could hardly fathom this. They were virtual strangers. Or were they? She had held vigil over a dying loved one, doing all she could to make her comfortable. In the end, all her mother could stand against her skin without writhing in pain

was a thin, light sheet. Kayla had sung and prayed, drawing from her meager knowledge of Christianity for her mother's sake. Her knowledge of Islam was poorer yet because her parents had set aside their childhood religions when she came along. Kayla read aloud from a Bible as her mother's breathing rattled to a stop, then started, then stopped. It had been agony.

The man was looking up the street now, as if silently summoning help.

"I'll be right there. Tell her I'll be right there." Kayla closed the door before he'd had a chance to respond, and she heard his footfalls on the wooden steps as he descended. She raced into her bedroom and redressed in jeans, pulled her hair back into a ponytail, and pulled on her shoes.

She drove to save time, but she was unable to park anywhere near Paula's house because the tiny dirt lanes of the mobile home park were choked with vehicles. When she finally reached the trailer, the yard was lit up and a dozen or so people stood around in the trampled weeds, silent and somber, their hands tucked helplessly in their pockets. Kayla approached carefully, unsure of herself. She saw no one familiar. Then he appeared again, the man who'd come for her. She realized now that he was Indian. A relative?

"You made it," he said breathless, and she wondered if he had run from her house.

She offered a faint smile, and he led her to the door. But he stopped at the bottom of the steps and waited. She gripped the knob, hesitant, then opened it and stepped into the dark interior. The smell was overwhelming, something of decay and urine—powerful enough to make her eyes sting. It was a tangible presence in the room.

Paula stood up hugged her. A hospital bed took up nearly the entire living room in the single-wide trailer. A nurse in brightly-colored scrubs sat on the opposite side of the bed,

quietly smoothing Aida's dark hair over the pillow as if she were an angel preparing to meet her God.

"Thank you for coming," Paula said in a barely audible voice. She didn't look at Kayla, but at Aida. "I can't face this alone. But I can't take the way people pity me, either. You never pitied me."

Kayla kept her arm firmly around Paula's shoulder as she acknowledged the hospice nurse. The nurses who had helped Kayla's mother through her final days were a godsend, and Kayla had tremendous respect and gratitude for those women.

Paula drew a chair out of the corner and set it next to her own and the two women sat in their now-familiar quiet, gazing at the frail, bone-thin girl on the bed. Her skin was pale to the point of translucence, and her abdomen was grotesquely distended. Paula petted the girl's hand lovingly, and they waited.

JOSEPH

Testifying before the legislature this time had been different. The first time, Joseph and the fledgling MIA had been few in numbers, less informed, more emotional, and they were mindful to walk a careful line so they didn't appear to come out too strongly against the tribe. The tribe and its members were their neighbors, their friends. They still believed they could reason with them and come to a mutual agreement. But this time the MIA was strong: forty-four people showed up in Helena, well informed, outspoken, and ready to fight for their livelihoods. The hardest thing for Joseph to face, though, was Victor, sitting among the opposition. Victor understood what a loss would mean for Joseph. And yet here he was, ready to sell his friend down the river.

The tribe brought Sylvia as their spokeswoman, and she was every bit the secret weapon he imagined they had wanted her to be. She told the story of the 1855 treaty and how it had been far-reaching in its taking of Indian hunting grounds and homelands. She painted a vivid picture of the damage done to the indigenous people in each subsequent act, such as the Land Allotment Act, which had divided reservation land into parcels that undermined the communal fabric of their lives, and sold off the surplus to white settlers. But she did not dwell long on their grievances, instead brilliantly providing her audience a new tribal image of industry and education, not poverty and addiction. She talked about the tribe's investments and businesses, which ranged from the architectural firm to a new high tech company that had already secured several multi-million dollar government contracts. She showed photos of students at the Indian college, diligently studying one of the many specialty programs that fed

these and other Indian-owned businesses. She showed pictures and quotes of Indians in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, developing computer programs that better detected land mines. But she spent most of her time on water management and fisheries, highlighting the increased numbers of fish by species due to diligent conservation. Her presentation was so compelling that Joseph caught himself nodding at her points, immensely proud of the work that they had done on the Reservation. He felt connected to the tribe in ways he had never fully considered. And here they were, taking his water rights, devaluing his land, and likely pushing him out of his ancestors' home permanently.

When the water compact proponents had finished testifying, the MIA members took their turn, one-by-one telling the legislators what the precise personal cost would be if they lost their water rights, or were given reduced allocations of water than they currently received. Joseph listened as each member spoke, totaling up the staggering cost in lost productivity, reduced land values, previous investments in irrigation equipment, and loss of future income—running into the millions for each of them and collectively into the billions. He wondered if these lawmakers were seeing it the same way. Loss of irrigation water didn't compare to the injustices of the past. But did it need to? Hadn't we moved beyond the sort of barbaric taking of land and resources that had defined the past? he wondered.

He and Victor did not make eye contact, but Sylvia boldly stared at each MIA member as they testified. She was not confrontational, but it was very uncharacteristic of Indians to do that—it was considered rude—and it unnerved the MIA members as they spoke, causing some to stumble over words and forget their points. On the whole, Joseph felt that the group had done the best they could. His own comments to the legislators had opened with his loss calculation, and then turned to the new wording of the compact which relegated irrigation water to a junior position.

“This virtually guarantees that we will lose a significant portion, if not all, of the water we have been promised by the State of Montana if fisheries, municipalities, and other industries take precedence,” he said, his voice echoing against the marble floor and wood paneling. He paused to allow the information to take root in the minds of his audience, but they showed no indication that he’d made an impact.

As they left the state house, Joseph bumped into Sylvia on the steps. She was reading something on her phone and had been looking for Victor when they collided.

“Sorry,” he said.

She gave him a dismissive glance and stepped aside as if he were a complete stranger. It struck him then that she didn’t view him as a neighbor and fellow community member—a friend. And it rankled him. Hadn’t they known each other for years? Hadn’t they spent hours together in their mutual friendship with Victor before she broke it off? Hadn’t he cleaned fish for her and started her barbeque? Wasn’t he the one who had tried to reason with her when she crushed Victor’s soul? Hadn’t he changed the head gasket on her car when they were both young and poor and Victor was in Minnesota? Did she forget these things?

He paused and waited for her to look at him. When she finally noticed that he was staring, she put the phone in her purse and straightened her posture.

“You spun a nice tale in there,” he said, but not unkindly.

She blinked as if he’d slapped her in the face. “I was just telling the truth.”

“A convenient one at that.”

“Look,” she said, drawing herself up to her fullest height. “I didn’t write that compact. I’m just here to lend a hand. I don’t know what your problem is, but I can do without the attitude.”

“My problem? You don’t know what my *problem* is? Didn’t you hear a goddamn word we said in there?” Joseph felt the heat rising in his face and he knew he should let this go before he regretted his words.

“I heard. I’m sorry that this has the potential to go badly for you, but your loss pales in comparison to what our people have been through. So you lose one battle. You’ve still got your customs, your language, your families. You can come and go like white people do, no one eyeing you suspiciously. No one following behind you to make sure you don’t steal anything. You’ll recover from this the way white people do. But don’t cry to me about your loss. It’s nothing by comparison. Nothing!”

He wanted to shove her against the wall and shout in her face. He wanted to hit her. He flexed his fingers into fists, then shoved them into his pockets. “What’s next? My land? Are you going to take that, too?”

She sighed and spoke to him as she might a child who didn’t understand. “It never should have been yours in the first place. The Reservation belongs to the tribe. If I have my way, we won’t stop until every acre of it is returned to the tribe.” She looked him hard in the eye, her cold pupils dilated into shiny black stones. “Whatever it takes.”

Victor stepped in then and gently pushed Sylvia along. “C’mon. Don’t say things you’ll regret.” He looked at Joseph. “That goes for everyone.”

The four-hour ride back to Mission on the bus the MIA chartered was virtually silent. The ranchers seemed to struggle with a collective sense of pending doom. As they digested Sylvia’s brilliant speech, there was a budding feeling of loss that none of them said aloud, but which eddied about them like a current. Even Louise seemed beaten and exhausted. She had simply shrugged at him when he got on the bus and took the seat opposite hers.

“We’ve done all we can for now,” she said, and they had. Now it was a waiting game.

Joseph turned his thoughts to other things for the first time in weeks. He would call his mother when he got home and see if she wanted to go fishing on Friday. He would take her over to the Swan Valley, get away from the Reservation for a bit. Maybe he would call Kayla. He thought about her. Perhaps too much time had passed now. He had meant to call; he simply hadn’t done it. Was that a statement of his interest? He didn’t think so. Surely, she would understand when he told her about the changes to the water compact and the trip to Helena to testify at the State House.

“Aida died this morning,” someone toward the rear of the bus said quietly. Joseph looked back at Erick Walden whose face was illuminated green from the glow of his phone.

“Poor Paula,” someone said.

“Poor Ron,” another said, and the bus fell silent again. A new weight pressing upon the old one.

