The Man from Sacaton

a novel by Teri Ekland

Chapter 1: Dust Devil

(September 1996) Jessie June Ellars

The flat desert sprawls around me. No one's in sight. There's no sign of civilization—no shack, no pole lines, no nothing except a rusted-out Ford chassis dumped among the creosote. To think. Less than twenty-four hours ago, I was jogging in Washington Park, enjoying the cool temperatures of Portland, and smelling Douglas fir and Oregon grape. Halfway down the trail, I foolishly decided to surprise Bob and come home early. I sprinted back to my folk's house, grabbed my luggage, and caught the red-eye to Phoenix. Why in god's holy name was I so eager to see the surprise on Bob's face? I didn't even bother changing out of my sweaty jogging clothes. I'm wearing them now. Why? Because, at the time, I had no idea the surprise would be on me.

I stop walking, deeply inhale the dry air, and wipe my brow with the back of my hand. A hundred yards before me a burst of dust appears like a spirit born from the sun and hard caliche soil. Like a god has just created the first human being.

I watch the dust spirit swirl and meander among the yuccas, agaves, fishhook barrels, patches of jumping cholla, and a few old saguaros standing tall like sentinels of their desert terrain. The vortex soars into the dazzling sky and seems to suck up the turkey vultures that are obviously tracking me down. Suddenly, it spins out and disappears like it never even existed. If the wind is a spirit, as Native Americans claim, then the dust devil must be a spirit in turmoil.

And here you are, Jessie June Ellars! Lost and spiraling out of control. Or is it spinning out. Unraveling? It hardly matters. Yesterday's shock and last night at the casino will vanish with your death. You'll end up like the bleached bones of Georgia O'Keefe's paintings, or like the bones of lost and hopeless migrants found near Nogales. "Unidentified Female Human Bones Found in the Sonora Desert" the Republic will report. And no one will ever know those bones belonged to you!

I helplessly look around at the emptiness. From the top of a creosote, a Gambel's quail is calling to his mate. Or more likely he's saying to me *Hey, gringa! Where are you going?* I've never hiked into the desert so unprepared. I don't have any water, I didn't slather my fair skin with Spf 45 sunscreen, and my Ray Bans are inside the glovebox of my broken-down Beemer. How did this happen?

Because, stupid, when you set off for help, you assumed someone would find you right away?

Was that three hours ago? I've lost track of time. I can't even tell which direction I'm going because the midday sun is scorching the part in my hair. I glimpse overhead but only for a second. I don't want to lose my sight even if I'm going to die anyway.

How could you be so careless? Jessie June. You've lived in Phoenix for fifteen years. You know better. Remember last August when that out-of-town writer made the news? Like an idiot,

he hiked the Superstitions without a drop of water and he died from heat stroke. Like people do every summer. Like those little kids who drown in backyard swimming pools. And now, Jessie June, you're one of those people who make a fatal mistake. You're nothing but a statistic!

I take off my red Cardinals T-shirt and cover my pulsating head. I push forward, step by step, watching for snakes, tarantulas, scorpions, and Gila monsters. Poisonous dangerous desert vermin. I saw a Gila monster once, a few years back, during a trail ride on South Mountain. The fat lizard's black and orange colors sparkled under the sun like the glitter on my coffee table paintings of the desert. It didn't move and I wanted to touch it. My cowboy guide, a man named Ken Buckholtz, said a Gila may be slow but it's quick to lock its jaws on victims. "And their venom is as lethal as a rattlesnake's bite," he added and warned me not to touch it. He was right. Just the other day a man in Phoenix made the news. He was keeping two Gila monsters as pets. Even named them Poncho and Zapata. One bit him and he died. Just like that! Maybe it was the spirit of Poncho Villa who came back as a revengeful Gila monster.

I hear a noise and snap from my drowsy thoughts. I look around. A roadrunner crosses the desert pavement with a lizard in its mouth. I start recalling how Bob practically insisted I go to Portland. *Visit your parents, your sister Brenda* he said. *Take a break from your job*.

Sure, I'm always complaining about my caseload and the drudgery of being a PI attorney. Yes, I hate my job! But Bob wasn't looking out for me. He wanted me gone for two weeks. I wonder who his bitch could be. I didn't recognize her as one of Bob's clients or colleagues at his firm. Maybe she's a paralegal slut? But then, I hardly had time to stare her down. After the initial shock wore off, and my mind registered what was going on, I stormed out the front door and sped off in my Beemer. Or is it spun off? I didn't even take my luggage out of the trunk. Oh

yeah. That's something Bob would have done if he wasn't busy fucking some middle-age husband-stealing whore. In my bed!

I kick the hard ground and think about when Bob and I first moved to Arizona after living in Boston for six years. I wanted to grow a garden in the backyard of our new house in the South Mountain foothills. But the ground in Arizona isn't formed from centuries of forest decay like the rich humus soil of Oregon. No. Caliche is a clay that ancient people used to make adobe huts. I couldn't dig into the ground with a shovel. Neither could Bob so we ran to Home Depot and bought a pickaxe. Even that proved useless. I ended up using potting soil and growing plants in ceramic pots on the back patio beside our swimming pool. I don't worry about my kids drowning in that pool. Bob and I don't have kids! Before we married, he told me he didn't want kids and like a fool I went along with the idea. I wanted *him* that much. Now it's nearly too late to change my mind. And anyway, I'm probably about to expire decades before my time.

A barranca of mesquite, ironwood, and paloverde trees appears a hundred yards in the distance. I amble toward it and find shade under a scraggly mesquite. I sit against the trunk careful to avoid the long dark thorns that are as prickly as a prickly pear. I hug my knees and my life flashes before me like they say it will when you're about to fall off a cliff. . .

Portland wasn't the best place in the world to grow up. It rained all the time and whenever I wished for a white Christmas, the snow changed to slush, black ice, or a silver thaw. Mom and Dad owned a One Hour Martinizing drycleaners in North Portland near Keenoo's Groceries on Lombard Street, across from the Piggly Wiggly where, early summer mornings, I caught a school bus to pick strawberries in Forest Grove. I wanted extra money for things like earrings and maybe clothes that weren't catholic school uniforms. We weren't really poor. It's

just that my folks didn't make enough to spoil us kids. Not like Bob lavishes me with expensive gifts, fine dining, exotic vacations . . .

I like being spoiled, no doubt about that. What am I going to do now? If I survive? Get a divorce and continue working as a PI attorney at a second-rate, ambulance-chasing law firm? Or live off an artist's wage selling my coffee table art? No. I'm going to take Bob to the cleaners—to a Mom and Pop's One Hour Martinizing! I laugh aloud and start coughing. My throat is caustically dry. Once I gain control, my mind reels back to when Bob and I first met . . .

I was nine-years-old and the five-year difference between us seemed enormous. Bobby Ellars was a gangly teenager and best friend of my brother Randy. They were both freshman at Benson High, a school exclusively for boys. Like a lot of things back then, girls weren't allowed. Like the sign on Randy's bedroom door.

Bobby came over nearly every weekend. He and my brother seemed to make a game of teasing me. Randy called me "Messy Jessie Bressie" and Bobby called me "Boo Boo Bear" after Yogi the Bear's sidekick on Saturday morning cartoons. Sometimes they both called me "flapjack." I know now that they were referring to my emerging breasts. At the time, however, I didn't understand their lewdness. I was only in the fourth grade and under the strict rule (and ruler) of Sister Glanzel in her penguin frock and wimple. Besides, I liked the attention Bobby showed me and felt there was something special between us. I was his best friend's kid sister and he was my big brother's best friend . . .

The faint purr of a car engine snaps me from my memories. I squint and spot a distant car stirring dust across the desert on a road I hadn't noticed before. It's moving toward me. My instincts caution me. These are probably drunken men on a joyride. I want no part of whoever they are and pray they continue on their way. I freeze up. Play opossum. But how can they not

notice me? A freckled woman in a sports bra with a red t-shirt on her head, alone in the middle of their reservation. I feel vulnerable, afraid, parched, and so in need of help. But I don't want *their* help.

The car slows down and stops. It's an old white Buick, maybe a Cadillac, an abandoned junk heap resurrected. "A bucket" Bob would call it. The thought makes me want to snicker again but if I do, I'll choke.

Four men with long black hair exit the car. One points my way and shouts but I can't understand what he's saying. If I wave them on, they'll think I'm gesturing for help. And if they walk toward me, I'll run the other way.

Who are you kidding, Jessie June? You can't even get up. No. You're not crazy after all. A crazy person wouldn't feel so helpless and afraid. You're just an ignoramus, like Randy used to call you. And this will be the last stupid thing Messy Jessie Bressie ever does!

The men climb back in their car and the bucket spins around in a cloud of dust. It speeds off in the direction it came from. Returning to a town, I'm guessing. For help? I wonder. Where is my own car? My hand-me-down Beemer from Bob. He buys a new BMW every year to look sharp for his executive clients from Intel and Motorola.

I should have stayed with my car! I scold myself. Then I remember another story in the Republic, about a family of five found dead in their car stranded in the Sonora. They had waited in their car for help! If only I had some water.

I close my eyes and feel like collapsing on the ground but the desert's too full of quills, thorns, and stinging barbs for that. Not to mention deadly black widow spiders and bark scorpions! And other lethal creepy crawlers.

Stop it Jessie June! You've no right to think about dying. You're in the prime of your life. Only last summer you hiked the Grand Canyon rim to rim. Or was that the summer before?

My body hurts inside and out. My head is pounding. My heart is beating too fast and my breath is too shallow. I'd cry but I don't have any water for tears. Thirst is dragging me down. Maybe it's best to hope those cavorting men return and rescue me. Maybe my instincts were wrong.

I rest on my knees and picture my wedding ceremony on Flag Day, Bicentennial Year. It was the happiest day in the happiest year of my life, I used to tell myself and anyone else who'd listen to my romantic story. Bob liked telling it too, at least he made me think this . . .

I had just earned my Bachelors of Fine Arts at Framingham University and thought Bobby Ellars was the perfect man for me—a Harvard grad and a patent attorney at one of Boston's most prestigious law firms. Even my folks thought Bob was a good catch and they hardly ever say anything to me about my personal life. Why? Because I didn't act like a proper catholic girl? But I did change my name from Bressie to Ellars. Maybe I was just tired of Randy calling me Messy Jessie Bressie.

Bob and I didn't want a big Catholic wedding and maybe this also pissed off my folks. But Bob and I weren't even Catholic anymore. We used birth control, for one thing, and had been living in sin for over a year.

With our parents and close friends, we had a small gathering at Walden Pond. Brenda was my maid-of-honor and Randy was Bobby's best man. An actor playing Henry David Thoreau married us and ended the ceremony with *Go confidently in the direction of your dreams; live the life you've imagined.* I always believed these words launched Bob and I on life's journey together, sealed our fate as a couple in union with the cosmos. Or some such asinine

spiritual thing. I believed we were soulmates. Made for each other. Until yesterday. Now these words seem hollow, sucked into a dust devil like turkey vultures.

A hot breeze rustles the mesquite leaves above me making the music I suspect one hears at death's door. It's a soothing sound, this death knell. I rest my head against the trunk, close my eyes, and say what may be my very last prayer.

Hail Mary, full of grace, blessed art thou among women. I have asked You for many favors, but I earnestly ask you now. Let me find a way out of this god forsaken desert. Let me survive. Amen!

I drift asleep and dream I'm still wandering the harsh desert terrain.

Chapter 2: Dream-Vision Wanderings

600 years earlier

Indolent Moon

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HER MOTHER WENT TO 2ND HEAVEN: Tamoanchan OR (?) Tonatiuhtlan. Place where sun moves. Home to Tonatiuh, god of 5th sun and to warriors who died in battle. WOMEN IN CHILDBIRTH. THE PLACE OF DREAMING

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From the cloud of swirling earth, I enter my dream-vision wanderings in the season of southern sun one week past my first bleeding. Many generations ago, my ancestors—the people

of bones—re-emerged from the hole Creator dug before the flood that destroyed the previous world. When my ancestors re-emerged from this hole, they reclaimed the desert and built irrigation channels from the river to our fields of Maize, Beans, and Squash, the three sisters. They built the Grand Palace in our settlement which is now a thriving center on the trade routes of the four directions. Other nations call us Hohokam, *master irrigators of their fields*. We call ourselves the True People of the Desert and River.

My father is Sun Chief of the Grand Palace Settlement. People call him Shivering Bear, *the man who makes bears shiver*. His wisdom and power reach all True People in our nation of settlements along the river and irrigation canals. He is Keeper of the Fire in the Grand Palace because he settles all disputes, organizes the ballcourt games, and leads our warriors into battle. True People follow my father because he is patriarch of the Fish Eagle Clan. I always wear a shell pendant carved with the Fish Eagle totem. It means *At the beginning of this world, Fish Eagle burst from the Earth hole on the flames of Young Sun.* Inside my shell pendant are my mother's ash and bone.

My father's council of elders has nine men and three wisewomen. They represent each phase of the moon as well as their own clan totem names. It's taboo for hunters to kill the animal of their clan totem name. My people rank each clan according to when its totem animal re-emerged from the Earth hole after the flood that destroyed the previous world. Coyote and Vulture followed Fish Eagle, then came Bear, Deer, Owl, Bat, Scorpion, Turtle, Lizard, Roadrunner, and Quail. All the clan totem animals followed Elder Brother who created the sky and Earth. Elder Brother is our Creator.

My father gave me the birth name Indolent Moon because the night of my birth Frog Moon stood indolent beyond the northern reach of Old and Young suns. In this way, Earth and

sky spirits blessed me. But they also cursed me that day because my mother's spirit flew away and left her a corpse. People called her Elder Woman for her standing on the council of twelve elders. She died on the pelt of a bighorn mountain goat, her animal totem name.

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Tonatiuhtlan. Place where sun moves. Home to Tonatiuh, god of 5th sun and to warriors who died in battle. 2ND HEAVEN: Tamoanchan OR (?) Tonatiuhtlan. Place where sun moves. Home to Tonatiuh, god of 5th sun and to warriors who died in battle. WOMEN IN CHILDBIRTH. PLACE OF DREAMING. OF DREAMS. Cihuateteo (spirits of women who died in childbirth. like spirits of male warriors who died in violent conflict; a woman in labor capture the spirit of her newborn child similar to the way a warrior captures his opponent in battle. resided in *Cihuatlampa*, the "place of women." ea day, they guided the sun from noon until sunset, even borne it through the underworld until it rose again. LIKE NUT aided by the spirits of male warriors, an honor that was not bestowed on any other individuals)

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In the tradition of my people, my father set her corpse on fire and her smoke spirit rose like Fish Eagle on the flames of Young Sun. To my father, the passing of Elder Woman was the bite of a rattlesnake with fangs made from the sun.

In the tradition of True People, only a mother can raise a daughter. My father has many wives and children. I'm his eldest daughter. But my step-mothers fear my curse and refused to raise me. In truth, I believe they're jealous because Shivering Bear loved Elder Woman more than any other woman he ever took to bed.

My father placed me under the care of White Evening Flower. Her birth totem name comes from the plant that resembles the long-jointed stick bug. Its large white flower blooms once a year and makes dream medicine. Most people call White Evening Flower, Grandmother. Sometimes I call her an old crone. For ten years, she has taught me the healing magic of sky and Earth spirits but she never shows me the love between a mother and her child, a deer and her fawn. She is always impatient and cranky when instructing me.

In my settlement men join societies for warriors, hunters, craftsmen, builders, traders, and medicine men. Women belong to only two societies. All women and girls join the Basket and Pottery Makers Society because all women and girls weave baskets from willow twigs and grasses along the river and irrigation canals. Girls usually stay in their family home to make pottery vessels, yucca cloth on their looms, and the baskets we carry on our backs while gathering food, medicine, and offerings for Earth and sky spirits.

White Evening Flower is First Prophet of the Three Holy Sisters society, the other society for women. My father and his council of elders select a few girls in our settlement to join this society as holy women dedicated to healing and prophesy. My father chose me to join the holy sisters because of my birth curse. No man of the True People will ever take me to bed. He fears my curse will destroy him. Father and Grandmother tell me I am blessed to be chosen as a holy sister. But for me, it's another curse because holy sisters cannot bear children. It's taboo. Now that I'm a fertile woman, my greatest instinct is to have a child. I am double blessed and double cursed and this is what haunts me during my desert wanderings.

At the age of a girl's first bleeding, mothers usually give their daughters their animal totem names. Grandmother tells me I must go beyond what most girls do when they become fertile women. Before I enter her society of holy women, I must wander the desert alone and find my totem animal in a dream-vision in the same way boys are required to do.

From new moon to the thirteenth moon, or until a vision reveals my animal totem name, I am staying at the ceremonial pit house called Grandmother's Hut. White Evening Flower stays with me and guides my dream-vision wanderings. Each morning, she weaves bone totems and scarlet macaw feathers into my hair and paints black zigzags on my cheeks to represent my path.

My shell bracelet is a roadrunner with a rattlesnake's head in its beak. It means sky spirts overpower the poisonous spirits of Earth and protect me on my dream-vision wanderings.

On my yucca fiber tunic I have drawn Ek Chuah, the flute playing spirit who carries on his back parrots, macaws, and other trade goods from each of the four directions. Along the way to our settlements, he scatters glitter, pollens, and magic dust as he plays flute music that causes the wrens and thrashers to sing when making their nests in mesquite branches and woodpeckers to chirp when drilling their homes in grandfather saguaros. Ek Chuah makes rain music and plays the songs of hummingbirds that hover for a moment then flit away to make another tune.

Before I begin my day's wanderings, Grandmother gives me a tea made from the red plant that grows high on ironwood branches. The brew helps me have visions that will reveal my animal totem name. Throughout the day I visit many hunting and medicine shrines where I make offerings and ask the Earth Stone Spirits to reveal my animal totem name. At the end of each day, I return to Grandmother's hut with my gathering basket filled with food, medicine, wood, rocks, bones, and feathers for Grandmother and for the Earth Stone Spirits at the shrines.

Outside the hut, Grandmother keeps a sacred fire burning with dried paloverde and mesquite. It's taboo to burn ironwood. Like grandfather saguaro, ironwood is an old man of the desert. Sometimes old ironwood appears dead but he's as alive as a sapling. In the washes his thick gnarly branches intertwine with catclaw, a shrub with piercing thorns and fragrant flowers that attract birds, bees, butterflies, and other little desert spirits. During the second midway sun, red pods twist from the catclaw branches like conch shell ear ornaments the color of a scarlet macaw. In a stone metate, I grind these young pods for my father to drink in a brew mixed with the cacao beans traders of the far south bring to our Grand Palace settlement. The brew makes him sleep with many dreams that reveal what he must do for his people.

After Old Sun removes flowers, bees, and glittering rocks, the night sky spirits appear one by one and the White Road spans the sky. White Evening Flower sleeps in her hut and I sing and dance around the sacred fire. I tap my magic sticks made from saguaro ribs and painted Earth colors and I count the night totems circling the sky. The Bear, Deer, Rabbit, Owl and Hawk twin brothers are sky totems like sisters Snake and Sky Hummingbird and the Hunting Warrior and his coyotes who watch over Earth past the northern sun. When Sky Hummingbird appears in the night, I hear him saying *I am watching your desert wanderings, Indolent Moon. I am listening to your prayers.*

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Today is my seventh day of wandering. Young Sun paints the sky like pottery glaze and he tattoos woodpecker with his totem. I find a baby quail trapped behind my gathering basket against the wall of the pit house. The chicklet is the size of my thumb and feels like a tiny spirit of the flute player's song. I place it outside and it runs to twenty chicklets following their parents. The magic of the desert is a song of love. This is why my instincts are to be like a deer that loves her fawn. Like a quail that loves her many children. But I am cursed and blessed and begin my wanderings with a confounded spirit.

I first wander to the stone maze on the desert pavement that people of bones made for their descendants to follow. For me. I enter the maze and hold three magic sticks in each hand and tap them together so Earth spirits can fill me with power. The spirits speak and I sing what they tell me,

People of bones marked the journey of life in the

stone path you wander on your dream-vision quest.

You pass through rock,

Walk up the cliff and into the whirlpool of night.

Young Sun drinks the whirling water

Your ancestors etched on sacred shrines.

On my way to Bear Hunting Shrine, I pass a field of jumping cholla. My steps are especially careful. The pods fall to the ground and grow new pods that jump on anyone passing too closely. The quills sting like a scorpion's tail.

At the patch I meet a coyote. He has spindly pods in his mouth and on each paw. It was probably yesterday that he tried to bite himself free but died in the midday sun. To honor his gravesite, I shake my gourd rattle and ring the copper bells around my neck where my shell pendant with my mother's ash and bone also hangs.

I sing *You are now a great Earth spirit, brother Coyote*. *Like you, I am blessed and cursed. My fate is to be a prophet and healer but my instincts are to be a mother. I pray your great spirit ends my curse. That you bring a trader to our settlement who is not one of the True People. Such a man won't know about my curse and if he does, he won't fear me. He will take me to the far south where I can become a mother. Then I will be only blessed and no longer cursed.*

Chapter 3: The Teardrop Tattoo

600 years later (September 1996)

Jessie June Ellars

I wake to a faint puttering. I squint. A blinding beam of sunlight bursts off the chrome fender of an old wrecker tow truck, a dark green Ford crossing the desert toward me. It stops fifteen feet away keeping the dust from reaching where I'm leaning against the mesquite. I strain to see who arrives and suddenly believe that I might not die although it could be too late.

A large man is sitting in the driver's seat. Dark sunglasses hide his eyes but I know he's staring at me. He exits the truck carrying a colorful Navajo blanket. He's wearing an unbuttoned workman's shirt and a white tank top tucked into jeans. When he turns to shut the truck door, I see a long black braid falling down his back.