SYLVIA

The bus ride home to the Reservation was cautiously optimistic. Sylvia sat in the front, behind the driver, and had been thanked by each person as they mounted the steps. But her exchange with Joseph McGill was bothering her. She'd treated him like an enemy, and she regretted that. In a lot of ways, he represented the enemy: the white land-owner on Reservation land, a descendent of those who had attempted to eradicate her people. But in so many ways he was not the enemy. He had been her friend when she and Victor were dating, and since then as well. He had helped her in personal ways, such as the time she needed a ride to a funeral in Miles City—some two-hundred miles in blowing snow and sub-zero temperatures. He had skipped New Years with his wife to driver her there, and he'd waited at the Motel 6 until she was ready to go home. They were young then, full of expectations and aspirations. She almost married Victor that winter. It was a time before she understood white privilege and how insidious, and often difficult to see, racism could be. When had she begun to see Joseph as her enemy?

“You killed it, Sylvia,” Victor said and sat across from her.

She smiled and thanked him. She *had* done a good job, but the kind words embarrassed her. She was simply doing what she knew how to do.

“That was brilliant. No one ever talks about the professional work modern Indians are doing. They only talk about how the government and the white man have beaten us down, stolen our land, and left us in poverty. It's a sob story we need to shake off in favor of what

we *can* do—what we *are* doing. You did that, girl.” He put his feet up on the seat next to the aisle and leaned back against the window.

“We can never forget the past,” she said. It was a warning. She agreed that a new story would win the tribe—this one and others—what they sought, but she feared that it would eclipse the ugliness of the past, blotting out the genocide, the prejudice, the cultural appropriation. They could not let that happen. “We can never let those years die away in our memories or our stories.”

“Lighten up, sis,” he said. His smile had slipped away. “I was just commenting on what a good job you did. No one is forgetting the past. As if we could!”

She thought of Nona agreeing to tell her story, but only in Salish. As frustrating as it was, her grandmother was wise. She understood how to keep their heritage alive.

“Sorry,” she said. “It’s easy to look forward. Hard to look back. For Indians, anyway.”

He considered her carefully for a long moment. “What you said that day I came to talk to you about testifying for the tribe... You mean what you said?”

“About what?”

He rolled his eyes. “That you want me to see other people?”

She closed her eyes against his gaze. Why was he doing this? Couldn’t he simply enjoy the afterglow of a job well done? No one knew how the legislators would vote, but the tribe had done their best, and they were proud of it. Couldn’t he just be happy for the moment?

“Well?”

She sighed. “Yes. I meant what I said.”

He nodded, got up, and moved to a seat near the back of the bus.

Sylvia turned forward, feeling the sting of his anger. She listened to the various conversations on the ride home, but his voice was not among them. She was exhausted and sick of her own company. She felt somehow over-exposed. As if she had put all her inner thoughts and feelings on parade that day and she could not now retreat into anonymity.

As they neared the Reservation, Annabell Wolfe let out a terrifying wail. “She’s gone,” she cried. “Our little bird has flown away.”

KAYLA

Though she had been up all night, she had been too tired to sleep when she got home about noon. Sylvia called Kayla the moment she arrived back in town, waking her from the first real sleep she had achieved since the vigil.

“Thank you for staying with her,” Sylvia said. “I would have come sooner if I could.”

“It’s okay,” Kayla mumbled. She looked at her clock and realized that his was 5:30 in the afternoon. She rubbed her face, thinking of the long hours she had been with Paula. Watching over Aida until the end. They had been at her bedside all night and into the early morning hours. They had read to her, sung to her, and said prayers over her. Kayla had listened with her eyes closed as Paula chanted and sang to her child in Salish. It was an intimate thing to witness, and Kayla was careful to remain in the shadows, thinking often that it was backward—a mother helping her daughter into the next world.

“How was Helena?” Kayla asked.

“Good. But I’m glad to be home. Glad to have it behind me. I can’t talk long, but wanted to tell you how much it meant to me that you were here for Paula. She needed you. More than she needed anyone else in her life. Maybe that’s why you ended up here when you did.”

Kayla couldn't fathom this conversation. She wasn't religious and didn't put much stock in mystical thinking. "It was a fortunate coincidence," she said.

"If you say so. But thanks."

Kayla got up and showered and readied to go out. She didn't have any place to be, and no one to be there with, but the events of the previous night had left her bombarded by random images and disturbing moments revisited. She needed to shake free of them, and the only way to do that was to go be out among the living. So she put on makeup, styled her hair, and walked down to the Oil Can.

She sat alone at the bar, listening to music and drinking beer from the bottle. The place was quiet—a young couple sitting in a booth along the wall and an elderly Indian man reading handwritten letters at the other end of the bar. They glanced at her often, but she was accustomed to that now. No longer did people stare openly. Everyone in town now knew she was Arab, and she had become a curiosity. She ordered a burger and a second beer. Wait until they met her father, she thought.

"You new in town?" the bartender asked. He was a young man in his twenties she had never seen here before. Short, with a wide grin to match his broad shoulders, and blue-black hair that brushed his collar. His forearms were tattooed in tribal patterns often associated with the south Pacific. She could ask him the same question.

"I guess I'm still new," she said. "When do you stop being new?"

"You're new until you've been chased by a bear," someone said behind her.

She turned to find Victor ambling into the bar. He was alone, and he looked worn out. She smiled and offered to buy him a beer.

"Sure. You get this one, I'll get the next."

She raised an eyebrow. That would be a third for her, and she didn't think she would be doing that. "You look tired," she said.

"Just got back from Helena on business."

"Oh, Sylvia was in Helena, too." Kayla realized the moment she said it that they must have been there together.

"Yeah. Saw her." His words were clipped, and she could tell Sylvia was the last person he wanted to talk about.

"Must've been some big tribal business then. But don't worry, I'm not asking. I know you guys like to keep that stuff to yourselves." She mock punched him in the arm to lighten the mood.

"You might be a spy," he said.

She laughed, but he didn't.

"How're things with Joseph? I can't believe he lets you buy your own beer. What an ass."

She looked at Victor more carefully. "I have no idea how Joseph is. I haven't spoken to him in god knows how long. He might be dead."

Victor busted out laughing. "He's not dead."

"Well I wouldn't know."

Victor considered this, and as he did, she considered him. He had a chiseled jawline that made his already handsome features seem rugged as well.

"Aren't we a sorry pair, then?" he said.

“Speak for yourself. I’m not sorry about anything.” She sipped her beer and admired him; Sylvia was a fool.

“No, I imagine you’re not. A beautiful woman like you can have anyone she wants.”

“Uh, hello... *Reservation!*” She splayed her hand out at the nearly empty room and the mountains beyond the overhead doors. “For an outsider, this is hard country for dating.”

“Outsider,” he said, as if it were the first he had thought of her place in the community. “I guess you kind of are an outsider.”

“Kind of? I may as well be from Mars.”

He chuckled. “Well, that makes two of us then.”

Her burger arrived, and she pushed the plate toward him. “Have some fries.”

He accepted, but ordered a burger of his own. The bartender had turned sullen, and was now slow to serve them. He turned the music up too loud, and Victor had to ask him to please turn it down so he could have a conversation without shouting.

“Guess he thought he had you to himself,” Victor said quietly.

“He’s way too young for me.” She ate her burger without concerning herself with being dainty or dignified. Victor watched her with amusement. But she was hungry after the previous night.

“Oh,” she said with her mouth full, remembering his remark. “How do you figure it makes two of us?”

He thumbed his chest with both hands. “Victor Little Knife. No big Indian.”

She scowled, though she thought she probably understood from her conversation with Sylvia.

“I’m a non-tribal Indian. Which is to say I’m a nobody here in Indian country.”

“But you’ve got a pretty important job at the hydro plant, right?”

“Don’t get me wrong. They’ll hire me on to manage the hydro plant, just like they hired you on to do whatever it is you do at the architectural firm.”

“Marketing.”

“Marketing, right. They’ll take me to Helena to testify for the water compact. They’ll invite me to be on their side. I have a good Indian name. I look the part. But they won’t let me vote. I don’t get any settlement checks when they sue the government. I have no claim to fish or land or indigenous rights.”

Sylvia didn’t know what to say, so she raised her beer in a toast. “To outsiders.”

“Outsiders,” he said, and clinked his bottle against hers.

As they ate they talked about life beyond Mission. Victor’s time in Minnesota, and hers in Portland. They lamented the absence of Thai food, blues concerts, beer festivals, and organic markets, but both agreed that the scenery was stunning here.

“I wasn’t born here. I came when I was barely a teenager. I always wanted out,” Victor said. “When I left for college, I didn’t plan to come home again, not permanently anyway. But the older I got, the more I missed it. When the hydro job came up, I jumped on it.”

“Are you glad to be home?”

He ordered them two more beers without asking her if she wanted another. She didn’t mind. She had walked.

“Yeah. But it’s not like I thought it would be.” He mopped up the grease on his plate with the last of his French fries. “It’s good, though, I guess. How do you like it?”

She sat back and thought about the question. “I like it okay.”

“Just okay?”

She laughed. “Well, the job is great. I’ve made some friends. But I’m not Indian, and all the white people think I am. It’s confusing for everyone. And when people find out what I really am, well... that’s a whole ‘nother deal.”

“You’re probably the first real Arab woman they’ve ever seen. And you don’t fit the part. Where is your burka, girl?” He slapped the counter.

“You’re probably right, but...” She had started to say something about Joseph’s reaction, but remembered that the two were good friends.

“But, what?”

“Nothing.”

He studied her. “McGill say something to you?”

“No.” She smiled in an attempt to change the mood, but Victor was serious. “I guess that’s the problem. He asked me out on a date, we had a good time, he seemed interested in another. Real interested, if you know what I mean. But he never called. He didn’t say *anything*.”

Victor cursed under his breath. “What a fucking idiot.”

“Hey, let’s not talk about that. It was over before it really got started. No big deal.”

Victor looked her in the eye. “He’s an idiot.”

“I’ll drink to that,” she said, and they raised their bottles again.

The place was filling up, and couples were taking to the dance floor. The bartender opened the garage bays to let the night in, and turned on the lights that were strung from the building to a large tree in the middle of the parking lot. Like yellow pearls, lighting the night, they glowed. Victor pulled Kayla onto the dance floor. She was feeling the beer and let herself go a little, enjoying the music and the company. Who cared what she did tonight? She had just witnessed a grieving mother usher her young daughter into the afterworld.

It was after midnight when Victor walked Kayla home. She had lost track of the number of beers she'd had, but she held close the feeling of slow dancing in his arms. Drunk or not, she would remember what it felt like to have Victor Little Knife wrapped around her.

She stumbled up the steps to the porch and he caught her before she fell.

“Whoops!” she sang.

He kissed her in the dark while she gripped her keys.

“We shouldn't do this,” she said.

“Why not? Who do we outsiders have to answer to?”

Her mind went first to Joseph. She dismissed him. Then to Sylvia. She had said she wished he would start seeing someone. Victor was wrapping her up again in those muscled arms, pulling her into him. He smelled of sweet pipe tobacco and cloves. He kissed the top of her head, then her nose, then her lips.

JOSEPH

He lounged late into the morning in his sweatpants and bare feet, drinking coffee on the back porch overlooking the creek. There were innumerable things to do, machinery to fix, fields to mow, cattle to check, but Joseph was having trouble getting motivated today. He didn't even feel like fishing. He picked up his phone and dialed Kayla's number. It went to voicemail, and he hung up without leaving a message. He couldn't think of what to say. He considered that the reason he hadn't called her until now was because of his mother's reservations about Kayla's ethnicity. While he didn't necessarily agree with her, he had always taken the path of compliance with her wishes. He loved his mother for all the compromises she had made through the years without complaint, and their relationship was strong. It had always been so, and there were very few issues he cared enough about to press when they disagreed. He wasn't sure about this one. Allowing his mother to influence his choice of dating partners seemed over the line. Perhaps it was just as well that Kayla hadn't answered.

He called his mother. She answered by telling him that she had one minute before she had to be out the door to drop off some picnic supplies at the church for their summer youth program.

"I'll call you later," he said.

"Okay." She hung up before he could say anything more.

He tossed the phone on the table next to the porch swing and tipped his head back with his eyes closed. He rocked back and forth in the sun, listening to the creek as it raced away toward the Flathead River and beyond. He imagined the number and variety of fish treading in every deep pool between here and the Pacific Ocean.

The swing had been put in by his grandfather Jacob before Joseph was born. It was always a part of Joseph's world, and the most comforting thing in this home because he always felt the presence of his grandfather here. Jacob often sat here alone in the summer, rocking gently, looking out in contemplation at the creek and the mountains. He often seemed sad in those moments.

When Joseph thought of family, his mind always brought him here to the swing. He had imagined that one day he would have a son of his own, and they would sit here together, discussing the business of this ranch. But time was running out for that. He suffered a moment of guilt at the prospect of failing to pass the McGill ranch down to the next generation. His younger sisters both had children, and he supposed that he might coax one of those kids up here to learn the ranching business. But then again... those children, all five of them, lived in San Diego. What chance was there of making ranchers out of any one of them? This was a hard business that one was best born to. It had its rewards. Many. But it was backbreaking work. The kind of work one hardened to as a child and then grew into with all the physical scars one acquired along the way.

Joseph had had a special bond with his grandfather, and he missed him often over the years, but never so much as today it seemed. Jacob had an encouraging way. He never dictated, but simply asked. Whether talking to hired hands or his own family members, he always made a gentle request. "Would you mind repairing the wheel line," he would say to

Joseph. Joseph knew he wasn't asking if he would do it; of course he would do it. But Jacob made it feel like he was doing his grandfather a favor—a kind favor that he was happy to do.

“What do you think of all this water business, grandfather?” Joseph said, his eyes still closed, a soft breeze ruffling his hair as he swayed.

When he was a boy of ten or twelve, he sat on this swing while his grandfather told him about his own father, Ian, and how he had pioneered this ranch from wild land into a profitable cattle operation. He told him about the first McGill cabin and pointed out the original cobblestone foundation below the kitchen and dining room of the main house. “It’s still here,” he said. “Just reworked, but still the center of our lives.”

Joseph asked questions about hunting and fishing, wanting to know how his great-grandfather had managed alone in an empty land without grocery stores and gas stations. Jacob indulged his curiosity, and told him how the antlers mounted in the entryway that they hung their coats on were from the very first buck Ian had shot the year he put up the cabin. Joseph marveled. These ever-present and wholly benign things in his life were placed here by his great-grandfather seventy years before he had been born.

“This’ll someday be yours, Joe,” Jacob said. “Just as it was mine, and is now your father’s.” He looked out over the creek in quiet contemplation for a moment. “Do a better job with it, okay?”

“Better than what?” Joseph asked.

“You’ll know what I mean when you’re older. But don’t mention this conversation to your father, okay?”

Joseph thought about that comment now, so ominous and weighty. He had become a diligent observer from that moment forward, keen to understand what his grandfather had

meant. He never had a singular moment of revelation or certainty, though he had gathered plenty of evidence about how he could do a better job. He would treat the neighbors like friends, for starters. This community was too small to be waging war over minor issues such as whether someone's horses got into the field or Indian kids rode through private property on their motorcycles. Joseph had learned from his grandfather's example that friendly conversations almost always solved difficult issues. Why, then, had his father Gil been so cantankerous?

That approach hadn't worked with Sylvia, he thought. Her words came back to him again, as they had over and over since she said them on the steps of the state house. The tribe would have every acre of land back. Was that her dream, or the tribe's collective dream? It was hard to tell. If he'd learned anything about Indians living in this community, it was that they were seldom of one mind. His ire rose once again, and he was glad that Sylvia and Victor were no longer together. She was the loser in that decision, but she was too stubborn to see it. Joseph was happy for his friend, whether Victor appreciated it or not, that the man was not saddled with that back-stabbing bitch and he would be sure to tell Victor what he thought of her.

Joseph went into the house and started a fresh pot of coffee, then went upstairs and into the attic where he retrieved a large shoebox. It was dusty and the lid was misshapen. The corners were smashed in and it looked as if it would not hold together much longer. He would find a more suitable container for its contents before returning them to the attic.

Out on the porch, with the sun angling in and striping the small table in the bright yellows and reds of oak, he set the box on the swing next to him and opened it. The photos were black and white, some curled at the corners. The older ones were sepia toned and fading. The newer ones, from the '50s and '60s, were still crisp with their white borders and

convenient date stamps. The box included letters and documents, old birth certificates and marriage licenses. He found Ian and Elizabeth's wedding photo from 1919, her in a calf-length lace dress without sleeves; he in a trim black suit and bow tie. Ian's hair, which was famous for its coppery tint, was wavy and it frayed away from his ears and collar in a mildly comical way.

Joseph wished that he had known this man. He had so many questions for him. Why did he move here to the Reservation? What did he envision his life here would be like? Jacob had once told him that Ian was terrified of Indians when he first put up his cabin and had kept a loaded rifle nearby at all times. That seemed difficult to fathom, staring into the stoic eyes and tight jaw of the young man in the photo. Jacob explained that over the years Ian had become good friends with Eddie Frye, the Indian who owned the parcel to the east. That forged friendship had been like a new and tender root planted in this untamed place, he'd said. Joseph had met Eddie's grandson, Russell, but they hadn't enjoyed the same friendship that Ian and Eddie had. Joseph's father Gil had accused Russell of trying to steel his cattle by then. And now the entire Frye clan was gone—he had no idea where. The Frye ranch was now owned by Amish for coming on five years.

As he lingered over the photos of family he had known and others he hadn't, his mother pulled up in her dusty little Subaru station wagon.

"Thought I'd just come by," she said as she set her purse on the small oak table.

"I was just looking at these old pictures," he said. She was a welcome sight, and he got up to get her a cup of coffee.

She settled into a porch chair and picked through the images, a quiet smile on her lips.

"Did you ever meet my great-grandfather, Ian?" he asked, handing her the wedding photo with a cup of coffee.

“Yes, I did,” she said. “He died when you were about five. You probably don’t remember him, but I took you to see him once. His memory was spotty by then; he had trouble with names and dates. He was down in Missoula at the retirement home. He hated it there. I think it’s what killed him. A terrible place for a wild cowboy from the frontier to end up, really. But he was well over ninety by then, and no one here could care for him properly.”

“What did he think of dad?” Joseph and his mother had never had a frank conversation about Gil, though they had flirted with the topic once or twice. For some reason, it seemed important to do so now.

Alice sipped her coffee, taking her time, as if to ascertain the origin of the question. At last she shrugged. “He was disappointed. Gil was a huge disappointment to all of the McGill men before him.” She shrugged again, as if giving up all pretense. “And after, I gather.”

Joseph had never thought of his father in terms of being disappointed by him. He had simply not understood the man. Gil had angered him on many occasions, and perhaps that anger had been disappointment after all.