Without speaking, the man approaches and stops before me. He towers above as I peer at his square-toed black boots with straps, buckles, and chains. I look up at his broad nose and scarred, beardless face.

The man eases me up and covers my head and back with the Navajo blanket. It feels heavy like a buffalo pelt. My skin stings; I didn't realize the severity of my burns.

I notice his calloused, tattooed hands, his soiled nails, and the missing tip of his right little finger. When I spot his cuff bracelet—a Navajo cluster of turquoise on silver—pain explodes from everywhere inside me. I nearly collapse but the man braces my elbow in a way that seems gentle for such a large man. He knows how to treat my condition. He is a man of this land, so unlike the masses of urbanite invaders. Tourists. People like me and Bob.

"Easy, dear lady." For the first time I hear his voice. It's soft and raspy, as if blown from the desert's grit. *Dear lady* echoes through my pounding head. It amazes me that I can walk without dropping into blackness. I really may survive.

He opens the passenger door and helps me onto the torn vinyl seat. The smell of oil and grease permeates the cab. A man's smell. With the blanket secured over my blistering shoulders, I lean forward, feeling both hot and chilled. Despite the heat, I know the blanket keeps me from lapsing into a seizure.

The stranger reaches behind the seat and pulls out a plastic water bottle. He unscrews the lid and holds it to my tender lips.

"Slowly, dear lady," his voice again speaks from the desolate land. *Slowly, slowly, slowly* echoes through my mind. The water tastes sweet and cooling although it's hot. I want to drink it all at once but the large man allows me only a small trickle at a time. It hurts to swallow. My dry throat feels like a dozen scorpion stings. Like bronchitis and strep throat. His touch eases the water down my throat. He feels my forehead. It burns but his touch relieves the pounding. He knows what to do. He's helped someone out of the desert before.

I rest my arms and head on the cracked, dusty dashboard, and remember when Bob and I first moved to the desert fifteen years before. . .

I had just enrolled at New England School of Law in Boston, the only law school that took my low LSAT score, when Bob announced a change of plans. At least for him. After thirteen years he was suddenly tired of living in Boston. "Too many traffic hogs," he complained. "People honk you through intersections. Everything's expensive. Winters are cold, wet, and snowy. Lots of sludge . . ." He took me completely by surprise when he declared he was moving to the Sun Belt. Then I learned that this was not a new idea. Without my knowledge, Bob had already applied for a position at a patent law firm in the Valley of the Sun.

I didn't even tell New England School of Law that I was pulling out. I wasn't worried about a refund. My husband made good money and I didn't want Bob to leave me behind.

Besides, I dreaded going to law school and Arizona sounded like a pleasant change. Bob gave me the option to come with him or stay in Boston and go to law school. *Did he even invite me to join him in Phoenix? Or have I always assumed that he did?*

When we moved to Phoenix we were newlyweds. While Bob was meeting with the partners at Goldstein Patent Law, I was relaxing at the Phoenician in Scottsdale or driving a rented Cadillac around the city. That's what I did. I was Bob's pampered wife the creative artist, the interesting hostess, the world traveler.

On that first visit I drove to Papago Park and the botanical gardens to draw in my sketchpad. The day was clear, dry, and warm and it was the middle of October. At this time of year, both Portland and Boston are cold and rainy and people are suffering from chest congestion.

The red-orange outcroppings and strange thorny plants appeared like a backdrop in a John Wayne movie. Everything seemed so unreal. And the mountains of Phoenix are nothing like the Cascades of the Pacific Northwest. The desert is so unlike the Douglas fir forests of Mt. Hood or the fall colors of New England. But something about the raw arid land appealed to me in ways that made the NW and NE seem unvarnished. On my first night in Phoenix, I dreamed I was trapped inside a boxy Portland hedge in the cold drizzle. The dream confirmed that I had made the right choice by moving to Arizona. . .

I jolt awake feeling stiff, dusty, and parched. The green tow truck putters to a stop near a two-story house made of timber and adobe. It has a slanted plywood roof and looks like a pioneer's attempt at making a home on the prairie. Tires and chassis on jacks clutter the yard. Near the front of the house is a ramada made of mesquite posts topped with saguaro ribs and

ocotillo spines. A large adobe horno dominates its west side next to a stone firepit. Mesquite trees stand around the ramada and near the house.

The large man parks his wrecker truck, exits the cab, kicks away the barking dogs, and opens my door. I sit motionless, feeling paralyzed but miraculously alive, over the hump of surviving. The man helps me walk to the house, step by step. He would carry me, I sense, but he knows I must walk or I'll perish.

The front door is ajar. Inside is an outdated country kitchen that reminds me of a great uncle's farm in Forest Grove. It has an old stove and a hand pump dripping water into a rusty sink filled with dirty dishes. I don't see a refrigerator. *Is there electricity?* I wonder as the man guides me to a metal table, the kind my grandparents had. He helps me sit on a vinyl padded chair, torn and taped, and removes the Navajo blanket from my shoulders and the Cardinals T-shirt covering my head. He goes to the kitchen counter and aims a small fan at me, cooling me instantly.

Electricity does come to the house I'm thinking. Probably from road lines I didn't notice. My head is still spinning although the pain has diminished now that I'm out of the sun. I want to thank him, the large O'odham man, but my throat cannot bear my voice. Instead, I watch him step outside the front door. Shortly he returns with a long blade of aloe.

Through swollen and sore eyes, I watch him remove his work shirt and hang it on the back of the chair he pulls close to me. His arms are massive. His left bicep has an odd tattoo, a switch blade through the heart of an eagle dripping blood. His right bicep has an animal skull with feathers.

Suddenly, I feel exposed in my sports bra. My pale skin shines red in the dull light. But the stranger is trying to help me, not seduce me. My condition is critical. Still, I can't help but wonder where this will lead when I'm better.

The large O'odham man takes from his belt an MSI knife sheathed in black leather and slices the serrated aloe leaf; its slimy juice drips onto the plank floor. He reaches over and applies the cool gel to my burning shoulders. His touch is not like that of a lover who brings a tingling sensation to my skin and body. He touches me with the care of a nurse, a mother, someone who brings relief to pain. *Hail Mary, Sacred Heart of my Lord.* I recall driving home from Christopher Creek last month (when I believed everything was fine between me and Bob). We had hiked for five-hours that day and I was driving home while Bob was napping in the reclined passenger seat. He can nap like that because he works long hours and has to "keep up with me" as he often teases when he agrees to join me on one of my nature hikes. Usually, I hike with friends from the Environmental Law Society, the ELS, in law school.

As I drove through the ponderosa pine forest of northern Arizona the windows were slightly ajar, the sun was setting, and a warm breeze blew the vanilla scent through the car. I had felt refreshed, wonderful. Imperishable. Like now as the stranger glides the aloe along my arms, on my face and bleeding lips. His touch feels like a soothing fragrant breeze in the silence of a drive home.

I sigh and close my eyes. This man has me now, all of me, I'm thinking. It doesn't seem wrong. Not now. Not after Bob cast the first stone. I don't know how this situation might end but for now I find only comfort from this man. He cares that I survive.

Am I hearing him ask if I'm married? I'm unsure. Any normal man would ask a pretty woman found wandering alone in the desert if she's married—no matter her condition. My thoughts drift away. I say nothing because I cannot speak.

"There, Red," the large man says as he applies the aloe to the nape of my neck, pulling my red locks aside over my shoulders. "Now we sleep."

His words run through my mind triggering new thoughts that had refused to form just a moment ago. Will he sleep with me now that he's fixed me? His strange, violent switchblade tattoo with two drops of blood dripping from the eagle's heart moves toward me and aligns itself to cut my throat. I feel dizzy, giddy with a pleasurable sort of fear. I'm surrendering to my survival and my head falls on the table. I nearly blackout but sense him carry me up the stairs and into an attic room. He places me on a queen mattress against the plank floor. I hear him tell me to dream about the Creator living in a nothing atmosphere before he creates everything that is and everything that doesn't even exist.

I fall deeply asleep and dream the first dream I remember having probably when I was five. In it, a bear family takes me into their lair. They place me on a stone table and stand around me, waiting for their meal which is presumably me. I've always believed this dream came from the fairy tales told to little children—Red hikes in the woods and a beast eats her. I also believe these fairytales originated from cavemen teaching their children to fear predators—Bears, Wolves, and Lions—that prey upon the weak.

When I awake, I find myself lying on the queen mattress. A single bedside lamp illuminates the timber and adobe walls. Across from me, ten feet away, is a twin mattress also on the floor. A cooling breeze blows into the attic from two open windows. I don't know how long I've been asleep. Nothing is normal nor will it ever be normal again even if I return home. The

surprise. Mine for Bob. Bob's for me. Has changed everything. *Was the surprise yesterday, or the day before? When did I go to Harrah's Ak-Chin Casino? Which reservation am I on?*

The O'odham man suddenly appears in jeans and a leather vest covered in badges and patches. He's sitting on the twin mattress and leaning against the wall. His long hair hangs unbraided down his shoulders and arms. With a somber expression, he's gazing at me as if he's stoned. Wasted. Or in a trance.

I want to ask about the tattoos on his massive biceps but I still can't speak. Or am I even awake?

"The eagle flies higher than any other bird to give messages to our Creator. The skull is of the bear, my spiritual brother," he says about the tattoo on his right arm. He knows my thoughts like he is the Creator.

The large O'odham man begins quietly singing in his language and shaking a gourd rattle that makes the sound of a diamondback.

Haven't I seen you before? I ask. Or, am I thinking to myself. Is this a dream? Is he the Navajo man on death row. *Didn't I meet you when I was a law student? One time in the holding room at Florence*. I think I'm asking. But I'm not. The State executed the Navajo man the year I passed the bar on my second try. I don't know the man across from where I lie with my head on a stone-hard pillow. I vaguely remember his face as I was walking through the Ak-Chin Casino. His wide lips, high cheek bones, and proud broad nose. He wore sunglasses then. He isn't wearing them now and his dark almond eyes are clearly visible as he looks at me. A teardrop tattoo falls below his right eye and his open vest reveals diagonal scars across his bare chest.

Chapter 4: Deer Family Spirits on the Thirteenth Moon

600 years earlier

Indolent Moon Deer Spirit

On the day of thirteenth moon, I visit a mountain ravine at the place of Big Rock. The barrel cacti hillside of tumbling red and black boulders has many pictures that my ancestors drew. Grandmother says that Earth stone spirits from inside these boulders guided the drawings and help us interpret their meaning.

One boulder displays spirals and circles aligned with the north, south, and midway suns. In another, Ek Chuah floats above mesquite, ironwood, and paloverde trees while playing music to a deer spirit family of four adults and two fawns crossing a barranca. They are related through the first mother who gave birth to them all. They stay together and taste and smell each nuance that Wind Spirit casts. Wind Spirit is the servant of Bitter Man, the first man on Earth. *Do not go down the road of Bitter Man and leave you spirit to the wind* Grandmother often tells me.

Lizard man emerges from cracks in the red-varnished boulders. Grandmother says that lizard and horn toad drawings lead to places of power. I sit before the shrine and reflect on the path my father has chosen for me—to become a holy sister. I am troubled because the curse of my birth prevents my greatest desire, an instinct so strong that I must have whispered to my mother's parting spirit that I would fulfill what she lost and bear a child to raise. I defiantly sing,

Bless me with a child.

Spirit of the rock.

Tell me what path to follow. What choice to make.

The Creator breathes spirit from the sky and says to me,

Thank the sky and Earth spirits.

Collect seeds, bulbs, roots, and plants,

as women do.

You will be a prophet when the great bear hangs his head over the river canyon.

I fall before the deer shrine as if hit by a stone at the back of my head. In my dream-vision a deer wanders up to me and collapses on the ground. I see her bleeding from an arrow in her gut. "Your predators are from the Bear or Coyote clans," I tell the deer as I feel her beating heart fighting to escape her fate. I remove the arrow and smell and taste the blood on my fingers and know that the doe is with fawn.

I awake and understand I have found my totem name. My desert wanderings are over. My totem animal tells me the path I will take. I cannot join White Evening Flower and her society of holy sisters. My destiny is to bear a child and become the mother my own mother could never be. I am a deer pregnant with a fawn.

I hastily return to Grandmother's hut and tell the old crone that my totem animal name is Pregnant Deer. She argues against my interpretation and says it was merely a deer in my vision.

"It was real," I insist. "I felt her last breath and tasted her pregnant blood."

"That is no matter," Grandmother corrects me. "A vision can seem so real that you cannot distinguish it from what is actual. The Creator foretold our dreams when he emerged from

the dark place that never existed. A place without sight, smell, taste, and sound. There was no thought and vision in that place of nothingness. But the Creator has always existed. He aimlessly floated in the abyss until He wiped off his greasy sweat and formed life on Earth and spirits in the sky. He created dream-vision thought in the minds of true people. And that is reality, Indolent Moon. What you saw was as real as your vision." The old crone cackles in her speech and drinks from her brew of sage and catclaw tea.

"What I saw was actual!" I insist near the point of being disrespectful. I owe the old crone much reverence. She is the only caregiver I've ever known. And she teaches me how to survive on my desert wanderings. But I have a spirit of my own and that spirit knows I touched a dying deer and tasted her pregnant blood. And I have the evidence. On my woven garment are spots of deer blood.

I squabble with my master until White Evening Flower agrees to visit the sacred shrine the next morning. "Let's see if we can find this deer," she tells me in her cantankerous voice.

After Young Sun arrives the next morning, I help the old crone to the hillside shrine, about an hour's walk from the hut. Along the way I envision proving my case when I reveal the deer that by now is most certainly a corpse at the shrine. Possibly turkey vultures have ripped the wound in her gut, the kill hole where her spirit flew from Earth to the Creator. To the spirit people of the sky. To the spirit land of Earth. Who knows where the deer's spirit went?

At the shrine we do not find a dead or wounded deer nor any evidence of blood splatter on the ground or boulders. The old crone is tired and I take her to sit on a boulder under the shade of a mesquite tree nesting a young saguaro. I give her water from the gourd in my gathering basket.

“You see,” White Evening Flower speaks after she has rested. “We found no deer. Only the drawings of people of bones. This is how real visions are, Indolent Moon.”

“No, no, Grandmother. What I saw was real.” I insist; my spirit now tramples on decorum. “I felt the doe’s heartbeat and tasted her pregnant blood. She gave me the totem name Pregnant Deer. I will have children. I cannot become a holy sister of your society.”

The old woman glares at me, points her boney finger at the drawings on the boulder, and says, “Speak no more taboo words about leaving my society. Only Shivering Bear can release you. You are now an initiate in my order of sisters. Your totem name is *Deer Spirit*. A deer is graceful and never clumsy even in a fall. She is gentle in all manner even in the way she eats. You are Indolent Moon Deer Spirit of the Fish Eagle Clan, eldest daughter of the Sun Chief Shivering Bear.”

“Grandmother,” I protest. “I am *Pregnant Deer* not *Deer Spirit*. The blood told me the deer was pregnant. A vision does not go that far. I know my dreams apart from my steps on Earth. I know the spirits cursed me and no man will take me to bed but Frog Moon fills me with seed and I am fruitful. I will love my progeny like a deer mother who never forsakes her offspring, who teaches them how to survive by intuition. I *will* be a mother one day, Grandmother. This is what my dream-vision foretold.”

Grandmother ignores me. With the help of her saguaro staff the old crone stands and then states in a raspy voice, “Deer Spirit inhabits the rocks and lives with the ancestors on the White Road. In your dream, Indolent Moon, there are no false faces. Your totem name is Deer Spirit, a totem accepted by the sisters of my society. It means you are alert to predators. By all your instincts you are prepared to flee danger.”

“With my fawn,” I defiantly say.

The old crone smiles and says no more. I know my master has had enough exertion for the day. I take hold of her elbow and brace her for our long walk across the varnished desert scape back to the hut.

The next morning, White Evening Flower and I return to the settlement. Grandmother declares to everyone that my totem name is Deer Spirit but privately I tell my father that my real totem name is Pregnant Deer. The Sun Chief grows angry and says, “I had no choice but to give you to the old crone. No man will take you to bed if he learns about your dreaded curse. Yes, Frog Moon blessed you but the spirits cursed you because you killed your mother Elder Woman. And your dream-vision was of a dying pregnant deer who can never give birth to her fawn. Your choices will be damning if you do not conform to my wishes.”

The following day my father holds a public ceremony on the central plaza and proclaims my full name is Indolent Moon Deer Spirit of the Fish Eagle Clan. At the same event, I enter the society of holy sisters and vow to accept this name and serve my people as a prophet and healer.

Chapter 5: Bear Man in a Maze

600 years later (September 1996)

Jessie June Ellars

Did I really go to the Ak Chin Casino? I ask myself as I fade in and out of sleep. I'm not a big fan of gambling and cigarette smoke. The Gambling Devil has never swayed me and I don't have the soul of an addict.

I recall passing the "Oasis of the Desert," the new casino's front statue of an enormous saguaro with an eagle on top. I remember entering the front doors and the smoke hampering me.

At an ATM an old woman was waiting for her cash. In one hand she held a cigarette, in the other a rabbit's foot. I had no credit cards for the ATM. I had already maxed-out each one.

After I caught Bob in the act—obviously the slut was staying with him during my two-week trip to Portland—I scrambled through the day cashing out our credit cards, withdrawing our savings, and redeeming our CDs and stocks until I had three hundred thousand dollars in cash. It was exhilarating!

As I lie upon the queen mattress, I see fuzzy images of my obsessing through the night rolling dice at the tables, bidding as high as possible, drinking Margarettas, Slings, a Bloody Mary, coughing from the smoke; my head was dinging from the clanging machines and dropping quarters.

Yes, I remember all this in my sleepy thoughts. I wanted to blow our wonderful savings on something senseless. I wanted to play out my winnings until the casino devoured our three hundred thousand in cash. *Did I really spend every dime of it?* I remember drinking coffee at the bar then leaving the casino well after sunrise—drunk, upset, and out of my wits.

I see myself aimlessly driving around dirt roads that aren't meant for Beemers. I had nowhere to go and wasn't ready to return home. To face the Beast. Bob. At times my wheels were spinning in barrancas. Yes, I remember that. Hopelessly spinning and spinning until finally

the rear tire popped. *That's what happened*, my dreamy mind recalls. I had a flat and no phone service and I was crazy drunk and helplessly stuck in the middle of nowhere.

I open my eyes and don't know how long I've been sleeping. With my head anchored on the hard, soiled pillow, I look over at the large man sitting across the attic on the twin mattress. In an unbuttoned work shirt with the sleeves cut off, he's staring at me without his glasses. In the dim light of morning (or is it evening?) I see his teardrop tattoo and hear his chanting voice and the gourd rattle he shakes. The rhythmic sound makes my head vibrate like I'm driving my Beemer down a dirt road filled with pot holes and ripples.

I clear my throat. "Were you there?" my words barely crackle from my throat. "At the casino? The Ak Chin."

He doesn't answer. Perhaps he doesn't understand me. Maybe I'm not really talking. I'm dreaming that I speak. Is my mind that far gone? Then I remember the flat tire and my long walk across the desert and I clearly recall the big man who rescued me from the harsh terrain, from my own stupidity. I stretch out on my side; my back burns like the bites of red fire ants. As if I must justify my actions, I declare, "The man I've been with for over twenty years drove a knife through my heart. I came home early to surprise him. He surprised me. I caught him in my bed with another woman. I left him and gambled away all our money."

The O'odham man stops his mellifluous chants. "As a boy," he says, "me and my cousins ran through dust devils to catch the desert's spirit. It made us laugh. It made us happy and brave like a man who hunts bears like a bear hunts." He pauses a moment and I smile, or at least I think I'm smiling. I'm not sure. My face feels paralyzed.

“In an old Cherokee legend,” he continues, “Deer Lady lures the lustful man to his death. Her beauty seduces his spirit and he cannot resist her. He cannot resist a beautiful woman. To break the spell, the man must touch her feet.”

“Bob must kiss my feet, you mean,” I suggest. He chuckles. “I like your story,” I add. “It feels appropriate to my situation.”

“You have the spirit of a deer marked by the Great Bear, the big dipper of the Milky Way.” He stops speaking and starts singing in his native language and shaking his rattle.

“What are you singing?” I ask.

“The bear causes your headache and fever. I ask him to heal you instead.” The large man returns to chanting his song and shaking his rattle.

“Thanks for saving my life,” I say. I don’t know his name and I hear myself calling him Bear Man as I fall back asleep listening to his rhythmic chants.

Sometime later I awake and am able to slowly sit up. Hunger fights my sunburns for attention. Bear Man is not across the room but I hear a commotion downstairs.

My head begins to throb as I stand although I no longer feel dizzy, just weak and hungry. The room smells of old pine wood and my own sweat. I’m still wearing my sports bra and sweat pants. *How long has it been since I bathed?* I ask myself. Not since Portland. Not since before my jog in Washington Park. I was in such a hurry to get home and surprise my husband with romance. But instead, Bob sucker punched my gut.

A breeze sweeps into the room the fragrance of creosote, mesquite, and brittlebush. On the twin mattress across the room, I notice my clothes neatly folded and stacked beside my purse. I remember locking my purse inside the Beemer.

I stumble over to the twin mattress, pull my billfold from my purse, and find no money or maxed-out credit cards. Someone even took the pictures of Bob and me at Walden Pond. On our wedding day. How ironic is that?

Where is my suitcase? I ask myself. *And all the jewelry I wore to Kathi's wedding at Multnomah Falls?* I remember arriving home early in the morning and seeing a strange car in the driveway of my house, beside the paloverdes. A red Cadillac. Had Bob bought a new car? I had wondered. No. He always buys Beemers. . .

For a moment I stood under the high portico arch beside my sunburst lantanas. I was nervous. The double doors were slightly ajar. Something was terribly wrong. Bob is meticulous and always locks the doors. I worried he was sick or had an accident and I threw my camera case and laptop on the front sofa and called my husband's name as I ran up the curved stairway to our master bedroom suite. My suitcase was still in the trunk when I went to the casino. Bob would have retrieved it for me if he hadn't been fucking his whore.

On top of my stack of clothes rests a charm, an eagle made from deer antler, presumably. I'm guessing that the O'odham man made it for me to help me survive and recover. I imagine it possesses some kind of spiritual powers like the petroglyph totems of the ancient Hohokam, Anasazi, and Mogollon, the totems I like to draw on my coffee table artwork.

I change into my turquoise REI pants and white lacy blouse which I had on at Kathi's reception. I also wore my emerald earrings and pearl necklace to the event, plus a few pieces of gold jewelry that I've most certainly lost forever.

With the antler charm in my pocket, I step down the narrow, rough-hewn stairwell that's obviously not made to any county code. There's no handrail, for one thing. On the way down I

brace myself with my hand on the plank wall. With each step, I'm trying to be as quiet as a door mouse.

Does the big man intend to sleep with me? I can't help but wonder. I think about an incident that happened many years before when I was a freshman at Portland Community College in the SW foothills. I had taken the bus to Southern Oregon to see the Shakespeare festival in Ashland. On the return trip I decided to save money by hitching a ride. This was before I married Bob and when times were free-spirited and so was I. The man who offered me a ride invited me to his apartment for a beer and I accepted his invitation. It was hot and the man was fairly attractive. Of course, I knew sex was at play. But adventure was more on my mind and a cool beer sounded great. Then, while sitting on his sofa drinking a Schlitz Malt Liquor and talking about Nixon and Watergate, the man set his beer aside, scooted beside me and without any kissing or touching, he asked, "Can I sleep with you now?"

"What?" I had acted astonished.

"Now come on," I remember him saying. "A young girl like you hitchhiking alone and coming to a stranger's apartment for a beer."

I knew what to expect but didn't feel obligated to surrender myself to the situation. To the man. After all, I had agreed to a ride and to a beer. That was all. I told the dude, who was probably only twenty-two, "No" and then I left him seated on the sofa, walked out the door, and caught a bus home. The memory seems so vivid, yet twenty-two years have fallen between then and now. Still, the idiocy of my action remains idiotic.

I take another step down the stairs, not wanting to rush into whatever expectations Bear Man might have. Although he saved my life, I'm now alone with this stranger, this large, rugged man with a teardrop tattoo and scars across his chest.

He isn't in the kitchen at the bottom of the stairs. Instead, an obese O'odham woman is washing dishes at the sink. It's probably a good sign, I'm thinking. The man is in no hurry to rape me.

"Hello," I say as I stand by the stairwell.

"Ahhh!!" the woman gasps. "You're so quiet I didn't hear you rattle down those old stairs." She's in her thirties, has long black hair and wears slacks under a dress people used to call a moo moo, the kind fat women wear. Her round face bears a pleasant, welcoming smile as she approaches me. "I'm Special," she says and shakes my hand. "John Eldron is my elder brother."

"John Eldron?" I ask, perplexed, still holding the woman's soft hand.

"You must be feeling pretty lousy," she suggests, releasing my hand and gesturing me to sit at the old metal table. "Let me fix you breakfast. You like fry bread and eggs? Tepary beans?"

"Sure," I utter while remaining at the stairwell. My voice is still seeking its proper volume. "I'm actually starved." I pause a moment then ask, "How long was I asleep?"

"Three days." Special returns to the kitchen and unhooks a large cast-iron skillet from the timber wall and sets it on the 1940's cook stove.

"Where am I?"

"The Gila River rez."

"I need to call AAA."

"No telephone." The woman adds lard to the pan and after it starts sizzling, she cracks in the eggs. "Do you want to call your husband? John's got your car outside."

"Oh? I left my phone and my charger in my car." I walk over to the open front door and look across the yard and desert landscape. From the position of the sun, I'm guessing it's nine

o'clock but I don't know for sure. I left my Coach wristwatch in the Beemer and I'm sure it's not there now. I had been planning to pawn it anyway because Bob gave it to me last Christmas and I didn't want it anymore. I don't want anything that reminds me of my cheating spouse.

Near the ramada sits my car with the side windows smashed-in. I see the flat tire; it's obviously ruined. But I hardly care. It's all part of my "Casino Night at the Ak Chin."

A rusty red Toyota pick-up sits before the house and the green tow truck is also in the yard. *Where's the large O'odham man who rescued me?* I'm wondering but don't ask. And how does this woman, this "Special," know I'm married? On my way to the Ak Chin, I tossed my wedding ring out the window somewhere along the John Wayne Highway. *They know*, I tell myself, *because they've gone through my purse, wallet, and suitcase!*

"Sorry, someone broke into your car," Special interrupts my rambling thoughts. "That's expected. We don't see many cars like yours out here. John reported the break-in to the reservation police. We hope to catch those wolves; they even emptied your suitcase and took out all the gas. I folded your clothes and put them on the twin bed for you."

I sit at the table and the O'odham woman serves me a plate of eggs and beans. "Tepary beans are a traditional food that we grow on our land."

I stare at the heaping plate and hesitate to eat what looks so foreign and smells of the lard. Special smiles as if she knows my thoughts. "If you need the toilet you'll see it around back. There's a rez Mustang out there too. Elder Brother lassoed her from the herd just the other day."

"I'm all right," I say, feeling too hungry to care about the lard in the eggs and beans. While I'm eating the tasty but salty and peppery tepary beans, the woman places the skillet of food on the table and sits across from me with her own plate of food.

I take the charm from my pocket and ask, "Is this from you? Special."

“No. Elder Brother makes these totems from antlers. He hunts elk and mule deer up on Navajo land. Whitetails in the Chiricahuas. His totems bring power from the Creator. The sun weakened your spirit.”

“That’s what I thought.” I take another bite and begin talking about my coffee table desert landscapes to be friendly and make a connection to her. “On each piece I included images from Anasazi, Mogollon, and Hohokam pottery and petroglyphs, or from Native American basket designs. Do you make traditional O’odham baskets?” I ask feeling far removed from her world even though we are essentially neighbors. Until my casino night at the Ak Chin, I had never traveled onto the Gila River Indian Community and it's only a few blocks south of Pecos Road at the edge of our subdivision in the South Mountain foothills.

Special seems to glow with pride. “When I was a little girl,” she says, “my grandmother, mother, cousins, and neighbor ladies sat under the ramada and made baskets from desert willows and bear grass. The old women told stories about our people that they wove into their baskets. My grandmothers made baskets called kiahas. It means a woman’s burden basket. In our tradition, the women carried kiahas on their backs when they gathered food in the desert. Women have always carried burdens on their backs . . .”

“Very true,” I say. “Even those of us who aren’t O’odham.” I’m thinking about the burden I now carry. Of what I’m going to do about my philandering husband. “I think men have a lot to do with it. They burden us!” I chuckle and take another bite of the tepary beans and eggs.

“Yes,” Special says. “But our burdens in life make us strong. My grandmothers lived off the land and thrived. They used the fruit of the saguaro to make alcohol. They roasted mesquite pods in a big fire pit, ground the roasted pods on a metate and made a nourishing gruel. After the Gadsden Purchase the white man built many dams that channeled water from our land into his

big cities. He took away our ability to irrigate and farm. And he cast a burden upon both the men and women of the O'odham nation."

"I'm somewhat familiar with your situation," I say and tell Special what I remember about the O'odham water rights struggle from Bender's Indian Law course. I suddenly feel a bit pompous. Like I'm one of those ivy league men surrounding me in the Harvard Hall where I took my first LSAT test on my first attempt to go to law school. Not long after Bob and I married, he coerced me into going to law school by suggesting that I needed a profession to sustain me if something should happen to him. *Your artwork isn't a flourishing commodity*, he said. *It's something you copyright, not patent. And you can't make any money with a copyright unless you're already famous and rich.* I took Bob's advice because I believed he knew what was best for me. For us. For our marriage. Was I ever wrong about that!

"You studied Indian Law 101, Red?" Special chuckles and wakes me from my thoughts.

"That's right," I say. "Bender's Indian Law 101."

"Then you know the US government took our land and water then fed us with white bread, sugar, and white flour. Now we have the highest rate of type two diabetes in the world. We don't eat like we did before. These days an old Catholic woman brings us food that's not good for our metabolism. But times are promising because we expect checks from the casinos."

"I know," I say. "Governor Slimington, as my husband used to call Simington, tried to ban your slot machines. But your people won because of the *Indian Gaming Regulatory Act*. I'm glad. Not that I want to gamble anymore. One night was enough for me. But you deserve some kind of retribution after all the misjustice the US government imposed on your people."

"*Slimington!"* Special chuckles as she spoons more tepary beans on my plate. "You're right. I've had a difficult life for many reasons. And so has my elder brother. Our father

abandoned us before I was born. My Mother's elder brother supported us. Uncle was a medicine man. Keeper of the Smoke. He taught my elder brother the ways of our ceremonies."

"I could use a shaman. Maybe your brother really can help me."

"Elder Brother can diagnose and heal you. He is an old soul, a killer elite warrior of the Vietnam War."

"A Vietnam Vet saved my life? I'm so impressed with your brother."

"John enlisted the year they shot Dr. King and Bobby Kennedy. He's a war hero. Has a Bronze Star, National Defense Service Medal, Prisoner of War Medal, and a Purple Heart."

"Prisoner of war? Now I'm mystified by your brother. You must be so proud."

Special beams with pride. I sense the deep spiritual connection she has with her brother. It's not something I have with my brother or even my sister.

"I am proud of John," she says. "He was a POW for three years in a jungle south of Da Nang. But he also is a man with hidden temperaments. Soon after he returned from the war, his wife threw him out and he went to the streets of Phoenix. To Van Buren. He got mixed-up in trouble. The court convicted John of involuntary manslaughter."

Unintended killing, I recall from my course in Crim Law 101. I set aside my spoon, feeling bloated from the heavy food. "How long was your brother a prisoner?"

"In Vietnam or Florence?" Special asks.

"Well, both. Your brother must have interesting stories to tell."

"Yes he does. But a man must tell his own war stories. O'odham men used to hunt, farm, and weave at looms while women made baskets, gathered food, cooked, and watched the children. Today a man grovels with himself to learn how to live and take care of his family. John is a war hero in our community, like Ira Hayes, the O'odham Marine who helped raise the flag at

Iwo Jima. When my elder brother came home from the war the community gave him a Harley Bobcat."

"Any man who served in Vietnam is a hero to me. Let alone a POW with a Purple Heart."

"The government put my brother through hell then they trained him to be an auto mechanic. With his Agent Orange compensation he bought his tow truck and worked in Sacaton as a mechanic. But Vietnam followed him home and he took to drinking."

This worries me. *Will I be alone with this ex-con murderer with PTSD?* "Is this your house or John's? Do you live together?"

"Mother's elder brother built this house long before I was born. Last Christmas no one lived here so John moved in after his wife threw him out again for getting drunk and shooting off his gun."

I notice the crucifix Special wears, one similar to a childhood necklace I used to wear until I went to a public high school and my life no longer centered on my parent's faith. "Are you Catholic?" I ask.

Special takes a bite of her beans and tells me that she went to catholic school at the St. John Baptist Mission.

"I grew up Catholic," I admit. "But I'm not really a practicing anymore. Probably because my husband isn't very religious."

"You got kids, Red? I didn't see marks on your skin when I spread aloe on your burns."

"You did that?" I remember her brother soothing my burns with the aloe.

"While you were sleeping," Special answers. "Any children?" She persists. I guess she can't imagine a woman my age not having kids. I tell her I don't and she asks me why as if it's not a personal question. As if she's asking me if I take cream with my dark roast.

“Because of my husband,” I suggest. I’m surprised by a question I never gave much thought to until now. I’m facing a marital crisis and it’s possibly too late for me to ever have children. People will forever call me “childless” a term I hate. It implies that I’m “less” of a person, of a woman, for not bearing children, the reason a woman was put on Earth, at least in the minds a lot of religious people. “My husband has always worked long hours and he told me soon after we married that he had no time to be a parent. As for myself, I wasn’t sure back then, one way or the other but I reasoned that I had twenty years to decide. Now I wonder if it’s too late.”

“I don’t think so, Red,” Special reaches across the table and takes my hand in a friendly gesture. “You’re too young for menopause. You just need a new man.”

“I agree. It seems I let my husband rule my life. I became part of him and developed into nothing more. That seems very traditional and all the while I didn’t think I was being traditional. What is traditional anyway? I don’t really have traditions; not like you probably do. Certainly, I no longer follow religious traditions. I hardly ever pray except when I’m aimlessly wandering the desert about to die.”

Special chuckles. She has such a pleasant face and her laughter feels warm, sincere, not at all mocking. Like she’s agreeing with me. “We all live in a maze,” she says. “We must turn around when we reach a dead-end. Not give up. Not surrender to the elements. We start in the center, go away, come back. Many times. The maze ends where we began. Elder Brother lives at the center of his maze in a house he built on South Mountain. I speak of the Creator in the O’odham religion. Not my elder brother John Eldron.”

I nod and tell her I know the story, that I took anthropology classes at ASU for my coffee table artwork.

She smiles and continues, “After we return to the center of the maze at the end of our lives, we have one more chance to review the life we led before our Creator sends us to the hereafter. May that be peace in Heaven. Every day is a gift from the Creator and every day I praise him for my life. Today I praise him for giving that gift to you.” The O’odham woman pauses and looks at me as if to make sure I’m all right. “What are you going to do now?” she asks.

“Do you mean. What am I going to do with my life or how am I going to get back home and off the reservation? I just survived crawling through the desert and I’m exhausted and stuffed and stranded. I don’t know what the hell I’m going to do, to be honest.”

The kind O’odham woman again shows her warm reassuring smile and suggests I rest outside under the ramada beside the mesquite trees. “It’s very soothing when the trees whisper to the desert. You can wait there for my brother to return and help you heal. Later, after you’ve rested and settled your mind, I will teach you my daily prayer to the Earth Doctor, our Creator.”

As Special clears plates from the table, I head outside and investigate the damage on my Beemer. It’s trashed. Windows are broken, glass is inside, and the glovebox is open and all the important insurance papers are strewn on the seats and floor. My phone is gone but I find a bottle of water and a New Yorker that I keep in the car “in case it breaks down and I have to idly wait for AAA.” This was one of Bob’s backup plans for me. He told me to always be prepared for anything. Like he had my back. Like he really cared. What kind of mind game is he playing? I ask myself as I head for a lawn chair swing under the ramada’s shade.

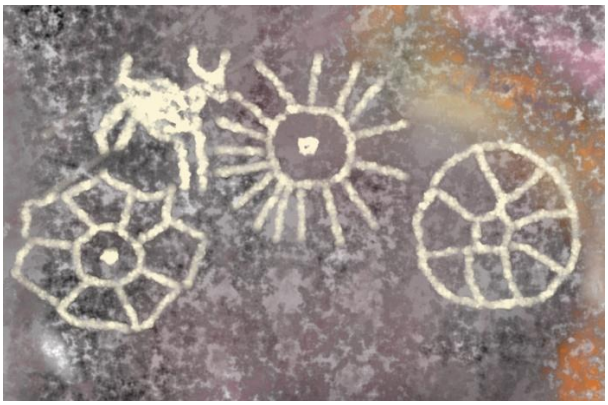
I prop my head on Hopi blankets and read about the divorce of Princess Diana and Prince Charles. The Sonora blows a soothing breeze, a quiet humming of *Amazing Grace, I walk through my gardens alone, Bringing in the sheaves,* and *In my heart there rings a melody* . . . It’s

so unlike the cacophony of the jungles in Guatemala where I traveled during my summer break after 1L, nearly ten years before. Bob had arranged for me to study at a language school because, as he said, learning Spanish would enhance my resume.

As I sway on the lawn chair swing, I hear no roars and screeches, no amusement park screams, no rackets from city traffic or neighborhood garbage trucks outside my front door on Windemere Drive. The raw open desert plays the quiet music of the flute player Kokopelli. The Hopi believe that his music impregnates the village maidens in the same way that Hindus say Krishna's flute music enchants the cowherd maidens with divine love and fertility.

I listen to the rustling of mesquite leaves and hear a quail calling to his bevy. I smell the creosote, the mesquite wood, and the dry caliche soil as the soft warmth on my damaged skin feels like silk fluttering over me. The desert pleases all of my senses. Except maybe for the sense of touch when feeling the quills, thorns, and barbs of desert plants and the stings and bites of scorpions, Gila Monsters, and Diamondback rattlers.

I set aside my magazine and try to dream about an eternal present where I drift in a nothing atmosphere above everything I see, everything that is, and everything else before it even exists.



Chapter 6: Second Prophet of the Three Sisters Society

600 years earlier

Indolent Moon Deer Spirit

For eight years I serve my community as Second Prophet under White Evening Flower who is First Prophet of the Three Sisters Society. I live away from my father's Grand Palace in an adobe complex with seven other sisters and White Evening Flower who sleeps in her own room. The rest of us sleep in a room together. Two rooms in our complex store baskets containing plants for healing and clay vessels and stones with powerful animal totems.

As Second Prophet of the sisterhood, a position I earned a year after my initiation, I rarely think beyond what I must do. I obey the commands of my people and call upon the animal spirits and the people of bones and ask for their magic powers. I welcome the newly born and bless the newly deceased at the place of their burnings and burials. With my society sisters, I create totems on baskets, plates, and bowls.

On a few rare occasions, I visit with my father, usually after I have conducted a ceremony. When he asks me about my life, I tell him that my deepest heart-spirit has never stopped longing to be a mother since the time of my first bleeding and my spiritual wanderings in the desert.

What I wish for disturbs my father and he never fails to remind me that my totem name is Deer Spirit and not Pregnant Deer. "I made you a holy sister to protect you from the shame of rejection. No man in my nation will bed a woman with the curse you possess."

But my instincts to have a child intensify over the years because Pregnant Deer, not Deer Spirit, is my true totem name. Pregnant Deer is telling me to insist to my father that I bring forth life because of what happened to my mother when she gave birth to me. "I don't want to become

an old crone like White Evening Flower," I say. "I want to feel the love of a mother for her child."

My father Shivering Bear reminds me of my commitment to the holy society and he says, "You cannot change a pledge to the Creator."

His words sadden me and my heart-spirit battles with my duty to the Creator and my community and my desire to become a mother. The work I perform as a healer keeps me from dwelling on what I cannot control or change.

Ten days before Frog Moon becomes indolent eighteen and a half solar cycles past my birth, a caravan of fifty men from Paquime to the far south arrives in my settlement bearing trade items and tributes on their backs. They bring wooden boxes engraved with jaguars and eagles and filled with turquoise and obsidian beads, copper bells, and seeds to grow corn. Ten of the Paquime men carry cages of scarlet macaws.

I have never been to Paquime but the stories traders tell bring images of a powerful trade center with channels of river water flowing into every room and flushing out the detritus. I've heard that they stack their adobe houses as tall as my father's Grand Palace and that Paquime people sacrifice their enemies or the losing team in their ball games. Their priests breed the scarlet macaws, the most sacred and beautiful bird on Earth. Only the holy sisters of my society use the scarlet feathers to adorn our skirts and hair. During rites to bless a baby, I uphold the left wing of a sacrificed macaw, sing holy songs, and ring my copper bells.

The caravan leader is called Wolf Blood. As soon as he arrives in our settlement, he approaches my father and declares, "From the Sun Lord of Paquime, Eagle Heart, I bring tidings to Lord Shivering Bear." After formal greetings, Wolf Blood tells my father the reason for his

visit. My father, the twelve elders, and the men from Paquime sit on deer pelts in the receiving room at the bottom story of the Grand Palace. I am present to conduct the rite of receiving tributes.

"The Sun Lord of my city," Wolf Blood says. "Wishes to marry a virgin daughter of the Sun Chief of the Fish Eagle Clan of the Hohokam, the people of the river and desert."

Shivering Bear has only one unwed daughter past the age of menarche. My father looks at me sitting across from him in my ceremonial attire with scarlet macaw feathers and he tells Wolf Bood, "As you can see, my eldest daughter is a sister of the holy women's society. And all my other daughters of age are married with children."

"And what of your eldest daughter? That she is a holy woman is a good thing," Wolf Blood says and the room grows silent except for the chattering macaws on their perches.

"My eldest daughter is Second Prophet of her society. She cannot marry," my father insists then takes a drink of his cacao brew from the traders of Paquime. I can smell the cacao beans and the scent of mesquite burning on a ceremonial stone before my father.

Wolf Blood takes a lit cigar from one of his men. He smokes the potent tobacco and hands it to my father. Then he says, "My lord Eagle Heart will value her even more as a Second Prophet."

"I must consider this," my father says as he inhales the smoke and blows it on the burning mesquite. "My daughter has taken vows to her society. As you can see, she is a valued holy woman in our community. I must consult with my council of elders and with my daughter and her holy sisterhood. Then I can give you my answer."

My father looks at me as I sit by the burning mesquite, stoking the fire. I sense he doesn't reject Wolf Blood's proposal because he's considering my laments about having children like my half-sisters. I feel a surge of hope in my heart-spirit.

Later that day, my father summons me to the receiving room. The twelve elders and my father sit in a circle around me. Wolf Blood and his men aren't present. Sweating with anticipation, I silently wait for the counsel to determine my fate. I wear a feather headband with beads. My long hair hangs loose behind my back. My garment is a woven shift with totems and macaw feathers. I have no voice in the matter at hand just as I had no voice about my becoming a holy sister or determining my personal totem name.