“Your father never wanted to run a ranch,” she said. “He had his heart set on going to engineering school and moving back east. New York or Philadelphia. He loved the city—or so he imagined that he did. He had never actually visited any of those places.”

“He never said anything about that to me.” Joseph picked up a photo of his father when he was a young boy of four or five, holding a spotted puppy. He stared into the laughing face. His eyes seemed bright and curious. Delighted. There was no trace of the man Joseph had known in that young face.

“There is an expectation in this family,” she said quietly. “I used to believe in his dream *for* him. I tried to convince him to pursue it when we were just newly married. He

could have done it then. But his father didn't even want him to go to college. He thought it would give him ideas, and take his attention away from the ranch. He was probably right about that." She held up a photo and gazed at it as if she wasn't sure who the people in it were. "But I don't know if he really wanted to leave here. It was something to blame, instead. Or maybe that's what made him so bitter. Who knows."

"Is that why he was so mean?" The question was blunt and surprised them both. Had they never discussed this before?

She shook her head, still looking at the photo. She had collected a pile in her lap. "I don't know."

"My grandfather was so kind. He was a generous, friendly man. How did he produce dad?"

She looked at Joseph from under her brows. "Jacob *was* a kind man, but he could be demanding. He expected your father to fall in line and become a rancher like he and his father had. There were no other career options for him, and Jacob made that abundantly clear."

"He once told me that when the ranch was mine I should do things differently." Joseph pulled out Jacob's birth certificate, signed by the local parish priest, though the family wasn't Catholic. He had been born at home, and the priest covered the entire Reservation for recording births and deaths.

"And you have. You've done a very good job with this place, Joe."

Joseph was glad he couldn't see the pivot from the back porch. A new and ever-present reminder that he might be the one to lose this place. "I vowed never to be like dad. Isn't that a terrible thing for a son to do?"

She was quiet awhile, taking her time studying each photo. “I used to go down to Missoula and read to your great-grandfather when he was in the retirement home, and he would talk about the old days. He loved this place so much. He made me promise to keep the family here. To raise a strong son to carry on the family legacy. It was so important to him.”

She masked her emotions, and Joseph couldn’t discern her feelings about what she had promised. It reminded him of his parents’ battle so many years ago and how she had stood her ground about not moving to Missoula with his sisters.

“If dad had allowed you take me with you, would you have left him? Left here?”

She looked up, surprised. “He never would have let you leave. I knew that. It was a bluff.”

“Lori would have been better off if you had left with her.” The moment he said it, he realized how blaming it sounded. “I mean, *he* caused that...”

Alice shook her head. They never talked about Lori. They simply visited the big cemetery in town on July 23rd—his sister’s birthday. He and his mother went together, but Joseph always wandered down along the creek after a moment or two at the gravesite while his mother sat on the grass, arranged the flowers she had brought, and told Lori everything that was going on. He scouted fishing holes in the shade of towering cottonwoods, waiting for his mother to get to her feet again—a signal that she was ready to go. He had always wondered why Lori wasn’t buried with the family, here under the willows. But he understood now that his mother, or perhaps it was his father too, needed her in town. They wouldn’t have been able to live here with their daughter’s grave present to every coming, every going, every picnic on the grass, or lighting of the Christmas tree. It seemed odd now. He would’ve have buried her here if it had been his decision.

Alice had dedicated hours and hours to trying to find Lori after Gil kicked her out. They'd heard she was with people in Seattle, but no one seemed to know the names of those people in the rumors. Alice talked about Lori coming home and getting her GED. She was always reminding the family that a lot of good people have a bad chapter; this wouldn't be what defined Lori's life. But the night of Lori's twenty-first birthday, while Joseph was home from college helping on the ranch that would eventually be his, she overdosed on heroin and died in a damp alley in Tacoma. He didn't want to believe that she was alone when she died—there had to be people with her. But no one surfaced.

Thinking of it now, Joseph could hardly believe that it had happened so long ago. It felt like yesterday that he had heard the news. Seen his mother collapse in hysterics on the kitchen floor. Wandered dazed into his sister's room to find it still kept for her, as if she were expected home at any moment. He and Lori had never been close, especially after Lori started getting into so much trouble, but he always thought what happened to her was not her fault.

"You are a fourth-generation McGill rancher," his mother said, pulling him back to the conversation. "You are exactly what your great-grandfather had hoped for. He was a tough man, but not unkind. His son Jacob was a rare human being—so generous. But Gil?" She shook her head. "He was tortured by this life here. Angry beyond reason. I often wonder if he was mentally ill."

Joseph understood. He sipped his coffee as he considered the idea. He had wondered the same thing over the years. There seemed to be no logical reason for the depth of his father's fury.

“I loved him, nonetheless.” She put the photos back in the box with purpose and picked up her coffee cup. “I have some more family documents at home that I’ll bring over. You should keep them all together.”

“What kind of documents?”

“Family stuff,” she said. “I should have given it to you a long time ago. You can look through them.”

He nodded. He didn’t imagine he needed any more marriage and birth certificates. What would he do with them, but put them in the attic?

“I’ve been thinking about something,” he said. “I know what you think about Kayla. I don’t know anything about Arabs or their religion, but I don’t want to be that person who throws someone away without giving them a chance. She’s an American as far as I’m concerned.”

Alice pursed her lips and folded her hands, listening to him.

“I like her. And I want you to like her, too. I want you to give her a chance. I’m not saying we’re going to get married or anything like that. But I’d like to explore this thing we have. You know I won’t do that if you feel strongly about it. I guess I’m asking you to let me decide what’s right for me.”

She nodded. “I guess it’s not fair for me to tell you what to do. You’re a grown man. And you’re capable of making the right decision.” She squeezed his hand. “I know you will.”

“Thanks,” he said. “I’ve been so wrapped up in the water compact business and testifying in Helena that I haven’t kept in touch. She probably hates me.”

KAYLA

Kayla awoke that morning to Victor Yellow Knife's careful fingers tracing her eyebrows and nose, lips and chin. His hair spilled over her breasts as he lay on his side, studying her. Her head ached, and she recalled the previous evening with a mix of excitement and anxiety. Had she gotten drunk and brought Victor home with her? She had. She closed her eyes, but he was now talking to her softly.

"You are so pretty," he said. "If we had babies together they would be Arab-Indians. And they would be awesome!"

Babies? Did he just say that? Alarmed, she started to sit up, but he kissed her back down to the pillow. She liked it, which was also alarming.

"I want to show you all of Montana, you city girl," he said, as he inched his mouth downward over her chin and neck to her collarbone. "I want to show you everything."

He had shown her things no other man had done, that was true. And she was a little giddy now thinking about each of those individual moments. Victor had left his watch on her kitchen table, and as she ate her toast, she wondered if he had done it on purpose. She'd had to convince him that she needed to get some work done, or he would have stayed all day. But the moment he was gone, and she was sitting in her empty house, alone but for Henry, she wished she had let him stay. She didn't know what to feel about this unexpected man.

After she washed the dishes she took her phone out onto the patio to call her father and saw that Joseph had called. She put the phone on the small table there and eyed it like a poisonous snake. How did he know she was with Victor? *Did* he know? How could he know? It was a small town. Of course he knew.

She picked it up again. He hadn't left a message. Maybe the lack of message *was* a message. She wondered if she should call him back, but then decided against it. If he had wanted her to do that, he would have left a message. And what would she say, anyway? 'I had a really great time with your best friend last night. He could teach you some things in the bedroom.' No. She didn't want to hurt him, and she hadn't been disappointed by Joseph's performance. But she had been wowed by Victor's. And his enthusiasm this morning. She didn't experience the emptiness of watching a man dress in the early morning hours and leave with a promise to call.

As she thought about the morning, Victor called.

"Hello?" she said. She was grinning, and she didn't care.

"You still as pretty as when I left?"

She giggled.

"I left my watch over there."

She gazed out at the enormous church building. A light breeze carried the scent of cottonwood sugar and alpine forest down from the mountains. "I know. I think you did that on purpose."

"I did. Now I have to come get you and take you to dinner."

She understood in that moment, listening to the deep timbre of his voice, that he wasn't just a one-night stand, but someone different and new and exciting. Her body tingled. She wanted to know everything about him. "I'll be ready at six."

"Indian time."

"Indian time?"

"I could do Arab time and be punctual, but my watch is at your house. So it'll be somewhere in the proximity of six, okay?"

"That sounds remarkably like Arab time," she said, remembering her childhood visits to Tripoli and how they lingered on the beaches or in the medina until ten or eleven or midnight before returning home for supper.

"Good. Our children won't be confused," he said. "I gotta go. See you soon."

She decided to call Sylvia before she called her father. This would be a hard conversation, but Kayla wasn't going to let her friend find out about Victor from someone else. Or worse, by seeing the two of them together.

"Hey, Kayla," Sylvia said. She sounded rested and upbeat.

"How's Paula doing? Have you heard anything?" Kayla asked. Though she had been with Paula when Aida died, the young mother's grieving had turned inward and private, and Kayla felt that any communication right now might be an intrusion.

"I went over this morning and she isn't taking any visitors. It's going to be a long road for her."

"Please tell her that I'm here when she needs me."

“I will. Thanks. Do you want to get together for a drink this evening?”