After the elders raise many questions about the best course for me, the Sun Chief my father presents me with a choice. "You have two options, Indolent Moon," he says. "You keep your vows as a healer and Second Prophet of the holy society and never bed with a man and bear children."

I look at my father who now stands tall in front of me, dressed in his bear skin cape and necklace of bear claws and puma canine teeth. He is holding his saguaro staff that I have painted many Earth colors. "Or," he continues, "You can choose to wed this Sun Lord of Paquime and bear the many children of your dreams. He is a foreigner and knows nothing about the curse of your birth. He will take you to bed and give you what your heart-spirit longs for."

My father gives me one day and night to make my decision. For a day I wander the desert to sing at the sacred shrines and ask the stone Earth stone spirits what I should do. I have grown used to my life as a holy sister and value my abilities to heal and mend the people of my community. However, it is more important to me to fulfill my instincts than to keep my sacred vows to the society. I hesitate, of course, because the lord of Paquime is foreign and unknown to

me except by reputation and story. People claim he is a greedy man who hoards many treasures looted from many wars.

"My totem-name in my dream-vision is Pregnant Deer," I tell my father and his council. "This I have always known as true. I will marry this lord of Paquime and bear him many sons and daughters. Maybe even twins like the fawns of a deer."

"You can never change back after you make this commitment," Shivering Bear says. "I will trade you, my eldest daughter, for great treasures and privileges in this alliance with Eagle Heart. The people of Paquime don't know about your birth-curse and if they do, they don't care because we do not share the same traditions. Pregnant Deer Spirit now guides you."

When Old Sun nears the west, I am sitting at a fire on the platform mound outside the Grand Palace wearing my ceremonial robes. People of my community and the caravan men from Paquime are standing in the plaza watching Shivering Bear formally present me to the Paquime trader. Wolf Blood is pleased that I am lovely and that I am a Hohokam prophet. "Lord Eagle Heart will provide your eldest daughter with everything she needs. In his great city of trade and commerce, she will live at the palace as his queen above all other queens," he assures my father as I sit beside him.

Wolf Blood then tells me and my father the story his ancestors. "They came from the caves of Aztlan," he begins, "and wandered the Earth looking for an ideal place to farm. They settled where the herons re-emerge from the Creator's Earth hole. The Creator and his sky spirits hurled an enormous stone from the White Road and marked the place for our city. My ancestors built Paquime palace around this stone from the sky."

I am silent because I cannot ask Wolf Blood about the Sun Lord of Paquime, my betrothed. Such behavior from a woman shows a bad spirit even for a prophet and princess of the great Shivering Bear of the Fish Eagle Clan.

That night I dance with my holy sisters on the platform during a celebratory feast. The next day I attend the ball games where warriors from different villages play against the men in the Paquime caravan. A thousand people watch the games from the berm around the oval court. *Who will be sacrificed? Who will be glorified?* They cheer. My people, the true people of this world, don't actually sacrifice people like the people far south in Paquime, but we call the losers of a game "the sacrificed" and the winners become our heroes.

Chapter 7: Off the Rez

600 years later

Jessie June Ellars

"See you later, Red," Special calls from her Toyota pick-up as she pulls away from the yard. "I'm fetching my kids from school but will be right back to cook John's dinner."

From the lawn chair swing under the variegated shade of the ramada, I watch her truck putter away on the desert road. A warm breeze touches my skin and rustles the mesquites and the

arid desert smells scoured with creosote or greasewood; the first plant Earth Doctor created according to O'odham lore.

Thoughts of my job come to mind. I'm currently AWOL from Williams and Chen Law Offices. My managing attorney Juliann Colby expected me back Monday morning and today is Thursday, I'm guessing. I really have no idea. Six months before, Juliann, a friend from law school, recommended me for the position at the Tempe office of the big personal injury law firm with offices throughout Arizona, Nevada, and California. I didn't have too many options as a newbie attorney who had been a mediocre law student, took the Arizona bar twice, hadn't worked since my job at the family Dairy Queen, and had to take the LSAT three times before I got a decent score. As it turns out, law firms average LSAT scores which made my result rather low even though I scored high on my last LSAT attempt in Tempe. I had done so well in fact that Mensa accepted my membership because they didn't see my other two LSAT scores which fell way below deck, so to speak.

Bob pushed me go to law school the second time and because of my higher LSAT score I got into ASU. Then, six months ago, my husband practically insisted I take this job and work as an attorney for at least a year *to gain experience, perspective, and momentum* as he put it. *You need something of substance on your resume,* he kept telling me. *Art is a bit laggard* I remember him saying. He meant that I'd become sluggish if I only pursued my artwork. Mentally un-astute.

The thing is, I hate my job as much as I hated law school. Sometimes I'm taking on the workload of three, filing motions, reviewing case law and state statutes, and interviewing crackheads and DUI scammers on AHCCCs, lowlife people who are as tricky as Wile E Coyote. It's a dead-end job and I keep thinking about quitting and returning to painting my coffee tables fulltime. I gave a law career a try. But my heart isn't into my job. Originally, I considered going

into nonprofit law but I lost interest after Bob's constant discouragement. He ranked nonprofit on the bottom of his "lawyer totem pole" which of course has patent law at the top. Well, personal injury law has got to be below nonprofit!

Bob has done nothing but fuck up my life while he's fucking another woman I think to myself then remember the money I threw away at the casino and smile.

A distant roar emerges from nowhere. I sit up and see the man from Sacaton approaching from down the road on his black Harley Bobcat. He parks by the ramada and the motorcycle hums and powers down. The man who saved me, the man I now know as John Eldron, Special's elder brother, wears a red handkerchief headband and his worn black leather vest with Army insignia and Native American patches. His long black hair hangs in two braids.

He takes two six packs of Bush from the side bags of his Harley and places them beside an old metal chair under the ramada. He quietly sits back, opens a Bush with a snap and fizzle, takes a drink, then looks my way through his dark glasses. This worries me. Special's words *my brother is a tormented man* ring through my mind.

He smiles and nods at me. Is he a man of few words, I wonder, or a scheming man up to no good? I close my eyes feeling drowsy.

"I hope you're feeling better, dear lady," he says and takes from his inside vest pocket a pack of Bugler. He rolls a cigarette like a joint. Offers me one. He doesn't know my name.

"No thanks," I say. I really hate smoking. *Then why did I spend all night in the Ak Chin casino surrounded by tobacco smoke?*

He lights his cigarette using a Zippo with the south Vietnam flag. "I towed your car here last night," he says. "Sorry if anything is missing; you're lucky no one stripped your car. Just

messed with it a little. I can get you another tire but someone jammed the ignition. It'll take a few days to fix." He drinks another Bush.

"How much will that cost?" I ask even though my wallet is empty.

"Don't worry about the cost, Red. I get you a tire that will take you home."

He quietly sits back, his booted feet jet forward. He opens another Bush with a snap and fizzle. His tattoos are clear, the two drops of blood from the eagle's heart dramatically stand out. "Your tattoos," I venture to say. I have nothing to lose. I'm at the man's mercy. "Are they Native American symbols?" My voice is still horse from the casino smoke and from nearly dying of heatstroke and thirst.

He continues smoking, not responding to me. He seems to be staring at me but I can't be certain because the dark glasses hide his eyes. "I killed a man," he says at last. "Several really, I count four in Nam."

"I see." I lean back on the swing, not knowing what to say. My back is still sore from the sunburn. Am I afraid of this stranger? He doesn't act like a rough guy that would kill a man or rape a woman. In saving me, he was gentle, angel-like when he soothed my body with the aloe. When he helped me drink water. How could such a man be a killer?

He flicks his cigarette into the cooking pit behind him and says, "Bear and deer shapeshifters are wandering visions and dreams, then poof. They appear in reality. I killed a drunken Navajo man who stole my beer. A homeless bum who went AWOL during the war in Vietnam. He returned to his rez after basic training. He was a deserter. I took his turquoise bracelet," he indicates the star burst he wears. "He no longer needed it."

I say nothing but watch him take a drink and smoke another Bugler.

“I’m a warrior,” he continues. “A hunter on a search and destroy mission. Because I’m Native American they put me on point in the ‘killer elite team.’ I held out after Charlie took me. When I was in that hootch I asked myself many times. Why am I here? When they tortured me with bamboo blades I thought to myself, these are not my people and they may kill me because I strayed far from the heart of my life. I never turned-coat but the white man sent me to take land from the Viet Cong like he took land and water from my people.” He pauses a moment to take a long steady drink of Bush. “For some reason our Creator wants us to face obstacles and overcome them. But why? I asked myself in that hootch. To prove ourselves like a boy proves his manhood or a girl unloads her burden basket?”

I pick up my magazine to keep from looking at him because his stare bites worse than the sun. And he speaks in a stream of consciousness as if he’s the storyteller of an ancient Hohokam village. But oddly, I can relate. My experience in law school, high school, my travels overseas, made me feel like a fish out of water. Like a Native American away from his desert home, his way of life. I too have faced many obstacles in the maze of life and have often ask myself, will my life’s story turn out all right.

I look at John and see the prison cross tattoo between his thumb and index finger. “God came to Earth as a man to save us from ourselves,” I say, thinking about my catholic upbringing. I want to say something; to show him I can relate to his difficulties, to his painful life. Although, at the same time, I feel far removed from who he is and what he’s experienced. “Or so the sisters taught me when I was a little girl in catholic school.”

“Our Creator wants us to believe He controls each turn we take,” John interrupts me. “He created us to respect one another. Respect the Earth and our parents. Our uncles, our sisters, and brothers. We are one family of people under the galaxy.” His words begin to sound like a song.

“Were you drafted?” I ask after a moment’s pause. John says nothing. “My brother avoided the draft by going to college,” I add but don’t mention that my husband did the same thing. I don’t want to mention Bob. Although, maybe I already have. I can’t remember. My mind is still sunburned.

“Uncle Sam didn’t draft me because I live in a sovereign nation. I was tired of doing the same old thing and wanted an opportunity off the rez. But after I left the rez, I got into trouble. That’s why I got the tattoo.” He removes his glasses to reveal the teardrop. “Guy in prison did the tattoo. Means I killed a man. That’s all. Don’t mean nothin’ else. The Navajo guy could be wearing this same tattoo for me.”

I smile at John Eldron while thinking *He’s quite the package. Makes Bob seem pathetically undernourished in all ways.*

I thumb through the magazine and say, “Anyway, I want to thank you for . . .” I have trouble saying the word “rescue” although that’s what I want to say; it just sounds so strange to say it. Instead, I say, “For coming across me like you did. Pretty stupid of me to venture into the desert without water. I even had some in my car, always do. I assumed I’d quickly find help.”

I feel silly and don’t want to sit here and make apologies for being stupid. Why should I? Shit happens and it doesn’t matter what race or gender you are or whether you come from the city, country, or desert. Every person works out his or her own way through the maze of life. Still, I feel idiotic and don’t want to admit it. I don’t know who this man is, this man from Sacaton calmly staring at me. Something about him feels familiar. At the very least I did see his face in the casino. Or maybe he’s related to the Navajo man I met on death row while a 3L. Who is the Bear Man in a maze? I can’t remember? “

How long was I asleep?" I ask, like a rescued damsel in distress. "Your sister said two nights. I remember you sang songs in your language."

"You recovered for three days. My younger sister helped you with the bathroom, with water, and the aloe for your burns."

"I don't remember that." I sit back on the swing and smile at my host, wondering if he or Special had drugged me. In Bender's Indian law course, I read about the ceremonial drugs of Native Americans—mushroom psilocybin, peyote, and blue morning glory seeds, but I don't ask the O'odham man about drugs.

"I took Indian law. In law school," I find myself saying while trying not to sound pretentious or am I trying to show my connection to the law? Reveal my oath of Admission to the Arizona Bar. I stumble in both thought and wit. "Turns out my law school class included a mass murderer. No one knew it until after we graduated and he tried to take the bar. They wouldn't let him because he was a felon."

The O'odham man takes a drag on his Bugler then asks, "You a lawyer Red?"

"Auburn. My hair is not quite red. But yes, Mr. John Eldron. I'm a Personal Injury Lawyer. I'm not bursting with pride about my job. I'm not a patent attorney at a top law firm."

"I may need your help one day." John grins.

"I help anyone who saves my life. Free of charge." He chuckles but says nothing.

"Why do you keep staring at me?" I ask at last, looking at him, feeling I've gained some control over this bizarre run-away situation.

"Because you're pretty," he says without looking away from me. "And you're right. I don't understand how you lost your way or why you drove on the rez from the casino. I think to myself, she likes to drink and gamble, spend her husband's money. Why not? I drink and spent

my wife's money. That's why she made me leave Sacaton. But you. No, I think to myself, your man treated you wrong. Caused you to drink and gamble. You're too pretty for a man to cut loose in that fancy car."

I set aside my magazine, astonished by this stranger's wisdom. He's right. He knows my story or he guesses right. Bob treated me wrong. Tears well in my eyes. I want to forget about Bob and stay focused on John's violent tattoo.

He stands and approaches me, touches my cheek with the back of his fingers, his large weathered mechanic's hand with a missing fingertip and a prison cross tattoo. "Come, Red," he says taking my hand to help me from the swing. "You need something to eat."

I rise faster than I should and feel dizzy. He catches me until I regain my balance then I follow him inside the house and sit at the old metal table. He stands at the counter to empty a box of groceries left inside the front door presumably by the old Catholic woman Special told me about. He takes out a can of refried pinto beans, a sack of rice, spaghetti, white bread, pastries and other donated surplus food most likely from St. Mary's foodbank. He opens a package of hotdogs and throws them to the dogs hovering by the door. His long braids hang down his back.

I watch him empty the can of beans into a frying pan; he adds a slab of lard from the tin on the stove. I hold my stomach, remembering how solid the eggs, beans, and fry bread sat with me all morning.

He places before me a plate of beans and bread then pours me some grape juice from the Catholic charity box. No ice. He sits beside me and says nothing. I'm unable to eat because of the heavy food and because he's glaring at me like a sentinel. His teardrop tattoo stands out under his right eye. Feeling uneasy I ask, "Aren't you going to eat?"

John fetches himself a plate of beans and bread then sits back at the table. “I generally eat much later, while you are dreaming about the Great Bear.” He scoops up a large dose of beans on the bread and takes a bite. I do the same.

“How did you know?” I ask, thinking of my early childhood dream about bears taking me to their lair.

“Dreams are visions. I watch your face as you sleep. I hear your voice. It’s the Great Bear emerging from his den when the Big Dipper is at the bottom of the sky. That’s the time of year the black bear gave me my scars.” He takes another bite. “As a boy of twelve I went bow hunting for Coues whitetail in the Chiricahuas with my mother’s elder brother. I was about to shoot a doe when I heard a roar from behind. I turned and saw a black bear running across the pine ridge plateau. The bear wanted the same doe I was hunting but he came after me first. I asked the bear to say my name because in my family tradition children from age ten until marriage cannot say their names aloud. The bear said my name and gave me permission to kill him because I called him Red. That was my first bear kill. My uncle gave me the name Bear Man Hunts Deer.” John gazes at me for a moment then asks, “What are you going to do after I fix your car?”

I don’t know! I’m thinking. My fate seems to be in the hands of Bear Man Hunts Deer. I avoid answering his question by asking if the scars on his chest are from the bear or from the war. I’ve heard about the Viet Cong torturing POWs with sharp bamboo sticks. About Vietnam Vets suffering flashbacks and behaving irrational. It’s a dangerous place to tread, the unsettled, tormented, quick-to-upset mind.

“The black bear gave me these scars across my chest before I plunged my knife into his heart. His power saved me in Vietnam. Charlie feared me. They knew I possessed great powers. The Great Bear helped me survive.”

John's stories of survival awe me. His very presence seems to revive my spirit. I pick at the food and take a bite. Taste the lard. I have no answer. About what I'm going to do.

"The rez patrol will be here tonight," John says. "They want to ask you questions. I told them what I know. I don't mind if you stay here. I like seeing your pretty face. I hope you don't mind my ugly mug."

"You're not ugly," I say, realizing he's teasing. He grins. I notice his missing teeth toward the back of his mouth, probably from a fight. Maybe from a battle with Charlie in Vietnam.

"I know you ran away from your man but I can't figure out if you have children. You should have five, a woman of your age and fitness."

"I'm forty-one and no I don't have children."

"Lucky for you. I had five. Now I have three. One son died in Desert Storm. The other died on an ATV out in the desert. It flipped. He was fourteen."

"I'm so very sorry," I say while thinking *Life has really tormented John Eldron*.

"Your man will come looking for you no matter what he's done. When you leave, I go back to Sacaton to see my wife though she always kicks me out of the house." He pauses to take a bite of his food. "You can stay here as long as you like."

"And will I be sleeping with you? Mr. John Eldron," I ask. Why not? I'm just saying the obvious up front.

His face draws a solemn expression then he begins to chuckle until he laughs. I laugh as well. "No," he says. "Your spirit is sad. Un-mended. You are in pain. I can wait."

Again, the strange enigma of the man surprises me.

In the early evening, after I've napped on the swing under the ramada, a Ford Bronco patrol car arrives with two Gila River Traffic Police. They are wearing khaki pants, waist badges and black polo shirts with a yellow logo for the Gila River Tribal Police. Under the shade of the ramada, they stand and interview me as I sit on an old metal chair. John Eldron sits across from me before the fire pit. He looks relaxed with a beer in his hand. Special is inside the house preparing dinner.

"I was on the road trying to get out of the rat race after a night of debauchery at one of your casinos," I suggest to the officers.

The officers chuckle then warn me about drinking and driving on the reservation. "Tribal laws are harsh even on non-natives," one of them says.

The officers write down my missing items and before leaving they have a lengthy conversation with John Eldron despite his current inebriated condition. John is a hero in their community, a respected man.

As the patrol car drives up the road, John turns to me and says, "Your burns peel. I will anoint you with more aloe while you eat my sister's dinner."

After a late evening meal, Special leaves in her truck and John helps me upstairs to sleep on the queen mattress. He says nothing and leaves the room. I sit on the bed and remove my Nikis, lie down, and dream John Eldron is sitting on the twin mattress staring at me. But the O'odham man doesn't disturb me during the night and I don't see him until the next afternoon.

I'm reading my magazine on the swing under the ramada. The mesquites are whispering in the dry air that smells of the bread John Eldron is cooking in the horno. He's wearing a worker's shirt with torn off sleeves and his tattoos clearly show on his muscled arms. I have no

thoughts about my predicament except I'm hoping to wipe Bob clean of all his assets and toss him to his little strumpet.

"People are talking about me in Sacaton," John says. He looks over at me as if to see my reaction. "They say I took a white woman as my wife."

I smile. "Who says I'm your wife? You won't even sleep with me."

He laughs as he places a flattened piece of dough into the oven.

The burning mesquite crackles and bursts with its desert scent. I'm now feeling more comfortable with John Eldron than afraid. He has fought battles, killed, and survived imprisonment twice; he has paid his dues and rolls with his life. The Great Bear marked him with the spirit of a hunter and scout. Or is it that the bear is his guide? I don't presume to understand his religion. I don't even understand my own. And my artwork barely touches on the spirit of the SW indigenous peoples. I'm just an outside observer who's read books by Ruth Underhill and Cynthia Irwin-Williams. But this O'odham Medicine Man intrigues me and I'll never forget how he saved me from certain death. He's fierce, perhaps violent, but he's also kind and wise. A bear man in his maze. "You are such an enigma," I say. "Mr. John Eldron from Sacaton."

"Quiet," John unexpectedly tells me and I hear a vehicle engine and look down the road. Two cars are approaching.

I stand and recognize the car following the police Bronco. "It's Bob in his steel blue Beemer." I gasp.

"Your man?" John asks as he takes bread from the oven with tongs. "He has come for you."

"I won't go with him. You don't know what's he's done to me. It's permanent."

“No, dear lady. You will go with him.” John sets aside the bread then picks up a thick ironwood branch leaning against the horno and walks out from under the ramada toward the approaching cars. “I want you to stay here. With me,” he says, holding up the club and with his back turned to me. “But you cannot, so you will go with him.”

You think you know everything, John Eldron I’m about to tell him but the cars pull up and distract me.

“Jessie,” Bob yells from the BMW behind the Ford Bronco. He gets out and stands at the car door, staring at me. He looks pale and oddly dressed in khaki shorts and a polo shirt, rather like the reservation police.

“Why are you here? You bastard!” I scream, maniacally. “You have no right to come looking for me. Not after what you did.”

“Thank you, gentlemen,” Bob tells the officers who remain seated in their Bronco. “She’s my wife.”

“Everything all right ma’am?” an officer asks from the passenger window.

John is now standing by his Harley parked by the front of the house. He’s wearing his sunglasses and upholding the ironwood branch with both hands. He seems prepared to use it.

I look squarely at Bob and think *Might as well face him now and start my divorce proceedings*. *Susanne from Law School went into Family Law. I’ll call her. I’m entitled to my fair share. Bob hasn’t a leg to stand on*. “No, it’s all right,” I say to the reservation police. They salute John, spin the Bronco around, and drive off into the desert leaving a trail of dust in their wake.

Bob remains by his car, waiting for me to say something. He can't help but see John, the large menacing O'odham man. "What happened to you?" he finally asks. "You look like a lobster. Are you okay?"

"What do you expect, Bob? For me to invite you into this man's home?" I indicate John. I'm feeling bitter, sarcastic, and filled with anger. I've loved Bob for over twenty years, maybe since I was a little girl, but now I'm not exactly sure what love means.

Exhausted from the ordeal, I slump down on the swing and prop my head on the Hopi blanket. I glance at John. He's watching Bob and me but saying nothing.

"We need to talk, Jess," Bob says as he awkwardly walks around John. He looks for a place to sit. I almost feel sorry for him.

"So, talk," I say, curling back my legs so Bob can sit at one end of the lounge swing. He really looks pathetic, still, he wronged me and I'll never forgive him for that.

"Jess, I need to talk to you. Alone." Bob glances at John who walks over to his chair under the ramada and quietly sits with his club beside him.

"Whatever you have to say, you can say in front of John Eldron. This is his home, Bobby Ellars. You're the intruder, not the Great Bear Man and Elder Brother to Special. Hero of the Vietnam War. Sorry, Bob, you've got this all wrong."

Bob touches my feet, "Look honey, boo boo bear," he uses the nickname from when we were kids. As if it'll help. But I've never liked him calling me Red although I don't mind the nickname coming from John. "I want you to come home," Bob implores. "I know what I did was wrong. But it was a one-time thing. Forgive me."

"Wrong? What you did in our bed was more than just wrong. You ended our lives together, that's for sure. It's over!"

“Please Jess, let’s go for a drive and talk. Let me have AAA pick up your car. This situation is absurd. You could have died in the desert. What the hell happened?”

“I’m tired and don’t want to go anywhere. John invited me to stay here as long as I want. He’s fixing my car.”

Bob glances at John who grins back. Bob looks at me with anger, humility, and little emotional control. He was wrong. I’m injured and out of sorts.

“You have a home, Jess,” Bob tells me. “A job, and believe me, I love you more than my life. I can’t lose you over something that means nothing. You just aren’t interested in me sexually. Barbara means nothing to me.”

It’s true. I’ve never been able to indulge my husband in his fantasies and fulfill his sexual appetite. In many ways, I’ve always remained a good catholic girl which means nothing to Bob. I hate his porno and I’m not interested in spicing things up with toys, oils and lotions, a threesome fantasy, a real threesome. Maybe I had a little initiative early on, when we were newlyweds and in love and sex was exciting. Now sex seems a use of my body for his pleasure. And we stopped discussing sex long ago because it never got us anywhere.

“Barbara?” I pull in my thoughts and back from his touch. “Nothing? How can you say that? Do you think it’s nothing to come home and find you with a whore soiling my sheets? You fucking bastard! You’ve got some nerve coming here. And . . . do you know what, Bobby darling? I came home early to surprise you. Some surprise. How long has this been going on? Every time you take a business trip somewhere? Or while I’m traveling? You’ve always pushed me to travel.” I pause a moment in thought. I’m feeling overwhelmed with emotion. My jerk of a husband is bringing this out of me. “At least you could have respected our bed.”

“Look, you have every right to be angry . . .”

“Right? Do you think you violated my civil rights? Does that make you feel better?”

Bob notices John laughing to himself as he sits back enjoying the drama.

“Please, Jess. I’m begging you to come home. We’ve given each other too much over the years to end it like this. Twenty years. She . . . Barbara, flirted with me and I . . . well, I’m weak and you know, honey, you’re not very creative in bed.”

“Creative? You mean like a laggard artist? So, this is all my fault, is it? My wifely duty is to be fucked at your whim. And if not, you find the first slut who comes along. Fair enough. I guess that’s what marriage is all about. Fucking the wife. Did you and Barbara do it up the butt?”

John laughs. His hand still grasps the ironwood club at his side.

“Stop it hon. Enough. Come home with me. I promise we’ll work this out. Things will change. I’ll change. We can even move if you want. Anywhere in the world.”

“You’re pathetic. And just how will our lives get better in Timbuktu? Or bum fuck Egypt?”

“We’ll take a cruise, work on our marriage. Communicate about sex. You always say communicating is the core of a good marriage. You’re right. We let it slip away somehow. I did. And now I want it back. I want you back. I’d be devastated without you.”

“You’ll manage, I guess. And so, will I. I want a divorce.”

“Jess. Don’t say that. Let’s not rush into anything. Not without at least trying.” He stands before me and holds out his hands.

I look at him. His steel blue eyes know me like no other eyes but my own. Eyes that I thought had cared for me. He has provided for me over the years. Encouraged me, I’m thinking. And he’s made me laugh and has shared so much with me. Then, in a moment, it was all gone. An illusion spun out of sorts.

I slap Bob away but he persistently holds out his hands. He's not usually assertive with me like he is at trial. But this is the first major crisis in our lives together. We're at the edge of our marriage. Either he brings me back or I'm gone forever. "Come on, Jess," he practically begs. "Come home with me."

Suddenly, John rises and walks past the swinging bed carrying the lowered club. Bob twitches. John sets aside his club, climbs on his hog, loudly revs it up, and drives away leaving a trail of dust.

"Thank God," Bob says. He remains standing before me, his hands still held out. "Let me take you home, boo boo. Please, let me get your car home. After you rest, we'll make changes. We can practice law together like we've talked about."

We had talked about it, when traveling to exotic places, but such an odd partnership we'd be, I've always thought. Bob, the stellar Harvard Patent Attorney; me the mediocre PI Lawyer who took the LSAT three times and the Bar twice. Bob was only trying to encourage me whenever he suggested this and all too often I've taken him seriously.

I remain aloof on the swing and avoid looking at him. My mind is on John Eldron who so abruptly slipped away without a word. In the past few days John has become my best friend. My savior. Now he's gone and I'm left alone with Bob in the khaki shorts and Polo shirt. But I'm feeling exhausted and in need of a hot whirlpool bath with lavender Epsom salts to help me relax and heal.

I begin thinking about my home on the desert mountain slope. I remember when Bob first showed it to me after I'd spent a week at the Phoenician, on my first trip to Phoenix. He had broken away from his busy meetings and drove me to the foothills of South Mountain. At the end of a cul de sac off Windemere Avenue, on half an acre against the desert slope, stood our two-

story Navajo White stucco house with a copper-red Spanish tile roof. I had never seen a more splendid house. Bob pulled his rented Cadillac into the driveway that curved around a front yard landscaped with saguaros and paloverde trees, boulders, and purplish stones recreating desert washes. No green lawns or flower gardens. No dwarf spruce or apricot trees. No forsythia shrubs or heavy bark sawdust. And no boxy hedges.

"Surprise," Bob had said. "It's ours. What do you think"

"It's beautiful," I remember saying before we even got out of the car. I didn't know that Bob had previously flown to Phoenix and bought the house. Like a lot of other things that he kept to himself. When I asked him why he didn't tell me about the house, he assured me he was only being practical, keeping me from having to deal with the stress of him finding a job and our buying a house while I was up in the air about going to law school.

Now, as I lounge on the swing, I look at my husband standing before me and wonder if I can tolerate him and return home. "I hate my job!" It's the only thing I can think of saying. Or maybe I'm really wanting him to tell me what to do, like he always has.

"You can quit your job," Bob says.

"Quit?" I ask with a stern look because I think he's lying.

"Yes, quit, if that's what you want to do. You can return to painting your tables and just be an artist."

I don't say anything but I think about my lovely art studio and office at the back of our house with its view of the mountain slope beyond the patio of rustic Saltillo tiles and a barbeque grill near the pool where I host Bob's parties. It would be nice to get back into my artwork fulltime and break away from my stressful meaningless job.

All of a sudden, I want to go home to the familiar where no one stares at me, where I fit in, belong, perhaps. At the very least I need to clean up after days of camping and Special giving me sponge baths. And I need to tie up loose ends and arrange for my future. But deep in my gut a feeling consumes me, like an instinct. I really don't want to destroy what I have. Maybe I can live with Bob, maybe even accept his infidelity somehow. It's just sex. Lust. He has, after all, been my very best friend over the years. So much of what I now am, how I now think, he's shaped during our lives together. I doubt I've shaped him in any way. Besides, what will I do if I end my marriage? Live here with John Eldron? Doing what? The man from Sacaton probably has cirrhosis of the liver.

I look at Bob imploring me to take his hands. Then I laugh.

"What's so funny?" Bob helps me off the swing. I stand before him and he draws me in his arms and holds me tightly, dearly, as if he's afraid to let me go.

"All right," I say in a moment, drawing strength from his embrace. It's almost as if we've been arguing over a silly, petty issue and just made up. I don't like this feeling. His infidelity is betrayal and the worst thing he's ever done to me. "This doesn't mean I forgive you or that our marriage is intact."

"No no, of course not, Jess. But it's a start."

"I'm tired now and want to go home and soak in the spa. But we have a lot of re-thinking to do. I doubt I'll ever trust you again, Bobby Ellars. And that's a hell of a thing to lose."

"I know, I know, boo boo bear." He puts his arm around me and we walk to his Steel Blue Beemer. "But we've got to try."

As we drive off the reservation to the freeway, via dirt roads to Maricopa, to the John Wayne Hwy, and on to Chandler Boulevard, I don't think I'll ever come back to the Gila River Reservation. Certainly not to Harrah's Ak-Chin Casino.

Chapter 8: Last Prophesies in the Grand Palace

600 years earlier (August 27, 1401)

Indolent Moon

On the day Frog Moon becomes indolent, I make my last prophesy as Second Prophet of the Three Sisters Society. The sun has cycled north south north eight times since my initiation wanderings in the desert.

In a knee-length skirt of woven yucca fibers, deerskin leggings, and a strip of white cotton gauze over my breasts, I'm sitting on the fourth level of my father's Grand Palace inside a circle of corn powder. Before me is a stone hearth burning mesquite chips that create blue flames. The black smoke escapes through the smoke hole on the roof.

At each corner of the room fragrant cedar bark and juniper berries burn in stone palettes from the northern Puebloans. Around my neck hangs a string of copper bells and the Fish Eagle

shell pendant with the bone and ash of my mother. My bracelet has a turquoise triangle like the chin tattoo of Wolf Blood, the caravan lord from Paquime. This morning my sisters painted my lips black, powered my face white with ground ironwood pods, knotted my long black hair with macaw feathers and bone hairpins shaped like lizards, flowers, and birds.

Neatly arrayed inside my corn circle is a Frog Moon palette, large round vessels painted with rivers, mountains, lightning bolts, and the white road across the night sky where people of bone journey. Placed in the four directions are the most sacred vessels in my corn circle—the effigy pots of community clan animals and of male and female people. They contain the old crone's mixture of plant magic. Before me, high on the east wall of the room, is a dust devil spiral.

While waiting to witness the moonbeam on the spiral, when Frog Moon sits indolent at his northern most post, I use a ceramic ladle to drink from the pottery bowl before me. It contains a brew of mushrooms, white evening flower, bee honey, and cacao that the old crone made for me. Its effect takes a while. My stomach hungers at first but soon the brew clears my mind of cravings and I recite the names of ancestors in my father's Fish Eagle Clan. Then, as the words appear in my mind, I sing to the spirit of the mother I never knew. The brew is making me live in a dream-vision in a vision.

"Frog Moon," I sing. "My father sends me into the unknown forever. Bless me with a child from this far away lord even in my ripe old age . . ."

Outside the Grand Palace I hear a raven caw like the old crone snorting in her sleep. I hear cheers of revelry, the sound of antelope horns beating deer skin drums, and the reverberations of conch shells. My people have been celebrating since early this morning. They are feasting on roasted deer, quail, rabbit, agave hearts, and corn gruel and cakes. They are

drinking a liquor made from the red saguaro fruit that makes them cheer and howl like coyotes. Their calls reach my ears like thunder that arises from under the Grand Palace floors. The smell of roasted meat also reaches me. It smells like the grease the Creator cast from his sweaty chest to make the true people of Earth in the present world.

All day my community has been preparing for Frog Moon to mark the far north so I can make my last prophecies for them. Now fires on the raised platform are blazing brightly in the darkness. People are singing praises to Frog Moon and calling him the spirit of fertility.

The burning mesquite pops and I shake my gourd rattle and continue to sing, "Frog Moon Indolent Moon. Tomorrow at sunrise Wolf Blood will take me far away on a long journey under the comet moon that wanders north and south like the stars that shoots across the sky."

Outside, the shouts of reveling people suddenly die down as a square of light appears on the dust devil spiral high on the wall before me. Northern Tlaloc pulls at Frog Moon and I stand and loudly sing so the people outside can hear me, "Indolent Frog Moon arrives at his spiral in the Great House."

Inside the circle of ground corn, I begin dancing around the blue flames and ringing my string of copper bells. My steps are precise, my songs of praise are cheerful.

I pick up an effigy pot of an owl, hold it high to the moonbeam on the wall, and ask Indolent Frog Moon for a good prophecy. Then I hurl the pot against the stone of the hearth. The red ceramic shatters in pieces. For an instant a brilliant burst of blue light ignites the room and the moonbeam fades from the spiral.

My first vision appears and my prophecy forms. *In the passing of five Indolent Frog Moons, in six generations to come, my people of the great city, my neighbors in villages near and far, will scatter to the north and to places south of Paquime. Great migrations of people will*

cross the world. The Creator won't cast floods like he did during the last world. But life for True People will forever change.

With the blue light, my first vision fades and the moonbeam on the wall reappears. I dance around the hearth calling to the spirits for a second vision. Onto the fire and stones, I throw an effigy pot of a large bighorn ram. The totem name of my mother. "I call upon my mother's spirit for a prophecy," I shout as another burst of blue light careens through the room. What I see in my second vision is disturbing. *In four hundred sun cycles, pale men will hazard the lives of those who descend from the true people of the desert and river. These intruders will steal the water and land and the world will change forever*.

Chapter 9: Retreat to Vail

600 years later (October 1996)

Jessie June Ellars

The gondola is filled with six passengers as it cranks up the slope of Vail, Colorado. This trip isn't as blistering cold as our previous trips. In fact, conditions are ideal. Pleasant blue skies now prevail after a fresh fall of powdered snow.

On the way home from the reservation three weeks ago, Bob promised me this getaway weekend as soon as the ski resorts opened in Vail. *If we can't make it in Vail, we can't make it*

anywhere he's been joking during this attempt to have a romantic weekend. And so far, we have been enjoying each other's company at restaurants, on evening walks, and in the condo's hot tub. *This is just like old times* he's also been telling me since we caught the flight out of Sky Harbor.

"I can't believe you gambled $300,000 in one night. That's got to be a record," Bob says aloud, shaking his head. "300,000," he repeats as if to the stranger across from me in the cab. Flapjack and the Rockies appear beyond through the window. The man ignores my husband. But I'm sure all the skiers in the gondola are listening to what Bob is saying. How could they not? He's intentionally bringing it up in front of these strangers just to emphasize his point. That what I did was bombastic. Does he think this is a courtroom? Asshole.

Bundled in my new fleece jacket I playfully hit his arm and tease back, "I wish you'd stop." Perhaps I'm letting these strangers think that my husband is just making a stupid joke. Bob had me convinced that he accepted my "casino night" as payment for his infidelity. He says he doesn't want to lose me because I'm his little "freckled face boo boo bear" a stupid moniker. He practically begged me to stay with him arguing that the Bible teaches love is patient, kind, and not envious. Hypocrite. He's not even religious. I argued back, "Well, the ten commandments say 'thou shalt not commit adultery.'" Back and forth we went like the lawn swing under the variegated shade of the ramada made from ocotillo and saguaro spines.

After a few days of rest and recovery back home, I simply returned to Williams and Chen Law and slipped back into my work routine. I didn't feel like complaining about my dreadful job to my husband when my head was spinning with complaints about his infidelity and betrayal.

I let Bob again run the show and make decisions for us. For me. I didn't want to address anything. I just wanted to do my job, return home and relax in the spa and eat gourmet dinners from Whole Foods or Trader's Jo.

At the same time, Bob kept saying something was going on with me, mentally, and that I needed to see a psychiatrist. As it turned out he knew just the one, the wife of his executive client from Motorola. Within a week of my return home, I met with Dr. Burkke-Scott, a blond woman originally from Slovakia, and I began taking the new drug called Paxil for my anxiety and depression. That was the doctor's diagnosis, anyway. I'm not sure what was really going on in my head except I felt betrayed and if that was causing me to be anxious and sad, well, so be it.

The Paxil made me feel better, less numb and lethargic, more able to chuckle at Bob's stupid jokes. Then he started asking for sex. I resisted him a few times by suggesting he might have the clap. And when I gave in to him, a time or two, I insisted he wear protection until he got tested. It seems I just didn't have the heart or stamina to argue with Bob and the Paxil has been keeping me in a kind of stupor.

About a week before this trip to Vail, I decided to place the deer antler eagle totem on my nightstand. I'm not sure why but I got it in my head that maybe the totem had magical, healing powers that could mend my relationship with Bob or give me the resolve to make it through his sexual sessions, which I hated. Or maybe the totem would empower me to leave him, or, somehow make Bob shapeshift and go away because deep inside I didn't feel redressed. Bob had wronged me and destroyed the innocent love I once had for him.

That night, Bob crawled into our bed with his lustful intentions and something magical did happen. My body shivered when he touched me and my mind or my imagination brought about John Eldron. My amorous husband slipped away, disappeared. He had shapeshifted into the O'odham man who saved my life. Who restored me. Or was it that John was shapeshifting into my wretched spouse? Either way, I was able to make love like never before. We sensually explored each other's bodies with lotions and massage oils. Me and the man from Sacaton.

It was like I was having a dream in a vision and all my senses were a part of what I was experiencing with John. My every corpuscle, nerve tentacle, skin cell, felt his touch, breathed his scent, heard his heartbeat strumming in rhythm with my own. And in my mind, or in reality, John Eldron took me into the vast spiraling galaxy of our universe through dust devil whirlwinds where our spirits, our essence, morphed into one.

We were spun from the heat and stilled from the cool comforting air. We passed through solid rock and walked straight up the cliffs into the night sky. And then the rising sun drank us up like water.

Passion had filled my soul like the Kama Sutra, like the tantric gods Samvara and Vajravarhai who dance so passionately they form the same awareness. The spirit reigned over the mind and the body came along for the ride. Our union was nothing short of a spiritual awakening that night until I awoke in my lover's arms and Bob reappeared in my mind and in my reality.

And now, here we are in Vail; I've brought along the eagle totem. I always keep it with me even when skiing down the slopes. I feel like it does more than make Bob shapeshift during our sessions in bed. I believe it's protecting me as if John Eldron himself is watching out for my welfare with my best interests at heart. When Bob approaches me for sex, I have the totem at the bedside and again I experience a spiritual liaison of passion with a shapeshifted man who is not Bob, at least in my mind or maybe in reality. I can't be sure and probably don't even care.

The gondola harbors at the top of the mountain and a fresh blast of powdery snow accosts everyone as we step outside the cab. Bob skis down Timberline Catwalk and looks over at me skiing in the powdery snow of Northwoods. I know he's wondering about me. He has asked me several times, "Where's your anger?" It worries him that I haven't screamed with fury since he

brought me back home. He can't imagine how long this will go on. He even told me that he wants me to stay angry a while, to hate him then heal and fall back in love so the rift between us will truly be over. Efficiently. He even told me once that something took away part of me, closed a door to him that he never realized even existed. All because of his betrayal, he admitted.

"You need time to heal from the wound I drove deep into your tender soul," he's told me. "I messed up royally, caused your crazy behavior. But I've noticed sex has improved significantly after I brought you home from the reservation."

"How so?" I had asked not really caring what Bob thought. Not really caring to engage in conversation with Bob about sex. It wasn't him, after all, that I was with during our sessions.

"You're suddenly willing and imaginative, something I never thought possible. Things are now the way I've always wanted them to be. Sex wise."

I had said nothing back, as if I was just playing along with him in our sham marriage. . .

The last run down the slope exhausts me with cramps and we return to the condo in Vail Village and soak in the hot tub then have a romantic dinner at Pinion's off Main Street. In the dim evening light of the restaurant, I feel more relaxed than I have since before my casino night at the Ak Chin. Since the Beemer's breakdown and my near demise in the raw desert.

At the table, over a portobello burger and grilled Brussel sprouts, I start complaining about my job, something I really haven't done since I got back. Like I said, the Paxil tends to pacify me.

Bob takes a big bite of his Kobe steak, then says, "Boo Boo. I urge you to stay with it for at least for a year."

"Bob, remember under the ramada at John's house?"

“How could I ever forget?”

“You said I could quit my job and pursue my artwork. Was that just talk? an empty promise to get me to come home?”

“I know it’s not the most glamorous job in the world,” Bob says. “But you need to get your feet wet. Art is good, your tabletop artwork is beautiful, but art isn’t a moneymaker. In case something happens to me you need a backup plan. You did deplete our nest egg! Jessie darling.”

“I’ll get one million dollars if you die.” I remind him of the MetLife policy HE took out years before, in Boston. He never bothered to take out any policy on me for himself. We weren’t going to have any kids and he felt he was set for life, but I wasn’t.

“Don’t think of your job as a cash-cow. It’s a steppingstone,” Bob makes his usual remark. It’s another circular argument so I say nothing more. Bob believes I need something of substance on my resume and if I end up divorcing him, he’s right. I need the job. My artwork has never gotten me anywhere other than selling a few tables to Bob’s clients and colleagues.

Back at the condo Bob orders my favorite bottle of slightly chilled Cabernet, organic Bonnterra, and he pours us each a glass. In the master bedroom suite, he lights scented candles and turns on Playboy TV, an indulgence I’ve allowed him this weekend.

I unpack an assortment of scented oils--sage-cedarwood, eucalyptus-pine, and juniper-rose. The deer antler eagle totem is in my night robe pocket. When I disrobe to bathe, I set it within hand’s reach. Rather like Hickok and his pistols.

Bob is reclining on the bed in his boxers. His arms are behind his head as he watches the porn, enthralled. “Daddy’s waiting,” he tells me.

“First I sing to the bear to heal me so I can heal you.” I’m not sure why I say this. It seems to just fall off my tongue and it makes perfect sense to me. I know it has to do with the totem and John Eldron

“Yeah, okay, boo boo bear,” my husband says, his eyes still glued to the porn. “Let’s get on with it.”