“Um... there’s something I need to tell you. I don’t want you to hear about it from someone else.”

Sylvia was silent, but Kayla thought she could hear her sucking in a bracing breath.

“I... I ran into Victor last night. At the Oil Can.” She bit her lip and struggled for words. This was harder than she had imagined.

“And?” Sylvia asked somewhat impatiently.

“We...”

“Goddamn it,” Sylvia said quietly.

“I’m sorry. It wasn’t something I planned.”

“It’s fine. Really. Don’t worry about it.” Sylvia’s words were rushed and tense.

“Sylvia—”

“Really! I told you I wanted him to see other women. I wasn’t really thinking of you, but that’s fine.”

“Please don’t be angry.”

“I’m not. It’s okay. But I have to go. I’ll see you at work on Monday.”

When she hung up Kayla felt as if she had swallowed a heavy stone.

After calling her father and confirming his arrival date, Kayla walked downtown to the post office. She stopped in at the art gallery, mostly because she didn’t want to return to her empty house. She had spent the time since the call thinking about Sylvia, and it had put a

damper on the giddiness of the morning. She wondered if their friendship was irreparably damaged. She considered telling Victor she didn't think they should see each other because of it, but the whole incident had been a happy accident. Nothing they had planned. They hadn't set out to hurt anyone, and didn't they deserve a shot at being happy, too?

As she sniffed homemade soaps, she wondered if she was being selfish for wanting to continue seeing Victor.

“Kayla!” DeeAnn said and hugged her.

Though she wasn't the hugging type, Kayla appreciated the gesture today. It was nice to encounter people who knew her and were happy to see her. She was coming to understand why people lived in small towns. There was a sense of belonging here among friends.

“Well, I did it,” Kayla said, knowing DeeAnn would be ecstatic. “I got a cello.”

DeeAnn bounced up and down with excitement. “We have an art opening next Friday. Promise you'll come play. I'll pay you with a bottle of local wine.”

“I'm very rusty,” Kayla said, shaking her head. She considered the bottle of local wine; their expectations were low. Maybe she could do this. No one came to the art gallery, anyway. She wouldn't be making a fool of herself in front of too many people.

“Please! We would be so delighted.”

“Okay. Just don't expect too much, okay? My father will be here visiting,” she said.

“It will make him feel really good to see me play.”

SYLVIA

Nona sat stoically in her reclining chair, a shawl around her shoulders, her white hair neatly braided and tied with beaded leather thongs. Sylvia positioned the camera she'd borrowed from Intrinsic Architectural, adjusted the lighting so that it wasn't in Nona's eyes, but so it highlighted her facial features.

"What's all this fuss for if you're not planning to share the video?" Nona asked.

"It's so I can study your lips as you speak. If I'm going to learn Salish, I need to be able to see how you say the words."

Nona scowled. "It's a listening skill. Not a seeing skill."

"It's both. Now hold still." Sylvia peered at the digital image of her grandmother, making sure it was just right.

"Why are you so grumpy?" Nona asked.

"I'm not."

Nona laughed, and Sylvia ignored her. She wouldn't understand this business of Victor and Kayla that had been gnawing at her since the phone call. On the one hand, she was grateful that her friend had taken the time to call and tell her directly. But did she have to pick *him*, of all the men on the Reservation? She had a multitude of white men to choose from. What happened to Joseph? She realized that she was clenching her jaw and tried to relax it.

“Say something so I can test the video,” Sylvia said.

“What do you want me to say?” Nona grinned. “Sylvia is in a very bad mood today,” she said in a teasing tone.

Sylvia gently adjusted the camera, then took her place in the chair opposite Nona. “Okay, tell me about your family first. How life was at home, before you went to boarding school. And when you tell about boarding school, please also tell me about the visits home. Okay?”

Nona thought about the request, her eyes crinkling at the corners. “In Salish?” The old woman started in in Salish without waiting for an answer. Her words were deliberate, slow, and seemed to carry no emotion. Sylvia listened to the familiar sound of her native language. She had heard it often enough to find great solace in its round, consonant-heavy cadence. But she had only learned single words here and there, or the occasional phrase of greeting that she and her schoolmates had practiced when visiting with elders or when they performed their Christmas plays. There was a weightiness to Nona’s words that made Sylvia yearn to understand.

As she listened, she couldn’t help but think about Victor. How could he do this to her? He knew that she and Kayla were friends. Kayla had become more like a best friend, in fact. The kind of friend she never had, but always wished for. Someone to share all of her aspirations with. That girl who would go to the salon with her in the afternoon, and the saloon with her in the evening. She imagined Victor finding Kayla at the Oil Can and spitefully flirting with her just to get back at Sylvia for telling him to see other women. She tried to focus on Nona’s words, but her inability to understand the sentences worked against her, returning her again and again to Victor and Kayla.

Nona spoke for two and a half hours. She cried softly in places, though her tone didn't vary from the plodding, calm dissertation. Sylvia became mesmerized by the sounds at some point in the second hour, and she listened intently, imagining that she understood moments, images, pain, and happiness in those words. The words swirled up like a kaleidoscope, morphing, sparkling, connecting, and breaking apart again. She forgot about Victor and Kayla, and simply listened.

When Nona went quiet, Sylvia was lost. "Is that all?"

Nona nodded. She seemed exhausted. She didn't smile. She looked out the window at the mountains, deep in the past.

"I'll make supper," Sylvia said, getting slowly to her feet.

Nona didn't respond, and Sylvia wondered if she had injured her grandmother by asking her to tell this story. What had she said that affected her so profoundly now? Sylvia would begin her Salish lessons tonight. She would not let this recording languish and be lost. She would hear and understand it. She would know what her grandmother had said.

At home, Sylvia uploaded the video to her computer and backed it up for safe keeping. She was careful to delete it from the camera before returning it to the firm. There were fluent Salish speakers working there, and she had made a promise to Nona not to share it. Her grandmother's words echoed in her head like ghosts, whispering a riddle. She closed her eyes and remembered the soft sounds of her story. It would always be this before anything else, this sensation of story—of life—without understanding its meaning. Is this what infants experience, she wondered.

Now that she had recorded Nona's story, she sat with the guilt of not having learned Salish. For all of Sylvia's commitment to fighting for Indian rights and bettering the lives of tribal members, she had failed to do this most basic thing. She didn't shy away from the feelings of failure, of neglect. She experienced them fully, vowing to change it. She would have children of her own, and she would teach them the native language. Like everything she undertook, this would be a focused achievement. She would pass these stories down in the words of her ancestors.

When she was finished securing the video, she called Kayla. Something had been bugging her, and it was not simply that Kayla and Victor were seeing each other. The call went to voicemail, and she hesitated. Kayla was probably out with him now, she thought. She tapped her fingers impatiently on the table as she listened to her friend's bright voice asking her to leave a message.

"It's Sylvia," she said. "Listen, I need to talk to you. I—I don't want to be the one to put a damper on things with you and Victor, but..." What was she trying to say? Shouldn't she be saying this in person? It was too late. She was already committed. "I think he might be seeing you to get back at me. I don't want him to use you. Just... be careful that it isn't a ploy to hurt me." She hung up, then immediately wished she could take the message back. It was better said in person.

KAYLA

“I can’t wait to meet your father,” Victor said as he dipped his fries into a concoction of ketchup and horseradish sauce that he’d mixed himself. The waitress had anticipated this without being asked and left a bottle of horseradish on the table when she brought the food. They sat on the same side of the booth at the café, like a pair of teenagers, their legs pressed against each other. His hand wandered along Kayla’s thigh, to her knee. He gave it a squeeze, then returned to his food.

“He’s got a pretty heavy accent,” she said. “Most people have a little trouble understanding him at first. But you’ll get used to it.”

“We’ll take him up to the Glacier Park. Can’t be too many mountain ranges like that in Libya.”

“That’s a good idea,” she said. “I’d like to see it, too. I’ve only seen the Matheson Lodge; I haven’t been inside the park yet.”

“Oh, you have to see it. There’s nothing like it in the world.”

His excitement about all the things he wanted to show her made Kayla feel giddy again. She hadn’t experienced this butterfly excitement with a guy since she was in middle school, and she delighted in it. How unexpected. Spending time with Victor was so easy. She didn’t have to think about how she behaved or what she said. Even her humor, which she put on as a way of making friends, was quieter and more truthful. His wide-eyed wonderment at her heritage was refreshing. Too often she found herself guarding it from people’s

assumptions and preconceived ideas, and here was a man who simply wanted to know everything about it.

“Let’s go up to the Bison Range after we eat,” he said. “The animals are more active in the evening. We’ll have a good chance of seeing them.”

“I still haven’t seen a buffalo that wasn’t in someone’s pasture.” She had imagined when she moved to Montana that buffalo would be roaming wild everywhere. It came as a disappointment to learn that they were only wild in the sanctuary, and that there were thousands of buffalo being raised for meat in pens across the state, just like cattle. Domesticated and diminished as an icon of the West.

“Maybe we’ll see elk. I love the elk.”

His comment reminded her of Sylvia. She also loved the elk most. Kayla looked at Victor. He was so alive, so physical and present in the way he moved through the world. Sylvia, on the other hand, seemed so restrained to Kayla. She was always holding back, whether it was her opinion, her emotions, or her ideas, she was measured and thoughtful. She could no longer picture the two of them together as a couple. Victor was all in, no filters. Kayla loved that about him.