When I’m ready, I splash pine-cedar oil on my husband’s shoulders and massages his muscles and sinews. He doesn’t know that I’m now finding comfort retreating into a world far removed from him. He seems happy, I believe, certain that I’m finding pleasure in him. But the truth is, Bob isn’t the man I’m with, his touch isn’t his and I’ll never tell him about the aloe John applied to my damaged skin.

He appears to me, the O’odham man, and leads me into the early morning desert where it’s warm and cool. Coyotes howl at the setting full moon. The sky is becoming an orange hue like the sands in a Navajo painting.

He places a Hopi blanket on the Earth. In the four directions he lights clay pots that are burning mesquite, cedar, and pine shavings and filling the air with the desert’s fragrance. He lights the eastern pot first. “This is where the sun rises,” he tells me AS he becomes an Anasazi warrior dressed in nothing but buckskin leggings with feathers, beads, and totems. We fall together into bliss AS Our spirits spread in the heavy smoke from the incense burners. We rise together and join the clouds that form the firmament. we create storms and showers that bring fruit to the people of Earth.

I feel the soothing, gentle hands of John Eldron glide juniper oil across my skin. A cold breeze enters the open arcadian doors. The curtains flutter as we make love on the condo’s king bed.

A while later, I'm sitting in my night clothes at the vanity mirror and wiping my face with an astringent pad of witch hazel. Bob is lying on the bed reading a brief he's brought along. As I look in the mirror, I'm confused. Is this all a farce? Am I making love in a fantasy? Who am I really making love to? Am I falling back in love with my husband, the brilliant, organized enterprising man. Or am I surrendering my spirit to John Eldron? Perhaps my spirit has simply become too exhausted to fight against anything. It's easy, even nice, to drift back in love with Bob, let him be my happiness. My world. Am I merely making my confession and cleansing my soul? I don't forgive Bob and I will never completely trust him again. But it's best to say nothing, prove nothing, and let the elements of a good life shape the way once again. This is nothing new. Women have behaved this way since the beginning of time. Besides, Bob now bends over backwards to make our relationship work, sharing with me his feelings, thoughts, activities at work, and he talks about his business trips more than he ever did before.

I look over at my Harvard PATENT ATTORNEY husband; he's as engrossed with his brief as he was with the porno less than an hour before. I apply face cream for the night and remember John anointing me with aloe.

Bob suddenly sets aside his brief and approaches me at the vanity. He begins massaging my bare freckled shoulders; the sunburns have healed and my skin is a shade less pale. I look at HIS reflection in the vanity mirror. His blond hairy chest is such a contrast to the O'odham man with bear claw marks across his bronze hairless skin.

"You like sex now don't you, boo boo bear? You've changed, and I like what I see."

“No, I don’t think so.” I gaze at him, feeling a bit put off. It’s best if he doesn’t even say anything to me. Just let things be as they be. I really don’t want to analyze how I’m feeling, like I’m having a stupid session with Dr. Burkke-Scott.

“Sex is part of coming together between a man and woman.” He’s making a pun, something he’s always been good at. Especially when his jokes are lewd.

“You mean for a man with a woman?”

“Women enjoy sex just as much as men do. Look Jess. I only want to bring you pleasure. Really. I want that so much it hurts. It was good tonight, wasn’t it?”

“Bob. Do you think our lives are sterile because we chose not to have kids?” It’s a question I’ve had on my mind since my casino night. Maybe before. I’m not sure. But it’s one I now want Bob to answer.

“What?” Bob removes his hands from my shoulders; he’s probably hoping I don’t bring up his infidelity. Perhaps he thinks this is the motive for my off the wall question. “Sterile?” he finally asks and rests his hand back on my shoulder. “Now what made you say that? I thought we both agreed with the decision. We travel lavishly, sometimes on a whim, whenever I can. Are you having second thoughts about children? Not much time to dilly dally Miss Lady, unless we adopt.”

I touch his cold hand on my shoulder and say, “I was thinking about John Eldron on the reservation.”

“John?” Bob gives me a puzzled look. “That old chief? Thought you forgot about him when we drove away from his hovel. He must have thought we were a couple of crazy pale faces or whatever they call us down there.”

“He’s just a person, like you, like me. Except, John Eldron is a war hero, a medicine man, the man who saved my life after you brought that harlot to my bed,” I say, somewhat in jest, but deeply serious.

“And what’s this got to do with having children and being sterile.” Bob quickly returns to the subject at hand like a sharp attorney.

“I don’t know,” I reply, trying to be as composed as I can. I don’t want Bob to rattle me with his patent lawyer wit. I’ve brought up a serious matter as far as I’m concerned. It’s not a lewd flippant joke. I had never allowed anger to get the best of me, until my night at the Ak Chin. And once I decided to go back home with Bob, my emotions completely sobered. The medication helps. “We’ve planned out our lives so meticulously and someone like John Eldron is so spontaneous. He was a POW in Viet Nam, on the elite killer team. He killed a Navajo man and spent time in prison.”

“Killed a man? POW? Prison? What’s this all about Jessie? That man looked like a thug. A gangster. I sure didn’t want to tangle with him when he came at me with that log. I can’t tell you how uncomfortable I felt that day we aired our dirty laundry in front of your medicine man.”

“Were you afraid?” I chuckle, recalling the incident.

“Damn straight I was. Thought I’d have to tackle him to get you back. Glad I didn’t though,” he continues as if playing to the jury. He knows he still must gain my trust. “I can’t tell you how relieved I was when that son of a bitch took off. Sorry, I know he rescued you but some guys, him in particular, look like big trouble. Killed a guy? POW in Vietnam. PTSD. Jessie,” Bob looks at me in the mirror. “Do you want to talk about Navajo John or about having a kid?”

“He’s Akimel O’odham, People of the Gila River.”

“Okay, Jessie. I stand corrected. Now, do you want to discuss this Gila River guy or do you want to put your forty-one-year-old body through childbearing?”

“I don’t know.”

“Do you think our lives are sterile without kids? Come on Jessie.” I detect aggravation in his voice. “I thought we were carving out the life we wanted. Now you think I’m sterile. I don’t know what more I can do for you unless you do the right thing and forgive me of my transgression.”

“Calm down, Bob. This is just a discussion. I think we’re all right. I just wonder sometimes. About having a baby.”

“What else do you wonder about. I swear I’ll never hurt you again. Ever.”

“I believe you,” I say although I know his infidelity will always exist between us. “Maybe we need to be more spontaneous. Less planned out. Like that day we went to New York City. To the top of the World Trade building.” I recall the incident long ago, when we were living in Boston. In fact, when I first moved there to be with him. He took a day off at the firm to show me the sights. On our way home, he asked if I’d like to see NYC. I don’t remember saying yes but he suddenly veered onto I-95 and we went to NYC. To the World Trade Buildings. He went to the top floor while I waited in the lobby feeling too scared to venture so high.

“That was 20 years ago. Isn’t this trip spontaneous enough for you?” he asks.

“Not really. Make-up getaways don’t count.” I stand and walk to the window to view the snow-covered tourist village and the distant mountain peaks lit up in the dark night.

“What then, Jessie.” Bob sits at the edge of the bed, irritated. “A trip to India, Africa. Backpacking in Asia? What can I do for you? Adopt a bunch of kids?”

“I don’t know and I’m really sorry for that. Until the crisis, I thought I did. It rattled me and now I don’t know. Yes. Maybe I want to get pregnant.”

“Are you having second thoughts about us?”

“No. Don’t worry.”

“Talk to Burkke-Scott about it. Maybe she needs to increase the dose of your meds.”

I remain quiet for a moment, feeling helplessly reduced to a “talk to the therapist” “take your meds” fix. Doesn’t he understand that we must be each other’s therapists for therapy to really work? The thought makes me smile and I crawl into my side of the bed to sleep. “Why don’t we have a baby? Why won’t you do this for me?” I finally ask.

He reaches over from his side of the bed, kisses my ear, and whispers, “I think you’re the finest looking woman I’ve ever known. More than just a Pretty Woman. You’re . . . my beautiful Jessie.”

“Why Bob why?” I ask.

Bob sits up in bed beside me and says with a huff, “Because Jessie. I told you I didn’t want kids because of my large catholic family. But the truth is.” He pauses to turn off the nightlight. “I am sterile and can’t give you a kid.”

I say nothing. Why should I? What he just told me is no more of a shock than his betrayal. Maybe it’s another betrayal. Or why he betrayed me. He lied when he didn’t come clean from the beginning, if he really is sterile. Maybe he felt demasculinized? And he convinced me, like the good trial lawyer that he is, that he simply didn’t want kids. And what’s worse, he convinced me as well that I didn’t want or need kids to be happy in our exciting life together. Now I feel doubly betrayed. Confused. And exhausted because of my husband. Because maybe I really do want to have a child. But I can’t think about it anymore tonight so I close my eyes and

try to remember the face of John Eldron. Somehow, it's important I don't let my memory of him fade away.

Chapter 10: Third Vision of Indolent Moon

600 years earlier

Indolent Moon

My mind reels from the effects of Grandmother's brew but I must control the visions and not allow magic to overwhelm me. Before the Paquime envoy arrived, I believed a man would never bed me because of my curse. Because of my strong double spirit. My destiny was to become First Prophet when the old crone died. But a different course has entered my life. I care not about the man who will bed me but I am overjoyed about becoming a mother. Now I ask the spirits for a personal prophecy, about myself and not about my people.

In my dance I pick up the male and a female effigy pot filled with the magic powders of White Evening Flower. I toss it against the wall and ask, "How many children will I bring into the world and give to the Sun Lord of Paquime?" The effigy shatters and floods the room with brilliant yellow light and the moonbeam upon the spiral fades away.

In a massive compound of adobe houses, I see myself taking a sweat bath. When I'm finished, women clothe me in a buckskin shift with a belt of swirling conch shell hearts. They powder my face, paint my lips black, and plait my hair with macaw feathers and strings of shells.

Wolf Blood enters the room and escorts me to the main chamber of the Paquime Palace. The room smells of burning juniper and I hear the crackling central hearth and the squawking of macaws and parrots perched in the corner of the room. Next to the hearth fire is the large black stone from the sky embedded into the floor.

Eagle Heart, the Sun Lord of Paquime, sits on a wolf pelt before the stone and hearth fire. He wears tight buckskin pants and a tunic with a red cotton apron. He crowns his long black hair with mountain lion canines and human finger bones. Trophy human skulls sit in niches carved into the adobe walls of the room.

The Sun Lord rises and tells me to stand beside him. A parrot repeats his words. I don't speak his dialect of Uto-Aztecan but understand the gestures he makes. Eagle Heart places a cape of scarlet macaw feathers over my shoulders. He takes my hand and places it on the stone. It feels cool then it warms.

"Before each day begins," Eagle Heart speaks words I can understand. "I touch the stone for power to lead warriors in raids against my enemies. Give the stone your power, Hohokam prophet."

My vision-thoughts tell me the Creator sent this stone to Earth to remind his people of his power and might. He causes all good and bad things to happen. He causes the floods, the rains, the droughts, and the fierce winds of Tlaloc. He brings forth bad spirits of illness, pestilence, and death. My vision-heart rapidly beats and I breathe in the essence of the stone, of the room, of my new life.

Eagle Heart tells me, "Make your entreaty to the stone, daughter of Shivering Bear. They tell me you are a great prophet of your people. Give me a good prophesy. For that is what your father the Sun Chief of Grand Palace City gifted to me."

"Lord Sun," I hear myself say in the vision. "I have surrendered my life as a prophet to be your queen and provide you with many children." I remove my hand from the enormous stone and the tall Sun Lord strongly grasps my arm.

"We are at war with enemies from the west coast. Hohokam prophet, tell me the outcome of my raid against the Chalchihuites. And heed your words. I require nothing less than a favorable outcome. A promising future. For I am Lord of the greatest city on the trade routes of all nations."

My eyes close to have a vision in a vision. I deeply breathe and say the words that fill my thoughts. "Paquime will come to a violent end when your enemy attacks and kills hundreds of citizens. The Chalchihuites will burn down the support beams and demolish the walls of the adobe buildings. They will smash the sacred icons of your religion and kill all of your scarlet macaws."

I am not sure why I dare utter such unfavorable words when the tall lord stands threateningly beside me, but some force urges me to tell the truth about what I see. Maybe this force is the stone. I can't lie about my vision in the vision to please a menacing threat. The Creator didn't give me the gift of life to speak untruths. He set me on a path to light the reality of my visions.

I see fury in the eyes Eagle Heart as his grasp on my arm causes me pain. But he holds his temper and says, "Before I take you as my wife, little Hohokam bride, before you give me children and more favorable prophecies, I wish to show you a spectacular view of my city. You

will see the great river that fertilizes our land. On the side of Young Sun, you will see our platform and effigy mounds."

Wolf Blood takes my arm and leads me from the room. He places me in a secluded room with nothing in it but a lion pelt for my bed and a few vessels of water. All through the night, Wolf Blood stands at the curtained door to keep me from leaving.

When Young Sun emerges at the northeast hills beyond the trade city and flowing river, Eagle Heart leads a procession of men carrying torches made of greasewood and deer fat; some men are carrying water and sacred ritual items.

Wearing the cape of scarlet macaw feathers, I march behind Eagle Heart to the steep western hills reddened by Young Sun. We climb a sacred mountain where prairie dogs are peeking from their holes and rabbits and quail are foraging. I hear a flycatcher softly twitter in the paloverdes and I know he is calling his mate to announce he's found grasses for their nest.

The steep rocky path winds up a ravine between towering stone cliffs that form a defensive structure for Paquime. The trail ends at a plateau where large stones form a circle. In the center are branches of pine wood. With a torch Eagle Heart lights an enormous signal fire. There are several such fires atop other mountain plateaus surrounding Paquime. When the enemy approaches sentinels light these fires to warn the Sun Lord of approaching enemies. But Eagle Heart lights this fire for a ritual involving me. Perhaps to formalize our union.

Eagle Heart speaks as the fire bursts into flames from the sap and grease doused on the wood. His men stand around him.

I see myself by the fire in the grip of Wolf Blood. I don't understand the meaning of their rite or what my new lord intends for me to do. He didn't bed me the night before in the dusty

room crawling with spiders, scorpions, and ticks. I wonder if this is my marriage rite, a strange custom of my new community then I question whether the vision is playing tricks with my mind.

Five priests approach the fire and toss special powders into the flames to make the smoke blue. Eagle Heart drinks from a gourd of strong agave heart alcohol; he swallows some and spits the rest onto the flames. He lights a cigar and blows the smoke into the fire and onto my powdered face. The smoke stings and makes me cry because it is laced with hot peppers. I can taste the tobacco and capsicum. My vision-heart palpitates.

Eagle Heart firmly takes my hand. I smell his greasy sweat from the roaring fire. The sun stands at midday and I sense my new lord's determination, his anger, his rage in preparation for a great war. He must fill himself with strong spirits of power.

Eagle Heart leads me to the edge of the steep granite cliff and tells me to look at his remarkable city, the center of world trade. "View the enormity and beauty of Paquime," he says and points across the brown river cutting the desert plain. The city stands like a thousand of my father's Grand Palaces. I look at the stacks of adobe houses on the west side of Paquime, then at the ballcourts, platforms, and effigy mounds, and the reservoirs and canals that flow through the city. Beyond the western edge, on the river floodplain, I see stones creating the image of an eagle. At this point in my vision, I wonder if I am now married to this lord. Did his priests already perform the rite?

"That is my effigy," the Sun Lord declares. "It's where I bury my sacrifices to Xipe Totec. My city will not succumb to my enemies. I am a reverent Chief of all people. Powerful, invincible, and mighty like the stone hurled from the sky to establish my nation. Yes, you are my bride, prophet of the Hohokam. You will bless my victory."

Eagle Heart stands behind me. I feel the hot sun bearing down on my heavy and throbbing head. In my vision and in actuality. I can taste the tobacco and liquor of the Sun Lord's warm breath at my neck.

Eagle Heart takes off my feather cape and hands it to Wolf Blood who is always nearby. "Breathe deeply prophet bride," he whispers. "Bid welcome to Xipe Totec." At the small of my back, I feel him push me off the cliff. I see myself falling. But the vision does not end.

I watch a procession march from the city to the Sun Lord's effigy made from stones. His men have prepared my burial pit beside the mound. In the pit they place my flexed body on my right side. Priests set beside me are effigy vessels, shells, stone beads, and five sacrificed scarlet macaws. I'm not wearing my Fish Eagle shell totem carrying my mother's bone and ash. My father took it from me because I chose to forsake my birth curse and bed with a man to have children.

Inside the corn circle, I awake from my vision and feel the warmth of the hearth. The effects of Grandmother's brew are making me shiver and tingle. My last vision, my personal prophesy, confounds me. I believed in my choice to marry the lord from a faraway nation. I embraced my new direction and believed I would become my animal totem name Pregnant Deer. But according to my third vision, I will never live to have children and fulfill my instinct of becoming a mother.

Chapter 11: The Power of Totems

600 years later (November 1996)

Jessie June Ellars

In the conference room of Williams and Chen Law, I'm searching through ARLs for a case to note in my brief to the judge. I'm wearing the Blue Nile teal suit that Bob bought me for a 1L moot court argument. After 8 years, the outfit still fits.

"A lawyer looks smart, acts smart, stays smart, is smart," Bob often said to encouraged me throughout my law school career at ASU. He helped me shop for many sharp-looking suits to wear during my moot court sessions and legal conferences. Not that these expensive suits did me any good during law school. Like high school, I was a mediocre student and a crappy orator during moot court. After I failed the bar exam the first time, I packed away the suits for a few years until I pulled them out again for my job as a PI lawyer.

These days, I've been concluding and not just speculating that my husband continues to cheat on me. He's having an affair. The other day I saw him with his paramour at the Coffee Plantation in Tempe when Bob claimed to be in New York on a business trip for his firm. Another time, I overheard my husband strangely talking on the phone when I was standing outside the door of his upstairs office across the hall from our bedroom suite. I've never really minded that he always keeps his office door shut and locked and that I never go inside. Perhaps my parents instilled in me, or the sisters at St. Cecelia, that men are entitled to their own private domain. Their Man Caves. My brother was the same way. On his bedroom door was a sign that read "No Girls Allowed." As a little girl I took his meaning in stride and that stride probably stayed with me when I married Bob.

In any event, Bob wasn't aware that I was standing within hearing range outside his office door. And generally, I'm not a snoop or an eavesdropper. I just happened to be passing his door carrying my suits from the drycleaners when I overheard his animated conversation. Was he being cautious? I now wonder as I try to concentrate on my ARL research. The things I overheard him say were slightly off and at the time I had wondered if he was using code words. Mathematical words. Animal names. It was all very odd. And then I thought I heard him saying, "I miss you and love you," but I couldn't be certain and I didn't have the heart to confront him, to let him know I was on to him. Not yet anyway. I must collect evidence first and come up with a strategy. Like a good PI trial attorney. I don't want to fly off the handle and become a hysterical wife feeling like she's been wronged. If I did that, I'd feel pathetic and Bob would certainly have the upper hand.

What really puzzles me is that Bob tells me that I'm now making great love to him while I'm telling him that I've grown to love making love—although not to Bob who doesn't know about the shapeshifting. So then, why does he need this other woman? Because he never called it off. That's why! He loves this Harleton Charlatan. He's been faking it with me, all the way. Who knows how long Bob has been with this Barbara, or with other women? He's been lustful since he was an adolescent boy with dirty little double entendres.

Bob likes sex a bit too much and he could never turn me into a tramp. I've always had limits to my sexual behavior and I still do, even now under the powers of my deer antler eagle totem. Why? Just because. I don't have to explain myself to anyone, including Bob. But I do recognize the truth about my husband and I don't care anymore. Why should I? He doesn't care. If he loves me, why would he mistreat me? Put me at risk for a STD or worse. *Because I'm*

married to a jerk I tell myself as I look up at my managing attorney and friend sitting across the mahogany table.

"I saw that floozy of Bob's," I tell Juliann Colby as I feel the antler totem in my jacket pocket. Lately I've been finding that it not only takes me on sexual escapades with John Eldron, it also gives me confidence and courage to be myself, to be forthright, to tell my friend what's going on in my life. Although the totem's always with me, I don't want to flaunt it and answer questions about it in a law office, so I keep it hidden from everyone including my good friends and Bob.

Juliann is thumbing through an ARS. The picture window beyond her looks out onto Rural Road four stories below. It's been pouring rain off and on all day and now the clouds over Tempe have really let loose. Juliann, a petite, smartly coifed woman of Asian descent, is six years younger than me. She went straight from college to law school, passed the bar on her first try, and then went right into practicing law. She was a year ahead of me in law school and was my mentor through WLSA, the Women's Law School Association, a ladies' club, so to speak. We became close enough friends to discuss some personal matters. We aren't best friends or bosom buddies but since my crisis, as I've been calling my casino night, at least to myself and to Dr. Burke-Scott, Juliann has been my closest confidant. More so than Bob ever could be. Well, how could he be when he's the crux of the crisis?

In the first place, I had to explain to Juliann why I was absent from the job for a week and so I described how I walked-in on the bitch pulling up her pantyhose when I arrived home from Portland and then I confessed that I went to the Ak Chin casino. But I didn't mention the amount of money I gambled because I didn't want to appear crazed or manic. As an attorney, I have to

be careful about how I'm perceived and how my words come across. I can't afford to make myself look unsteady or foolish to anyone. Maybe law school instilled this in me.