When he saw her looking at him, he kissed her, then shoved more fries into his mouth. If this didn’t work out, she realized, she was going to get hurt.

At the overlook on the pinnacle of the Bison Range, along the seldom used dirt road that was off limits to non-park personnel, they made love with the doors open, stretched out on the bench seat of his 1974 Chevy pickup. He had meticulously restored it in crisp blue and white, and every inch of it was polished to a high shine. They laughed as they maneuvered

around the stick shift and under the steering wheel. They gasped in unison when they united, unable to get enough of each other. When they had dressed again, Victor spread a blanket on the hood of the truck and they leaned back against the windshield together, admiring the Mission Mountains across the valley, the peaks lit pink in the glow of sunset.

“I know this is moving really fast, but I like you a lot,” he said. “I mean a whole lot.”

She felt the same. But this was not where she had intended to make her home. This was supposed to be a temporary stop, a gathering of her strength and renewal of her resources, before moving on to a bigger career in a larger firm in a city somewhere.

“You are so fascinating to me,” he said, smoothing her hair gently. “Who could imagine I’d meet an Arab woman out here in Montana?”

“Wow, an Arab and an Indian,” she said. “What a combination for people to contend with, as if it’s not already hard enough for them.” She laughed at the idea of these two cultures converging. “My mother was American, and my dad used to call her Miss America. He’d sing that old rock song to her, ‘American Woman, stay away from me...’” She mimicked him, singing the chorus line.

“What did she call him?”

Kayla couldn’t remember. She thought hard about it, but nothing came. It disturbed her. Certainly, her mother had a pet name for her father. “I don’t remember,” she said quietly.

“I used to know this white guy in Minneapolis who was married to a Mexican woman. He called her his Little Beaner, but only to her face. It enraged people who didn’t get it, but she thought it was funny. She named their cat White Boy after her husband.”

“We should come up with the most derogatory nicknames we can think of for each other. Just for the hell of it.”

Victor tossed his head back in pure delight at the idea. “I’ll call you *my little towel head*.” He squeezed the crown of Kayla’s head, affectionately.

“I’ll call you Tonto.”

“No, that’s what I call my dick.”

She laughed. “Geronimo.”

“Good, but the wrong tribe. Way off on your geography.”

“You guys all look the same to me,” she said.

He tickled her until she shrieked.

“Redskin?”

“Boring.”

“Oh, and towel head isn’t boring?” She slapped his arm.

“Okay, sand nigger.”

“Yikes! Maybe a little too derogatory.” She nuzzled into his neck and smelled his tobacco scent. “We don’t want people tossing us out of places.”

“Terrorist.” He said and kissed the top of her head.

“Like father, like daughter. I’ll call you Chief.”

“That’s me,” he said, cupping his crotch.

She ran her fingers over his, tracing the veins that stood in high relief like tree roots beneath the earth’s surface. He had beautiful hands. “If just anyone called me a terrorist, I’d show them what terrorism means.” She smiled at the idea, though she knew she wasn’t capable of such jocularly. She’d bite her tongue and seethe about it, but she was unlikely to

call anyone out for racism, and she knew that from experience. When she was in elementary school the kids often made fun of her father when he came to pick her up. They mimicked his accent, but they did so in demeaning tones, as if he was stupid. She had flushed with embarrassment, but she never defended him. In fact, she had asked him not to come to her school. Shame flooded her now. She should have fought for him. She was proud of her father, until those children made her feel otherwise. They made her feel like an outsider, a foreigner like him.

“Let’s get married,” he said.

She was stunned. “Shouldn’t we get to know each other first?”

“I know what I need to know.”

She had imagined that Victor was more responsible, less reckless than this. But then, he had never been married before. Not like her. “I’ve just suffered through the worse divorce you can imagine.”

“It won’t be that way with us.” He wrapped his arms around her and pulled her snugly against him. “I will love you forever. We will grow old together. We’ll lose our teeth and we won’t be able to see each other. Our hearing will fail and we’ll have to hold hands to stay upright. But we will be together.”

“What about Sylvia?”

He gave her a gentle squeeze. “I’ve moved on. It’s okay.”

“And Joseph?”

“Ah, good old Cowboy. Well, you tell me.”

“You two are the friends. I just went on a date with him. He didn’t call back, so I guess that’s that.”

He looked at her seriously. “Do you want him to call you back?”

She shook her head. “Too late for that now. I’m glad he didn’t.”

A strange whistling sound came up the canyon, and Kayla froze. “Did you hear that?”

“Elk,” he said, listening. “It’s early, but they’re getting ready for mating season.”

The day her father arrived it was hot—into the high 90s, and a hard wind was blowing off the mountains, lifting dust into whirlwind fingers that traced lines across the hayfields. He climbed out of his car and stood a long moment taking in the mountains and the sky. Kayla skipped down the front steps and hugged him with all of her strength. They held that embrace, and she fought back tears.

“You have missed me, Bunny,” he said, as they finally disentangled.

“I’m so happy you’re here.” She led him inside and showed him around her tiny house. She told him about the thrift shop in town and pointed out the mildly-stained oriental carpet she’d found there, and the 1930s floor lamp. The reasonably well-executed oil paintings of the local landscape, and the cherry blossom table cloth.

“You’ve done well for yourself, I see.” He looked around with approval, but he had always given her that. He was never one to criticize the way she made up her home or how she spent her money.

“You wouldn’t believe how much money I have saved.”

He smiled at her. A warm, fatherly smile that told her he was proud of her. “I have arranged for some things to be shipped here. The sofa and dining table. Your mother’s hutch. A few antiques that we picked up here and there.” He looked away from her, out the window. “I could not bring myself to get rid of them.”

She touched his shoulder, and he turned back.

“You can replace these rented things with familiar surroundings,” he said, smiling weakly.

“I’ll take care of them. If you ever want them back—”

“No,” he said. “They are yours now.”

“Let me show you your room. You must be tired.”

“A little,” he said. “It is a long drive to here. It took me two days. I stayed overnight in some town in Washington. Out in the wheat fields. Pasco, or Kennewick. One of those. What a terrible place that is. All wind, no trees. It looks like the deserts of Libya with wheat instead of sand.”

“You can rest and shower, and then we’ll go have supper at the café. You’ll meet everyone in town, all at once.”

“Sounds like Tripoli.”

Kayla was anxious to show her father Mission, not because she thought he would love the place—she was sure he would find it stiflingly small and inadequate. But she thought he would be proud of her for coming to this foreign place and making a home, a life. She was now working at a job she truly enjoyed, she’d made friends, and then there was Victor, too.

She was divided about introducing the two men, but Victor would be disappointed if she didn't. As she listened to the familiar sound of her father brushing his teeth in the other room, she realized that she was happy.

They met Victor at the café and took a table near the front window. Victor wanted Kayla's father, whom he called Mr. Azkari until the man insisted that he call him Khalid, to take the chair with the view of the Missions Mountains.

Victor volleyed question after question at Khalid about Libya and how he had come to live in America.

Her father seemed pleased that this young man was interested, and he told him about his growing up years in a family of nine children. He talked about Libya as a kingdom, before Qaddafi, and the pristine turquoise waters of the Mediterranean Sea. But he never told those stories without recounting the foolishness of the self-appointed leader, such as how Qaddafi had depleted the water table beneath Tripoli trying to create an enormous farm in the desert. Now the tap water often ran briny and it had to be boiled to make safe. He explained that the family went years without getting a phone bill, then suddenly they received a two-thousand dollar invoice that was due within the month. He told of the darker times, too, when people went missing after speaking out about the government, and the rotting bodies of the students Qaddafi had hanged in the square to intimidate the people.

"I am glad they killed that rat in the street the way they did when they finally got him," he said of Qaddafi. "It is a wonder he lasted the few minutes he did. We hated him. If it had been me, I would have tortured him to an inch from death, nursed him back to health, and done it again. I would do that to him for the rest of my days."

Victor had stopped eating. He was staring at her father, and Kayla felt uncomfortable. She understood his hatred for Qaddafi; she'd heard all of the stories of how the man had

robbed them of everything they owned. Not just her family, but every family. Her father had railed often about how Qaddafi had brought orphaned fighters from sub-Saharan Africa to populate his army because they had no loyalties to anyone in Libya but him. It made an uprising nearly impossible. But others were not so informed, and her father's vehemence sounded crazed to them.

"Is Qaddafi what made you decide to come to America?" Victor asked.

Khalid laughed, clearly enjoying the opportunity to talk about his homeland. Kayla wondered how long it had been since someone took such an active interest in his life.

"Perhaps he is the reason I stayed. But I had decided to come when I was a small boy. I watched hours and hours of *Combat* and *Big Valley* when I was little," her father said. "The American airbase in Tripoli broadcast their television shows on local TV. We did not understand one single word they said, but we knew that the good guys always won. And the good guys were Americans."

Victor shook his head. "Well, that's where you and I part ways."

They laughed.

"No. I would not imagine that those TV heroes were very attractive to Indians," said Khalid. "You people were the bad guys in those old shows. Very, very bad. You should be ashamed of yourselves," he teased. "Now it is Libyans who are bad guys."

"Remember that movie, *Back to the Future*, when the Libyans showed up hanging out of that VW bus with their automatic weapons blazing," Victor said. "You guys were badass. We loved you here on the rez."