Anyway, I explained to Juliann that on the way home to confront Bob, I ran out of gas and wandered the desert in the blistering heat until an O'odham man rescued me and nursed me back to health. I even described John Eldron to Juliann and admitted my attraction to him and his captivating and powerful spirit. I didn't embellish the story or show Juliann the totem or admit that I now takes meds. That would be very unlawyer-like. But in truth, I had been deeply frazzled for a few days when I returned to work but now I'm steady and on my feet. Under the care of a doctor and a mild dose of Paxil and with the power of my deer antler eagle totem.

I see my reflection in the table's mahogany sheen. It seems to give me courage, or maybe it's the totem I'm touching. I feel like a power is giving me permission to say what needs to be said. "The other day I was sorting through old photos," I say and close the heavy ARL and push it aside so I can plunge into what I have to tell my mentor. "I was scanning them on the computer and I came across pictures of parties and trips with Bob's old law firm in Boston. Lambert Patent. One packet contained pictures from a New Year's Eve party in the Hamptons during the bicentennial year, the year Bob and I married at Walden Pond. It was a costume party at the mansion of some bigwig law partner. I saw her in one of the photos. . ."

"Saw who?" Juliann looks up from her files.

"Bob's bitch. His tramp. I know her face like the back of my hand. She was dressed like Marie Antoinette with a wig of large white curls. Get this. I had taken the picture of her as she stood next to Bob who was dressed as Zorro. Now I call him Zero."

Juliann snickers and asks, "What was your costume?"

“A Bedouin woman. A family from Dubai gave me a thobe. They were Bob’s clients and I had stayed with them once during my travels. Anyway, the New Year’s party was a big event and I took lots of pictures that night. It’s been one of my hobbies since college when I took photography classes for my artwork. I didn’t know Ms. Antoinette when I photographed her with Bob at that party. I had no idea they were cavorting at the time. I assumed she was just a stranger in the crowd of attorneys at an exclusive party with exclusive people disguised in their alter-egos. I caught her powdered face with my Canon AE-1. Marie Antoinette with her mask down. She looks like the Wicked Witch of the North. Now that I look back, I realize I’ve been seeing glimpses of her throughout my marriage. For twenty years.”

“How can you be so sure, Jessie?” Juliann pushes aside her legal tome to fully listen to me.

I take a breath and continue, “Juliann, I think Bob’s been cheating on me since Boston. I believe his secret paramour moved to Phoenix first. Bob followed her. What I can’t figure out is why he bothers to be with me. He could have left me at New England School of Law. Is he just a lustful promiscuous man? I even wonder if he married me because he owed my brother Randy a life-saving favor. I don’t know what to believe anymore.” I feel myself becoming overwhelmed with all kinds of emotions, from anger, to disappointment, to sadness, to almost grief. I feel like a put-upon stooge. Messie Jessie Bressie.

“Steady, Girlfriend,” Juliann says. “You’re jumping leaps and bounds ahead of yourself. Like a runaway jury.” She closes her massive portfolio because I’ve fully piqued her interest. She has a lot to say about a lot of things just like she did as my WLSA mentor in law school. Now she’s a managing attorney and has been through two divorces and is heading for her third. She knows a thing or two about life. “How can you be so sure about all this?” she asks.

I look across the conference table; the gray light from the picture window is silhouetting my friend. “Because just last night I saw the bitch at some CEO’s mansion in Paradise Valley. Open bar party. Live band on the outside patio by the pool. Here’s the thing.” I look at Juliann to make sure I have her full attention like I do with a jury when I’m arguing a stupid DUI case at trial. “At first, I wasn’t going to attend the party and I told Bob to make excuses for me. But then at the last minute I changed my mind and told Bob I was going. That must have upset Bob’s little side plans because during the party I watched the bimbo bitch enter the front door. Marie Antoinette dressed in Louis Vuitton. I asked an attorney about her and he told me her name is Barbara Frank-Lymonne and that she’s a corporate lawyer at Gallagher and Perkins. She didn’t seem to see me at first or if she did, she didn’t recognize me. We only formally met once before. When I caught her in my bed with my husband!!”

“I’m still surprised you forgave him,” Juliann suggests as she pours herself a glass of water from the pitcher on the coffee bar side table.

“I’m not so sure I did. Come to think of it, the bitch had to recognize me. How can she forget my face gasping at her on my bed. I’ll never forget hers. It’s like seeing the face of your killer.

“Meaning her or you as the killer?” Julian snickers.

“Why me of course! Off with her head and all that. Anyway, Bob was in the kitchen having a drink with someone from Davis and Heart. Barbara Frank-Lymonne walked up to him, practically slathered a kiss on his mouth, he pulled back and she then switched up and greeted him like an associate. Juliann, if you could have seen Bob’s face turn ashen when he saw me standing at the kitchen door, as if I had caught them in the act of fornicating, once again.”

“You must have been livid.”

“I was disgusted. Wanted to step aside and see what Bob would do. I don’t trust him. How can I ever trust someone who betrayed my trust in such a way?”

“What happened?”

“As soon as Bob saw me he came up to me, without a word to Ms. Barb lay man frank, and suggested that we leave.”

Juliann chuckles.

“Evidently,” I CONTINUE, “Bob didn’t have a chance to warn his girlfriend that I was going to be at the party after all. That’s what happened. Marie Antoinette didn’t think I’d be there.”

“I don’t know Jessie. Bob must have felt terrible.”

“He felt silly, that’s how he felt. But get this. I went up to Ms. Antoinette and loudly thanked her for staying out of my bed. All attention was on me. It was really quite funny, except for poor Bob.”

“What’d the bitch do?”

“Walked away, her nose turned up like an indifferent law school snob. Bob grabbed my hand and we left the party. *It’s over* he kept saying all the way home. *When will you stop holding this against me? The Lord forgives our past transgressions. Why can’t you forgive mine?”*

“What did you say?” Juliann asks.

“Actually, I apologized on the way home and we made love last night,” I admit, although my sex life isn’t something I usually talk about with Juliann and I haven’t revealed my fantasy about making love to John Eldron when I’m having sex with Bob. It’s too personal and too mystical, the shapeshifting and all. It’s not the sort of thing a professional attorney would admit to, toy around with, speculate upon.

But I continue and tell my friend what I'm comfortable revealing. "Now get this. I came in an hour early today to look up this Barbara Frank-Lymonne in the Bar directory. On my own time, of course. She went to MIT then Harvard Law the same years as my husband. She graduated summa cum laude, highest in her class. Bob wasn't far behind. Does that sound like a coincidence? Not! They've probably known each other since birth. Two peas in a pod."

"Jessie, I really hope you're wrong about all this. I want you two to make it. It's not easy finding a good man. A handsome, rich, and ambitious patent attorney and partner in a top firm. Bob lets you travel all over the world on your own. You have a dream life. I know what he did is inexcusable but he seems to think the world of you."

"I know. We're a cute couple," I say, interrupting my friend and offering a comment I've heard a time or two. It sounds pathetic now.

Suddenly, something outside the window catches my gaze and I walk around the table to have a closer look.

"What is it?" Juliann asks, turning to see what I'm looking at in the intersection below. The late autumn downpour continues to douse Rural and Elliot.

"Do you see an old beat-up tow truck down there? Forest green?" I ask as the light changes and the traffic rushes on in the sheets of rain.

"No, I don't see it." Juliann is now standing at the window beside me.

"I'm sure I saw it. A Ford wrecker tow like John Eldron's. A bit out of place off the reservation. You don't suppose he's in town?"

"Why not. The reservation isn't a Japanese internment camp. Maybe he's looking for you?" Juliann suggests and chuckles.

I chuckle along with my friend and walk back to my ARL to continue my case work. But deep inside, I'm not so sure John Eldron isn't doing just that. Looking for me. I can sense his presence, his aura, as if he's etched his totem across my chest.

Over the following days John Eldron consumes my every thought and his image is like the deer antler totem that I carry in my pocket and keep at my bedside each night. It's always with me. My thoughts of him venture beyond a sexual fantasy, if that's what it is. Now he appears in my dreams and I think I'm seeing him in restaurants, at law libraries, and even in the courtroom jury box or the spectator seats at back. As I drive my Beemer along the streets of downtown Tempe I see a large Native American biker man with distinctive tattoos walking on the sidewalk. I drive around the block to double check and then realize that the person is someone else. John Eldron is like a bear stalking me, his prey. He's a shapeshifter, an ever-haunting presence.

At the same time, I've been thinking about the Navajo man on death row. The man I interviewed and then exchanged a few letters with before the State took his life. Why didn't I mention him to John Eldron during my five days on the reservation? Perhaps because my wounded body, spirit, and thoughts couldn't venture that far. I couldn't make connections. Or perhaps I had been worried that John Eldron was related to the executed man and I didn't want to stir up PTSD emotions. Now I reproach myself for not making the connection with John Eldron. I should have told him about my death row client during law school. Mentioned what the Navajo man had said to me about life. *I may be confined to death row,* he had said. *But it's a life*. It seems important now.

As the weeks pass, I discuss with Juliann only case law and facts that are basically all the same anyway—DUI drugheads in different scenarios that I set out to defend. I avoid chatting about personal matters because once I do, I tend to go down a slippery slope.

This all changes, however, on Friday, May 9, a few weeks before Memorial Day Weekend which brings lots of business to Williams and Chen. I lose my reserve and talk to Juliann about my tumultuous marriage.

Juliann and I have just finished a deposition for a construction worker's mishap and are having lunch at the Main Street Bistro near our office. We're discussing the OSHEA case when out-of-the-blue Juliann asks, like a genuinely concerned friend, "How's it going"

"Fine, I'm fine," I reply, caught off guard. "You?"

"No," she says. "I mean with you and Bob."

"Oh that. Well, he's fucking our friend Ms. Frank." There, it slipped. Just came out matter-of-factly which astonishes even me.

"You're teasing me, aren't you?" Juliann asks, setting aside her Rubin sandwich. "I was hoping things were working out. I'm rooting for you two."

I chuckle a moment, feeling empathy for my friend, the romantic on her third divorce. "No, Juliann. I'm serious. He can't keep his willy at home. Well, at least he's keeping her out of my bed." I take a bite of the dill pickle on my plate, a condiment with my Swiss cheese and roast beef Panita sandwich.

"How do you know?" my friend asks.

"A wife knows. Too many clues. You can't hide something like this. Although he thinks he's doing a damn good job of it. In fact, he thinks things are great between us; great sex, great rapport, great dinners together, everything. He's such an ass."

“Jessie. I’m speechless.” Juliann sips her mint cappuccino. She looks so sharp and pretty with her dark brunette page cut, her dark brown Asian eyes. Well, she’s much sharper than I am when it comes to the law. She did a whole lot better than me in law school, although she didn’t excel as a top student who made law review. But she did all right like she’s doing now in her law career as managing attorney at Williams and Chen Tempe Law Offices. It’s not that I envy her. Rather, I’m proud that she’s my friend and still my mentor in life.

“It’s all right,” I tell her and sip my cup of sweet chai. “I may even live with it. His infidelity, that is. I haven’t decided. I have everything I want, after all. No kids to weigh me down. And I got this stellar job and am driving a new ruby red BMW. A trip to the Bahamas is coming up, after hurricane season. We go there every year. His firm owns a beach house off Turtle Reef in Nassau.”

“Jessie,” Juliann reaches over and touches my hand. “I know you’re acting like you don’t care. But you must feel dashed. You can’t live with this kind of behavior. I couldn’t.”

“Live with the truth, you mean? We all live with the truth. Especially us lawyers.” I pause a moment to stir my spicy chai, then continue, “I’ve been thinking a lot lately about John Eldron. All the time in fact.”

“That O’odham man or the man on death row?” Juliann asks. As my WLSA mentor, Juliann knew all about my experience in the ASU Death Penalty Clinic. I told her about the Navajo man and his execution the year I finally passed the Arizona bar. It had seemed like an important connection that I had to share with her.

“Both, maybe,” I say. “John Eldron mostly. I can’t get him out of my mind. I dream about him, see his face everywhere I go. And, I have sex with him in my dreams and when I’m

fantasizing while making love with Bob." There. I finally admit it. But I don't go as far as revealing the shapeshifting notion and my deer antler totem from John.

"Wow! If you want my advice, why don't you go back to the reservation and look up this O'odham man? Maybe that's what you need to do."

"Juliann," I say then walk around the table and give my friend a hug. "That's exactly what I'm going to do. Now." I pull money from my purse for the bill and set it on the table.

"You're going to the reservation in your suit?" Juliann asks about the tan tweed jacket and matching skirt I'm wearing with low beige heels and a golden silk blouse and billowing bow tie. It's another suit Bob bought me for a 1L moot court competition.

I notice my colleague's look of concern on her pretty face. Maybe she was just kidding. I'm not sure. Maybe she really does think I'm a bit manic, or something. A bit off my game. "Yes," I say. "I'm going as is." I wink and slip away from the bistro, feeling energized and set on a mission to further restore myself from all the wrongs thrust upon me. Mostly by my husband Bob Ellars.

Within the hour I pull my new Beemer into Vekol's Market on the GRIC near the town of Maricopa which the locals call Copa Town. Vekol's is really a small, hick convenience store and one pump gas station out in the middle of nowhere on the reservation. I ask the Native American clerk inside if he knows where John Eldron lives. He points me to back roads due east of Copa Town.

For the next twenty minutes I meander on dirt roads in the raw empty desert but have difficulty finding the dwelling I'm looking for. I don't recognize anything. How can I possibly retrace my steps? I have very little recollection of when and where I abandoned my previous Beemer and started wandering in the Sonora Desert; I don't recall John taking me to his place

and I barely remember Bob driving to the edge of the reservation when he took me back to our home in the foothills of South Mountain.

Finally, by sheer luck, I stumble upon a dirt road off West Ferrell, north of the Ak Chin Casino. It appears familiar enough and I drive about three miles and finally spot the two-story, adobe and timber dwelling. It blends into the terrain like camouflage. In the yard outside the house sits Special's old red Toyota pickup. The Harley Bobcat is under the ramada and the dogs are sleeping in the yard but I don't see the green wrecker tow truck.

Three young children, six to ten, run from the wide-opened front door. An obese woman, John's younger sister, follows.

I park and exit my car.

"Red, is that you," Special says, drying her hands on the apron over her moo moo dress. "New car?"

"Very new. How are you doing, Special? I never got a chance to thank you for nursing me back to health," I say, suddenly feeling rather silly in my suit and heels. At least, out of place. My heels are modest but heels, nevertheless, and I worry I might take a spill on the rough caliche ground like a total nitwit tourist.

Special takes my hand and leads me under the Ramada's crisscross shade. "The house is too hot," she says. "It's much nicer out here for a visit. Got some sodas the old Catholic woman brought yesterday with her sacks of groceries. Like one?"

"Thanks. But I can't stay long. I'm still working." I reach in my purse and offer the O'odham woman one thousand dollars in cash. Special smiles and takes the money without question. I'm relieved because I was hoping she'd take it without my having to insist that it's a gift because she helped me recover. "Where's John?" I ask.

“His wife took him back. For now. Who knows how long she’ll keep him this time? Poor man. Hasn’t he suffered enough?”

“He’s in Sacaton?” I ask, feeling myself blush in the dry wispy heat of late spring, in the unpolluted air of the raw Sonora where I’m hearing the beautiful mesquites whisper in the gentle breeze. Special was right. It’s very refreshing under the saguaro and ocotillo ramada.

“It’s easier for him to find work in Sacaton,” Special remarks and then pauses a moment perhaps to listen to the desert’s music herself, something she must be used to but can never hear often enough. “Sometimes my elder brother works as a mechanic or a medicine man, sometimes he sells weed from Mexico to rural folk in Copa Town.”

“Your brother is an enterprising man,” I suggest, trying to cover my disappointment that John Eldron isn’t around. I really felt a tremendous need to meet with him. As if I needed more of his medicine, his personal touch, or, if nothing else, to thank him for saving my life. To thank him for the totem. I doubt I’ll reveal, however, anything about Bob shapeshifting during sex. Unless, John mentions something about it.

“Well,” I say, still holding Special’s soft and plump hand. “Please tell your older brother that I had business in Tucson, a legal case, and thought I’d swing by, although I did get lost trying to get here. But no flat tire this time.”

Special chuckles and says, “I live here now with my kids until the Catholic charity and Home Depot build me a house. I like it here. It’s peaceful and quiet. I take care of the animals, gardens, my kids, and of course my brother when he’s around. Not a bad life. I make baskets for extra money and so I do all right. The casino will send me a check any day now. Thank you for your gift, dear lady.”

“I’m glad, Special. You’re such a good friend.”

“How’re you doing these days?” she asks. “The sun mistreated you. John said your man also treated you badly. That right? Men can be full of themselves.”

“It’s true. I married an asshole.”

Special laughs. Her essence and smile make the day even brighter. Her voice, I’m thinking, sounds like a yellow warbler’s song—swift, breezy, and soft.

The children suddenly run up to their mother with sodas; they are full of energy and enthusiasm. A brown shaggy dog follows behind them and jumps up on me nearly knocking me down until Special hits it with her can of soda. The dog’s muddy paws have ruined my expensive suit but no one seems to care. The children are laughing uproariously about the incident and Special is widely grinning and chuckling.

“I really must be going, now,” I say, brushing off my jacket and skirt. “What’s the best way out of here? I doubt I can retrace my way even though it was less than twenty minutes ago.”

“There’s only one way and that’s the way you came, unless you drive across the desert and I don’t think you want to ruin your new car,” Special remarks as she picks up her youngest child, a daughter, and holds her up to wave goodbye. I walk off to my Beemer, hoping my memory sharpens up and doesn’t fail me.

Chapter 12: Long Journey Under the Comet Moon

600 Years Earlier

Indolent Moon

The trek to Paquime lasts many days as we cross the desert plains, traverse craggy hills, and follow rivers through changing terrain. Four men are carrying my palanquin in the middle of the caravan led by Wolf Blood. The other men are carrying baskets on their backs filled with stone pipes, ceramic bells, totem plates, and effigy vessels—tributes and trade goods from my father. I'm wearing a yucca tunic, deer skin leggings, bracelets and shell anklets, but not the shell pendant with my mother's bone and ashes.

Each night I sleep under the stars on a woven cloth, among the men, and I dream about the third vision that prophesized my sacrifice. I cannot change my decision to marry the Lord of Paquime and betray my father's trade commitment. And I cannot flee into the desert alone without any means to help me survive. Where would I go, anyway? It wouldn't be like my wandering rite-of-passage where at the end of each day I returned to Grandmother's Hut and ate the food that White Evening Flower prepared. My cursed birth has already made me helpless. My only option, and the thing I end up doing during my restless nights, is to silently call upon Earth spirits and bone people to change the ending of my third vision, despite White Evening Flower's warning that a vision is fate. *Is there any way to change a vision?* I remember asking her before I left on this caravan. And she replied *A vision is reality but sometimes, by the will of our Creator, we can misconstrue the vision's outcome.*

These words give me a semblance of hope and I spend many nights on the journey to Paquime trying to interpret the vision in a more promising way. Perhaps Eagle Heart is giving me his city and all his treasures. Perhaps I'm spreading my wings and embracing the large city

like a great eagle or vulture or owl. A raptor flying over her landscape. Perhaps it means I will have many children because I please my husband. But in my vision the prophecy I gave to Eagle Heart made him angry and I cannot convince myself that I've misinterpreted my third vision during the Indolent Frog Moon.

One night I wake from a dream about my third vision and realize that I must escape from this caravan to Paquime if I can find a way. The coyote spirit who died in the cholla patch tells me that Wolf Blood is taking me to my sacrificial death and not to my future as a bride to the Sun Lord of a great city. But a plan of escape fails to form in my mind and I feel as trapped and helpless as that poor coyote brother when he met his death. The harder I try to formulate a plan, the worse my situation seems to become. I am eating cholla spines and slowly dying in the mid-day sun.

The day after this dream, when my caravan passes through pine mountains, we encounter a group of Puebloan merchants traveling the road north after trading in Paquime and paying tributes to the Sun Lord, my betrothed. A man named Wounded Black Bear leads this caravan of twenty men. He dresses in buckskin britches, like his men, but he alone wears a bright red and yellow war vest and headband with macaw feathers and a string of pyrite beads and bear claws.

Our two caravan groups make camp together and feast on freshly hunted rabbit, deer, quail, and turkey. Around the large cook fire, the men speak a trade dialect of Uto-Aztecan and tell stories and barter some of their goods. As the only female among them, I quietly sit on my palanquin under a pine tree. Wolf Blood explains to Wounded Black Bear that I'm a high-ranking Hohokam bride for the Sun Lord of Paquime, but this doesn't stop the Puebloan trader from casting his glance my way. I know I'm stunning to look at among all these rough men; a desert flower among thorns, quills, and barbs.

During the evening's feast, Wounded Black Bear offers Wolf Blood and his men deer bladders filled with an agave liquor made in a village north of Paquime. The men mingle and feast and drink the liquor.

Late into the darkness of night, while I'm lying on my yucca cloth beside the palanquin, the rowdy and rough men are making me feel uneasy and I cannot sleep. Both the Puebloans and the Paquime men are dancing and singing about the corn maidens enchanted by the Young Sun's magic. The air smells of embers from the juniper and pine fires and the liquor and sweat of the reveling men. They play reed flutes, ring copper bells, blow conch shell trumpets, and shake rattlesnake rattles strung together. All the while the Paquime men are drinking the agave liquor from the Puebloan merchants.

By the time the waning gibbous reaches Tlaloc of Darkness, Wolf Blood and his men are fast asleep around the dying embers. The liquor has rendered them practically dead.