After dinner, Victor drove them up to a small reservoir at the base of the falls. They hiked up into a clearing where they could see the valley below, its lights beginning to twinkle on. The evening stayed warm, and Victor built a small campfire to keep the mosquitoes away.

“I’ve never been up here,” Kayla said, sitting next to him on the log and poking the fire with a long tree branch. Sparks sailed into the sky, mingling with the stars, and she poked it again.

“You have to have a tribal permit to come up here,” Victor said. “But don’t worry, I have one.” He grinned. “Just don’t pick the huckleberries or we’ll get scalped.”

“This is a little bit of heaven,” Khalid said, looking out at the valley. “I hope we can find our way back.”

It seemed for an evening as if time had stood still. Kayla felt relieved of some burden—that of proving her new life to her father, perhaps. Victor had taken responsibility for showing him the Reservation and all its beauty. And that seemed right to her. This was his home. Only he could truly guide them through it. But it felt a little bit like home to her, too.

She wished that her father were not leaving for Libya, but she didn’t dwell on it in that moment. It was his choice, and though she knew he would stay if she begged him to do so, she would not stand in his way. He had dreamed of Libya without Qaddafi since she could remember. As chaotic and frightening as the place was now, it had always been his home.

IAN

1974

Gil's wife was sitting in the metal chair by his bed when Ian awoke. He couldn't remember her name—not all the time. Sometimes it came. But not today. She smiled at him the way she always did, and it brought a mix of tenderness and resentment to him. He knew he was an old man, but he didn't need to be treated like a child.

“How are you, grandpa?” she asked, leaning in so he could hear her.

He waved her away. “I'm fine. Still alive.” Then he noticed her son, quietly coloring on the floor. “He's grown.”

She beamed proudly at the boy. What was his name? Ian wondered. Ivan? It was a family name.

“Joseph is almost three now,” she said.

“Joseph. That was my grandfather's name. We named Joanne after him, too.”

She nodded. “Would you like me to read to you?”

“No.” He didn't like to be read to. Or perhaps that wasn't entirely true. He enjoyed it when she read from those big World War II books the book lady had left. He like to hear about the battles and imagine his son as a soldier there. But this woman preferred to read novels to him, instead. Unsure of his taste, she had resorted to classics like Don Quixote.

They were okay, he surmised—they passed the time well enough, but they were not like the stories of real adventure.

She stood out of her chair and filled a glass of water for him. As she handed it to him with a bendable straw, he remembered that there was something he had wanted to tell her. It had been important, and he'd written it down.

“Can you get me that notepad from the nightstand?” He gestured at the small metal table next to the bed. He hated this place. It was cold, austere, and the noise of clinking dishes and wheeled carts in the hallway got on his nerves. Sometimes the place smelled like poop. And the colors were awful. Green and orange. He had never been much of a decorator, but he could do better than this.

She reached out for the notebook and knocked a small houseplant onto the floor. Dirt scattered across the ugly speckled linoleum, and she gasped and began to scoop it up.

“Uh-oh, mommy,” the boy said. But he didn't let it bother him long before returning to his coloring. Ian thought the boy looked like Jacob when he was little. He had a calm demeanor, not easily excited.

“Oh, I hope it survives,” she said pressing it back into its pot.

“Where did that come from?” he asked.

“I brought it; to cheer the place up a little.” She stood up with the small African violet carefully cradled in her hands. Its purple flowers were dusted with potting soil, but it appeared to fare okay.

He nodded his thanks. She didn't have to bring those things, he thought. He would forget to water it, like the others, and it would die. He wished someone would forget to water him.

“Where’s Gil?” Ian wondered how long it had been since he’d seen his grandson. Time slipped into a different measure here. What seemed like weeks often turned out to be days, and what seemed like days could sometimes be years. He wanted to go home where the rhythm of ranching could help him keep the seasons straight. This artificial environment, he suspected, was created to keep old people in a state of confusion. That way they could take their money and do what they wanted to them.

“He’s branding, grandpa. It’s that time of year.” She set the renewed plant on the nightstand, but he thought she should put it on the counter on the other side of the room. Otherwise, it will just get knocked to the floor again.

“He’s switching to ear tags. He thinks he’ll be able to quit burning the brand in a few years, once he has them all organized.”

“He’s a terrible rancher.”

“Now, grandpa, his is not a terrible rancher.” She handed him the water, and then dug in her purse. She produced a small baggy of homemade chocolate chip cookies. “Don’t tell the nurses.”

He took the cookies, which had gotten the boy’s attention. He handed one to Joseph and ate the other four one after the other without pausing. If the nurses found him with these, they’d confiscate them.

“Thank you,” he said, when he was finished. Between sips of water he asked her questions that seemed vaguely familiar, but he couldn’t remember the answer to. “Where is Jacob? Tell him to come down here and get me. I want to go home.”

She looked pained, and he remembered then that Jacob died, though he couldn’t quite remember when.

“Never mind,” he said, turning his face to the wall. It never stopped shocking him that his son was gone. He wished he could forget, but Jacob inherited cancer from his mother. Ian was certain of it. No one else in the family had died of cancer.

“Grandpa, let me read you something.” She picked through a small stack of books on the counter, selecting one and returning to her chair. He looked at this young woman. She couldn’t be more than twenty-five. He barely knew her, yet here she was, the family representative to the elderly and forgotten. He missed his daughter Joanne. He knew that she still lived in Bozeman, and that she was a grandmother now. He recalled that her second grandson was born premature, and she had spent weeks at the hospital with her daughter-in-law. But he couldn’t remember the daughter-in-law’s name, or the name of the baby.

“I don’t want to be read to like a child,” he said. He understood that he was being difficult. He was grouchy. But he was old. People should give him that.

“Okay, we can just talk then.” She smiled politely, but he could see that her patience was thin.

He rubbed his face, then looked at the woman. “Honey,” he said, “thank you for coming to see me. What I want, and it’s hard for me to admit...” He thought about this. Did he want to say this? Why not? He was old, and she would forgive him. “I want you to tell me your name.”

She patted his hand. “Alice. I’m Gil’s wife.”

“I know you’re Gil’s wife. I just can’t seem to remember your name. I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay.”

He looked at his notepad. He didn’t have his glasses and he couldn’t make out the words, but simply seeing his own scribbled writing jarred his memory. “I’m going to tell you

something, Alice, something I don't know what to do about. And if I don't tell someone, it'll be too late. I'll be dead."

"Oh, don't say that. You'll be here for a very long time yet." She drew her chair closer to the bed, and took the glass from his hand.

"I sure hope not!" He laughed, and so did she. Finally. He was beginning to think she was a sourpuss.

"When Jacob was boy—a teenager—he got himself into some trouble." He could see confusion working its way across her face. "Her name was... Dina. Dina? Dina!" He tried to remember her last name. It was important to remember. "Dina Two Eagles. Yes, that was her name. Jacob kept the relationship a secret from us at first." Ian took a moment to think about that. He'd never considered himself anti-Indian. Why did his son think he needed to keep it a secret? But he knew why. He wasn't anti-Indian, but that didn't mean he thought the two races should mix. He looked at Alice with purpose.

"I'm not prejudice."

She nodded and swallowed, waiting for him to continue. She looked worried, and he thought he better just come out with it straight away.

"Anyway, you can guess what happened. It was 1940. Things were different back then. We didn't know what to do. Jon Two Eagles, Dina's father, wanted her to keep it. Raise it. That sort of thing happened in their community, I guess. But it didn't in ours."

"What happened?" she asked.

"Elizabeth and I convinced her to go to a Catholic home for unwed mothers. She finally did after we agreed to pay for her expenses. And they gave the baby up for adoption. It

was a girl. That's all I know. She was a little girl, and she went to a nice family somewhere around Helena. But those records are sealed."

"Why are you telling me this?" The young woman looked suspicious to Ian, and he didn't like her attitude. He was telling her something important—something private, a family matter. She should have more respect and not be judgmental.

"I'm telling you because she's out there. A McGill. It's been on my mind a lot lately. If she ever came looking for her father, well... she might, you know? Gil should know about her. She's his sister."

Alice seemed not to know what to say. It annoyed Ian that she responded this way.

"I have the papers. They're in my safety deposit box. I planned to give them to Jacob, but I couldn't do it after he married Teresa. We never talked about it after he got his life together, and I think fighting in the war is what helped him do that. He left home a boy who had just signed away the rights to his daughter. He was broken-hearted over Dina and the baby. The two of them actually wanted to get married. But that would never have worked out. He knew that. He did!"

Alice took a slow, deep breath. "Is Dina still alive?"

Ian shook his head. "I don't know. We didn't keep in touch. And when Jacob came back from the war, he was a man. He'd seen things that we can only imagine. Ugly things. He never talked about it, but he was different. He took responsibility for the ranch, he got married, and he raised Gil." Ian's voice dropped when he spoke Gil's name. That boy had started out with such potential, but he turned out lazy. All he wanted to do was make up plans for aircraft. He daydreamed and left the gates open and let the cattle out. Then he blamed other people for his mistakes. He would forget to move the irrigation lines and then swear

that Indians had been tampering with them. Jacob and Ian were forever fixing that boy's messes.

"Grandpa, look," Joseph said, showing a red and blue scribbled picture that Ian couldn't make heads or tails of. The boy was proud of it, though, and Ian smiled.

"That's real nice. Can you draw me a horse? Draw me a cowboy picture, okay?"

Joseph looked at his picture a moment, then accepted the assignment. He went quietly back to work, and Ian wondered if this boy would be like his father. A dreamer. So far he seemed okay.

"Promise me that you'll keep this boy on the ranch," he said to Alice. "Raise him to the work of ranching. That's his birthright, but he needs to be trained to it. It's doesn't just happen. He needs to work, and work early."

She nodded, and he wasn't entirely convinced that she would follow through. Women were too soft when it came to their children. Elizabeth had been like that, and so was Teresa.

"Joseph," Ian said. "I settled that ranch for you. You and your son after you. Take good care of it for me, okay? That's your job."

The boy nodded, but didn't look up.

JOSEPH

2014

Joseph picked his mother up at her house to take her to the art gallery where her paintings were being featured in the special summer show called Solstice Nights. He had promised to attend, and he had felt a need to build better family ties after spending that recent day reminiscing over old photos and talking about his father. He and his mother had been to the cemetery to tend Lori's grave, and this time he had brought his garden tools. They'd planted perennials, some sort of yellow daisy that his mother picked out, along the base of the headstone. He had tried to remember Lori as a little girl. Something to erase and override his later memories—the ones of her drunk and belligerent that had prevailed after her death. He'd asked his mother for help reforming his perspective of her, and the two had talked long after returning from the gravesite about their growing up years when Lori brought home the baby snake she planned to keep as a pet, and the frogs she had raised from tadpoles in the stock tank next to the barn. They laughed about the time she got her foot caught in the cattle guard and it took the volunteer fire department and an entire jar of Vaseline to free her. They retold the jokes she was fond of as a child—silly jokes that weren't all that funny, but to them, in that moment, they were like a salve.

“Are you ready to go?” he asked, standing in her living room.

Alice was dressed in a silk pantsuit. It was new, and she looked younger to him. She'd had her hair done for the occasion, and she wore a smidge of lipstick.

“You look great, mom.”

She blushed a little and waved the compliment away. She picked up a folded document from the table and handed it to him. “I should have given you this a long time ago. It may be too late to do anything with.”

“What’s this?” he asked, unfolding the legal-sized page. It was yellowed and brittle. A document from Lewis and Clark County, Montana, dated November 3, 1940.

“It’s the adoption agreement a baby—your grandfather Jacob’s illegitimate daughter.”

Joseph stared at it, trying to put the pieces together.

“He got a young Indian girl pregnant when he was nineteen. They put the baby up for adoption. The girl’s name was Dina Two Eagles.”

“Two Eagles. I went to school with Harlen Two Eagles.”

“I did some research when I first found out about this. Harlen was Dina’s nephew; her brother’s son. Dina’s other daughter, the one she had later with Marty Thompson, is Sylvia’s mother.”

Joseph sat down on the sofa and refolded the document, trying to sort out the complicated relationships. He tried to hand it back to his mother, but she shook her head.

“You keep it.”

“Sylvia and I related through this baby?” The idea made his stomach sour. And yet there was the news was laced with vindication, too. High and mighty Sylvia, related to the white man she’s trying to screw out of his land. “Does she know about this?”

“I don’t know.” Alice watched her son’s reaction. “I didn’t know what to do with this information. So I didn’t do anything. I never told your father. It would have killed him.”

Joseph grimaced. "I wish you had told him."

He wished his mother had given him this document at another time. A time when he was alone to think about it, to form an opinion on it. He thought of Victor and how Sylvia had broken his heart over tribal blood percentage. He would enjoy telling Victor that his beloved shared a relative with the McGills. And he realized how much he'd begun to hate her. It wasn't healthy. He knew that. But he wasn't ready to anything about it.

The gallery doors had been propped open, and the evening light slanted in onto the burnt orange of antique fur floors. The sound of a cello lured people in with its haunting, slow melody. He couldn't remember hearing anything like it here before.

"I can't wait for you to see the paintings," Alice said as they climbed the steps. "They gave me the front wall, right when you walk in. It's the best space in the gallery."

His mother's paintings were beautiful, he thought. Landscapes of the valley, she had painted them in impressionistic styles with bright colors and thick, bold strokes. The rivers were silver and royal purple, the mountains orange and cadmium red. She had melted the fabric of their world, mountains and valley, rivers and forest, into each other with a delicate fluidity that could not be divided. These characteristics of Montana, of this specific place, could not be separated, no matter how meticulously one might try.

"These are stunning," he said without the slightest patronization. "You've really captured this place, mom."

She smiled brightly, and was instantly greeted by the gallery owner and a new admirer. Perhaps a buyer, he thought. He turned his attention to the other exhibits, but the first thing he saw Kayla bent to her cello, coaxing out a soft melody. He watched her, the way

she drew the bow across her instrument, the expression on her face as if the music were flowing from her very soul. Did he know she played the cello? Had she told him? She was beautiful, and he was glad to see her. He'd try to repair things.

He took a glass of red wine from the table and wandered, listening to the cello, waiting for her take a break. In the corner, Victor was intently discussing something with a short Mexican man. They both laughed, but their conversation seemed exclusive and private somehow. Likely one of the artists, Joseph assumed.

Joseph and Victor hadn't spoken since before the trip to Helena, and the friendship felt distant. It wasn't the first time they'd experienced this, and Joseph reckoned that time would smooth it out again. Regardless of how things turned out, they would find that connection again somehow. Girls had come and gone. Work had taken Victor away and back. They were now on opposite sides of a big issue, and that hurt, but at the heart of it they were just two boys who liked to fish and drink beer.

In the textile room, Joseph found Sylvia and her grandmother studying the fine weave of handspun scarves. He nodded his hello, but he couldn't look her in the face right now. Did she know about the lost baby? Would she admit it to him if she did? This was the woman who rejected Victor because he wasn't tribal, and Joseph couldn't find much respect for her knowing that.

"Did you see Kayla," he asked, deciding he should make small talk. They would eventually have to be friendly again whether they liked each other or not. "I didn't know she could play the cello."

"Yes," Sylvia said. "She's better than she led us to believe." Sylvia was reserved in her response, and he imagined it was due to recent exchange in Helena. They had never known how to treat a member of the opposition when they encountered each other in town,

and now things were worse. He found it odd that the community hadn't figured out an etiquette for these situations. As neighbors, they were always encountering each other. But then he remembered her plan to rid the Reservation of whites.

Sylvia's grandmother swatted Sylvia on the arm and nodded provocatively at Joseph, embarrassing him. In his experience, old Indian women were uncommonly overt with their sexual comments and suggestions. Victor's grandmother had been the same way, teasing the two boys about getting boners when they were barely thirteen years old. They would stop at her house when they were starving—she always had food for them. But it was a grab-and-dash visit designed to minimize her ability to talk about sex and embarrass them.

"Nona, stop it!" Sylvia said, and the old woman cackled with delight. "I'm sorry," she said to Joseph.

"It's okay." He felt the heat in his cheeks as he left the room. The Mexican man was standing alone now near the wine table and Joseph approached him to keep himself busy. He hated these types of events. They always magnified his poor social skills in situations that required polite small talk.

"You must be one of the artists," he said.

The man smiled and shook his head. He was short, and his dark skin was smooth and wrinkle free. "No no. I am the father of the cellist," he said with a heavy accent that Joseph had trouble following. He gestured in Kayla's direction. "I am Khalid Azkari, visiting my daughter from Oregon."

"Joseph McGill," he said, shaking the man's hand. As he turned to look at Kayla, Victor leaned down and kissed her on the mouth. She kissed him back. Warmly. She smiled, and said something. They laughed. He rubbed her shoulder as she put down her bow and propped her cello against the stand.

Joseph stepped out on the porch at dawn, his shirt unbuttoned and his hair standing in cowlicks. A pileated woodpecker drilled a nearby tree, and a pair of deer grazed on the horizon. The alfalfa stubble that was his field rolled away from him in waves of gold and brown, marching northward toward some unseen destination—Glacier Park, Canada, the North Pole. He stepped down into the dusty yard, slow and thoughtful. The mountains remained silent again today in their stubborn refusal to take sides, to choose a victor. The jagged spine of snowcapped peaks stood grand above him, so near he felt she could reach out and touch them. It was as if the land was yet in the act of becoming—the valley floor once crushed beneath the relentless onslaught of an unstoppable white glacier, now rolling and lurching to life, stumbling into the arc of mountain. These mountains would be here long after he was gone. Long after the tribe had moved on, or died out, or morphed into another civilization entirely. They would remain stoic and grand, inspiring and deadly long after the known world was nothing but an ancient episode. They had nothing to gain from anyone.

He stood now under the great arm of his irrigation pivot, its sleek aluminum piping twinkling in the morning sun, and he knew. He knew exactly how this would end. The scent of minerals seeped from the earth and a bald eagle scouted overhead. To the west, a bank of clouds pushed in from the distant coast.

“Joseph?”

He turned back to the house where he saw Kayla standing in the doorway, her nightgown clinging to her legs and her hair wild, fluttering about on a breeze that seemed all her own. He took a hard breath and looked again. The porch was empty. Ian McGill’s grand house with all its grand aspirations, stood now in the slant of history, a silent monument with an uncertain future.

Inside, he picked up the phone. He stared at it, wondering if this was a good idea.
Then he dialed Sylvia's number.

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