I suddenly realize that this is my opportunity to escape because I'm sensing that the Puebloans have tricked my Paquime caravan to steal their bounty of tributes. Maybe even to abduct me. By my own vision of prophecy, I have no choice but to join these Puebloan thieves. I cannot return to my father's settlement for two reasons. In order to produce a child, to be a mother, I surrendered my sacred vows as a holy woman before my people, White Evening Flower, and my father Shivering Bear. And if I returned, Shivering Bear will send me back to the Paquime Sun Lord anyway, and if I were to protest he would probably sacrifice me himself.

As I ponder my predicament, I hear a shuffling. It could be an animal, I'm thinking. A mountain lion or bear. A pack of wolves. I peer across the camp and see the Puebloan traders preparing to sneak away with the Paquime baskets of merchandise and bride bounty from my father. I was correct in my hunch. The Puebloans had drugged the liquor they gave to Wolf

Blood and his men probably with the mushroom powder I smell. I wonder why the Paquime men were so easily deceived. Perhaps Wounded Black Bear gave them pure liquor at first then he delved out a brew that was tainted.

From my bed, I watch the Puebloan men slit the throat of any Paquime man who stirs. I feel confident that these robbers don't consider me a threat. They see me as valuable bounty. A respected Hohokam prophet and princess bride to the Sun Lord of Paquime. I rise from my bed and sneak around camp among the thieving men until the rising gibbous moon shines on the man who eyed me all that day. Wounded Black Bear.

I approach him and boldly say, "I've witnessed the thievery of precious items in the possession of Wolf Blood, warlord of Paquime's Sun Lord. This loot is my father's tribute for my betrothal."

The Puebloan leader grows combative. He signals his men with a whistle, the sound of a night hawk. Then he places his hands around my neck and begins to choke me. He doesn't fear that my scream will awaken the unconscious men from Paquime.

"I will steal you as well, Hohokam strumpet," he whispers in my ear. "Or take away your life powers."

My struggle and gestures for help awakening no one.

When the Puebloan leader loosens his grip on my throat, I ease in my stance to think out a strategy like I learned to do during my desert wanderings. What can I use to my advantage? How can I change the heart-spirit of this fierce warlord of thieves? As my body loosens its tension, my mind relents.

I clear my throat and massage my neck. Then I offer Wounded Black Bear my jewelry and the bride wealth I have stashed in my tunic pockets. “I can also give you a prophecy,” I say. “One only I can give if you will take me north to the Mogollon region of the world.”

“That’s not enough, little Hohokam maiden. I take what I want without the consent of anyone, not to mention a wench. Status means nothing to a thief. But if you willingly bed with me and give me a fine Hohokam prophecy, I will consider your matter.”

I stand silent for a moment and think. If I have learned nothing else from my third vision, it’s that I cannot give a warlord an unfavorable prophecy. He must like what I predict even if it means I evade the truth. I glare at the menacing thief and tell him I agree but warn that we cannot bed together until the thirteenth moon has passed according to a prediction I’m feeling. “And I cannot travel the road among your men as I am. That would create suspicion.”

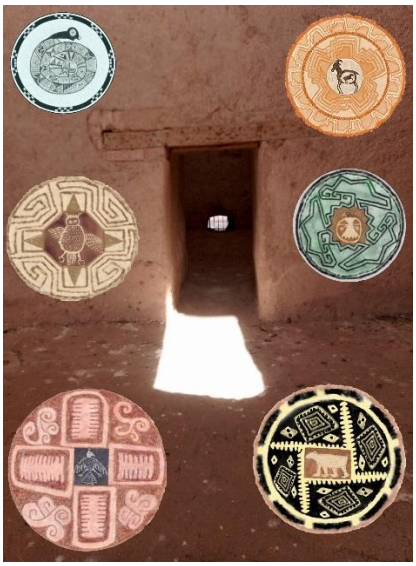
Wounder Black Bear ponders my words, agrees with my proposal, and provides me with the clothes of a dead comrade whom a Paquime warrior stabbed with an obsidian blade before he succumbed to his own mortal wounds.

“He was a small man,” Wounded Black Bear says about his fallen man.

I disguise myself as a boy while the thieves continue gathering the loot from the Paquime caravan. Before departing, a few of the Puebloan men slice the throats of Paquime men lying asleep. These Puebloan thieves possess marauding heart-spirits. They are pure evil and I must keep alert.

Over the next lunar cycle, in the darkness of night, by the sun, rain, and winds of day, Wounded Black Bear leads his men on the road north. I march along in the middle of the caravan of thieves carrying a basket on my back. No one carries me in a palanquin and I must keep pace with the steps of these wayward men. They don’t cause me harm because they know I belong to

Wounded Black Bear, their leader, and they know about my promise to give him a good prophecy.



Chapter 13: The Casa Grande Ruins

600 Years Later (May 9, 1997)

Jessie June Ellars

Before returning home to face another evening with Bob and his falsehoods, I decide to head from Copa Town to Sacaton across the I-10. It's not that I'm expecting to encounter John Eldron, or maybe I'm hoping to, but more so, I want to see Sacaton and sit at a fast-food restaurant and think about John. About all the things he said to me. *Bear and deer shapeshifters are wandering visions and dreams, then poof. They appear in reality.* Although what I really need to think about is having a life without Bob. And that will happen. I just need time to form a strategy to spring my decision on him. And I need to be prepared with a good family law lawyer.

Won't he be surprised? I'm thinking as I drive across the desert reservation, the GRIC. He's so sure we're living happily ever after. That I'm naïve and unaware he's involved with his

extra-marital lover. I can't understand how anyone can live such a double life. What hypocrisy! It's worse than any case of personal injury fraud I've ever come across.

Off the I-10 freeway between Phoenix and Tucson, I exit onto Casa Blanca Road to Sacaton, the capital of the GRIC. When I was touring through Egypt, after my second year of law school, I visited a contact I had made through Mensa, an older woman working at a clinic in Beni Suef. Her name was Lynn Stinnette and she lived on the Kom Awshim Beni Suef compound for US contractors and employees of some big U. S. concrete entity. The compound was situated on the flat baren desert south of Cairo and had several streets lined with one story ranch style block houses with small lots. Cookie cutter houses. The houses in Sacaton remind me of this Beni Suef compound except for the scraggy mesquites, prickly pears, saguaros, and ramadas.

I pull into a 76-Gas Station and ask the clerk if he knows the whereabouts of John Eldron, the medicine man Vietnam POW. I'm assuming John is well-known in his hometown community of 1500 people. The clerk is a Native American teen who introduces himself as Sonny Nieto.

"John's gone off the rez," Sonny says. "Wife kicked him out." He doesn't tell me where John's wife lives and I wonder if he assumes I'm "Red," the white woman wife of John Eldron. The wife John claimed people were talking about in Sacaton. Certainly, everyone hears the gossip and news about the town's war hero.

"John's a war hero, I understand," I venture to say as I pay for a bag of nuts and bottled water. I'm just trying to be friendly. Show the clerk that I know a little about John.

Sonny perks up and starts talking about Sacaton's celebrations for their war heroes. "In the 1850's my town was an Indian village near a station for the Butterfield Overland Stage. You

might want to drive past the post office and take a look at the C H Cook Memorial Church. It's a landmark named after a missionary who came here in the early 1900's. And please stop by our city park. It's named after our two war heroes, Matthew B Juan who was killed in WWI and Ira Hayes who fought in WWII and helped raise the flag on Iwo Jima. I'm sure you're familiar with that famous photo. Our town holds an annual 'Raising of the Iwa Jima Flag' parade and celebration," he adds with pride.

Following Sonny's instructions, I visit the sites of Sacaton and wander through the city park while sensing the community's pride in their sons and daughters who have served in the military, a tradition that undoubtedly goes back to honoring the warriors who defended the O'odham villages from warring Apache invaders.

I find myself shedding a tear when I think of such a distinctive heritage. It's a world I've barely touched with my artwork and anthropology courses and Bender's Indian law 101. In truth, I don't know how such a sense of identity feels. Being Catholic? Maybe. But I left the church years ago and my identity now is that of a newbie PI attorney and a cheater's wife and that doesn't give me much sense of pride. Heritage doesn't have the same importance to everyone and I can do without mine.

I touch the totem in my pocket and think that maybe this is another reason John gave it to me. To help me find my own sense of identity separate from any kind of heritage, job, philandering husband, or any social constraints and perceptions. There seems to be no end to the power of John's deer antler eagle totem.

I look at the new Coach watch Bob gave me as one of his many repentance gifts after he brought me home from the reservation. The afternoon is growing late and I have a gut feeling that I need to visit the ruins today before I return home to Bob or drive around bum fuck Egypt

looking for John Eldron. In truth, I'm not sure what I'm going to do after I see the Hohokam ruins outside Coolidge.

Twice before I've been to the Casa Grande ruins, a National Monument established in 1918 probably by the first President Roosevelt. Or McKinley or Taft. During law school I had stopped by the site to take pictures on my way to interview the death row Navajo man at the prison in Florence. Before that, when I was happily working on my desert landscape tables with Hohokam, O'odham, and Anasazi designs, Bob and I visited the ruins on a hot June morning. We'd been on our way to a biotechnology conference in Tucson; it was Bob's conference of course, but I tagged along to sightsee and shop while we were staying at a luxury resort.

At the ruins that day, I remember our guide was an O'odham ranger dressed in an olive-green uniform. He looked very smart and he used a walking staff made from a saguaro rib. His nametag read Ranger Ellars. "We must be cousins," Bob joked because they were glaringly unrelated. It was a typical remark from my arrogant Harvard husband, even racist I think as I reflect on that day while driving to Coolidge.

Maybe Coolidge was the president who established the National Monument. I'm not sure. But I remember Ranger Ellars proudly explaining that the Casa Grande ruins were the best preserved of any Hohokam ruins, a name he pronounced as *Huhugam*. He said the name means "those who vanished" because in truth, archaeologists are uncertain about what really happened to the Hohokam. It seems they just disappeared. But I remember Ranger Ellars also saying that the O'odham believe these ancient peoples of the Sonora are their ancestors. That the O'odham are what happened to the Hohokam.

It's nearly the five o'clock closing time when I arrive at the ruins. The ranger at the museum's reception desk suggests I come back another day but I opt to enter the park anyway.

I quickly pass through the museum onto the grounds of the National Monument. Only a few Hispanic families are wandering the nearly five-hundred-acre site as I follow the designated trails in my heels and soiled and ripped tweed suit.

The main feature in the park is the four-story Grand House, Casa Grande, which rises from the desert almost like a natural outcropping. I remember Ranger Ellars saying that the ancient people made it by packing and drying the caliche soil into adobe as hard as stone and they plastered the interior walls with reflective desert paints. The ancients probably held rituals inside or the structure was a palace for the ruling headman of the village. Now it sits under a large metal ramada to protect it from further erosion

The other ruins in the park also rise from the flat sprawling earth like mausoleums to those who created the settlement. Those who vanished. As I quickly pace along to see as much as I can before the ranger rounds up straggling guests and ushers us from the park, my imagination about the Hohokam soars. Who they were. How they lived. What they hoped for and aspired to do. Did what they envision come to pass? Or did their thriving community simply crumble and fade away? Did they all die out? If not, where did they really go? Or was Ranger Ellars, Bob's "cousin," correct? Did they become today's communities, nations, and tribes of the O'odham or other modern Native Americans of the desert southwest?

I stop by the tall central door on the east wall of the Grand House. On the upper right portion is a small hole created to mark the Major Lunar Standstill, an event that occurs every eighteen and a half years when the moon reaches its northern most point and seems to be standing still and being indolent.

My mind replays the rattle and chants of John Eldron. Drums begin to quietly beat in my head and I hear the breezy sound of the desert's flute music. It's easy to visualize activity on the

raised plaza mound. I see bare breasted and barefoot women in cotton skirts. They are communing with one another as they grind corn or use hand spindle whorls to twist agave fiber into yarn. Some are spinning and weaving the cotton they farm in nearby irrigated fields. Their naked children are playing together on the platform with cornhusk dolls and rubber balls. I imagine the people preparing for a big festival marking the Major Lunar Standstill, the Indolent Moon. The people on the plaza of my imagination are waiting for a prophecy from the priests who are observing the moonbeam that enters the hole in the upper room of the Grand Palace.

I stare at the white bird droppings on the cracked caliche walls of the Grand House. In the long and variegated fissures, I begin to see faces, tall figures, and glyphs, as if I'm on an LSD trip which is something I've never done before but can imagine what it's like. Really, I don't need to trip on acid to see figures dancing on the walls. It's something I've done all my life. Over the years I've learned that I possess two traits—synesthesia and pareidolia that possibly explain why I'm a much better artist than a courtroom PI attorney or a law school student. In fact, these traits are probably why I excelled on the image visualization part of the third LSAT test that I took, the one that got me into Mensa.

Synesthesia means that my senses sometimes crossover and I smell words, see nouns in shapes and colors, and even taste certain concepts. Actually, I taste a flavor for my marriage and it's bitter and acrid. I see the week days as round, gray, red, and pink. Pareidolia means I see shapes, images, and patterns in clouds, on a dirty windshield, in rock formations, in trees, and on this caliche wall of the Grand House. Even the shadows have faces in my artistic mind. As a child in Oregon, I sometimes lay on my bed, stared up at the spackled popcorn ceiling, and found cartoon characters, animals, and lots of faces. Now I'm seeing figures on the caliche walls while hearing their words and tasting their sweet and tangy dances.

I wonder if the ancients who created the beautiful rock art and pottery totems that I paint on my coffee tables also saw the world as I do. With synesthesia and pareidolia. Maybe being an artist is an ancient trait, unlike being a courtroom PI lawyer.

Except, I doubt the ancients had terms for these traits. Instead, I imagine they thought the spirits were working and they came up with notions like shapeshifting. But I'm not so sure I deny that the spirits are working. That shapeshifting exists. After all, I have experienced firsthand the powers of John's deer antler totem. My sexual experiences with him aren't just fantasies in my head. They are real. I feel John. Taste and smell him. Hear his mellifluous chanting voice.

I believe in these powers beyond the mere terms we modern people have coined to define our human traits. That's how I'm connected to the ancients. I'm with them. I believe in the powers of animal totems, of spirits, and maybe even of divine forces that are clearly beyond my imagination. Perhaps this is why I fell in love with the artwork the ancient SW cultures left behind.

I touch the totem in my tweed pocket. Perhaps its powers have brought me to this conclusion and now its leading me somewhere. Maybe to a better understanding of the world I live in both past and present. Through the totem, I feel the ancients reaching me, speaking to me, showing me their world, just as John Eldron had during our few days together and during our sexual encounters.

Feeling pressed for time and expecting that at any moment Mr. Ranger will appear and announce that the park is closing, I wander around the Grand House as quickly as I can. There are many small entryways or tunnel like doors leading into various adjoining rectangular rooms. How small were these Hohokam people? I wonder because the doors are no more than maybe

four feet high. Did they make doors smaller than normal because of the heat and dry atmosphere?

At one of the especially cramped doors, I stoop low and enter a short tunnel archway leading to a room in the Grand House. I take five steps on the gravelly ground, closely watching each step of my heeled feet so I don't step on a stone and twist my ankle. But when I think I've gone through the tunnel, I abruptly raise my head and my crown bumps the stone-like top of the passage.

I reel a few steps beyond the door, into the small chamber, and stand erect too quickly. I feel blood at the crown of my head and blood rushing from my face. I look at the caliche walls all around me and the figures and patterns begin dancing outside of the walls. They are making me dizzy. I drop onto the gravely ground and begin dreaming that the deer spirit of my totem comes to life.

Chapter 14: Mogollon Settlement in the Mimbres Valley

600 Years Earlier

Indolent Moon

We reach the Mimbres Valley where a few settlements remain. Some belong to the Mogollon people, some to Puebloans, and some communities have a mingling of both peoples. Along the Mimbres River we stop at a fairly large Mogollon settlement. In two separate complexes, the inhabitants have built their adobe and wood houses one upon the other in three levels with the rooves of the lower houses functioning as yards for the houses on top.

Wounded Black Bear leads me straight to the larger complex that lies where Old Sun enters the darkness of Tlaloc beyond the main plaza. Inside the great room of this complex cluster of houses, the settlement's chief sits on a puma pelt before a central hearth. He is a fat man that Wounded Black Bear calls Grasshopper Lizard. Around the room are many niches dug into the walls containing all sizes of cured human skulls that are flickering from the flames of the hearth as if the people of bone are alive and observing what's taking place.

The settlement chief wears a woven tunic with an abundance of shells, feathers, and beads and a yucca belt with obsidian blades and human bone hands strung together and painted white. His long oily hair hangs in strings and he holds a human femur bone and drinks from a human skull lined with coper. Beside him sit three young warriors, his attendants. Five women in the room wear woven skirts and turquoise jewelry. Each has long black oiled hair plaited with shells and feathers.

With his hand grasping my arm, Wounded Black Bear stands across the hearth from the fat chief. I listen to the two men argue but don't understand everything they're saying until Wounded Black Bear tightens his grip on my arm and offers me to Grasshopper Lizard. He tells the fat chief that I am a boy from a Hohokam village.

Demon spirits blemish Wounded Black Bear my thoughts shout. I haven't even bedded with him and he betrays me by breaking his promise. I mistakenly believed he would help me

travel to a good place in return for a favorable prophecy. At the same time, I suddenly realize that this fat Mogollon warmonger is drinking human blood in his copper lined skull. I can smell it on his breath.

In my mind I'm predicting what Wounded Black Bear intends to do. He will entice fat lizard to drink tainted agave liquor until he's oblivious to my true nature. By the time Grasshopper Lizard understands that I am a woman and not a boy, Wounded Black Bear and his men will be long gone for good and with all the treasure they can grab and carry away. Wounded Black Bear knows that Grasshopper Lizard treasures children, especially boys, and I now notice that most of the skulls around the room belong to children of bone.

The fat chief slowly rises with the aid of his accompanying men who turn out to be his two sons and son-in-law called Dragonfly. The chief walks over to me at the central hearth. The room is warm and sultry and my brow is sweating as the hideous fat man gazes up and down me to examine my age and look for possible flaws. He touches my chest and feels my groin. "You are not a boy," he exclaims with fury, backing away from me. "This is woman. You are trying to deceive me Wounded Black Bear!"

The Puebloan headman looks stunned. He hadn't planned on the settlement chief examining me. He mistakenly thought the man wouldn't even get up because of his girth.

"Accept my apologies, Grasshopper Lizard," Wounded Black Bear implores. "But she is a high prophet and princess of the Hohokam of the Grand Palace City. She is daughter of Shivering Bear, the great Hohokam war chief. Her value is enormous. She was betrothed to the Sun Lord of Paquime."

Grasshopper Lizard looks at me and exclaims, "I have brides from many nations who produce my collection of children. One bride is my eldest daughter married to Dragonfly. "Ten

of my children are still alive and live in other rooms in my house. I do not need a Hohokam bride. But I will take her as a producer of my offspring, if she foretells me a good fortune."

The fat man's words surprise me and I quickly think out a plan. Being known as a healer and prophet gives me leverage and power. Most men can't resist sexual favors, but no person can resist knowing their fate. The intention of the Creator. If I were a common woman, I'd be doomed to become a trophy head.

"I can offer you the best of all prophecies," I suggest, speaking for the first time. "How to unravel the passage of your life."

The Mogollon lord peers in my eyes with dark beady pupils filled with evil notions. "I like that," he says. "I wish to know more details. How many people will I capture and enslave. How much bounty and wealth will I accumulate? And will I live more than one thousand solar cycles?"

"Yes," I tell him smelling his rancid breath as he exhales both human blood and cooked human flesh. I smell disease, puss, and infection. "I can make a prophesy of all that you ask for if you treat me with respect."

"Of course," he says and laughs an ugly roar that shakes the webs in the niches and the flickering skulls of children of bone. "Now let me show you something marvelous, Hohokam prophet."

While bracing himself on the arm of his son-in-law, Grasshopper Lizard takes my hand and leads me to an adjoining room by the torchlight that Dragonfly carries. "This room contains my prized treasures," the fat man says. Lining the walls of the room are pots filled with jade, turquoise, and obsidian stones marked with totems and baskets of human bones, scalps and skulls, all cured and cleaned.

Grasshopper Lizard stands with me in the center of the room and points to his collection of local Mimbres pottery produced in the valley generations before. The bowls and plates lean against the north and west walls with some sitting niches. Most are black drawings on white slip.

"When I die," the Mogollon chief declares as he rubs his trophy hand belt over his enormous girth. "I will have a grand burial with all my wives and children at my feet along with this ancient pottery collection."

In the torchlight I scrutinize the stunning workmanship of the pottery. I have never seen the likes of it before. Each vessel tells a story about hunters and thunderbolts. Childbirth. Bird and lizard people from far south. The Young Sun and the hero moon that eclipses the rabbit. In mazes, the hero twins are defeating the demon lords of the watery underworld and killing Scarlet Macaw who boasts that he is the moon and sun in the present world.

My heart rapidly beats at the sight of such powerful totems. I want to touch each one and absorb its spirit and powers. "The totems of bats, rabbits, and lizards bring power to my life," I sing aloud hoping my captor Grasshopper Lizard will find appeasement in my song. But the sight of all his treasures absorbs the fat chief's mind. He does not even hear me. He listens to no one.

I continue looking closely at the totem plates and in a far niche I spot Pregnant Deer, the totem name of my dream-vision during my desert wanderings. The name the old crone and my father had forced me to reject for the name Deer Spirt. But in my heart and mind spirits, I have always believed that my totem name is Pregnant Deer. Now that I'm away from my father's community, no one can stop me from using my true name and I covet this beautiful Mimbres totem plate. I want it. It's meant to be mine for my own burial grave. But I cannot imagine how that might come to pass unless I please the fat chief so greatly that he gives it to me as a gift. Or I somehow steal it and escape this Mogollon settlement.

No, I decide, I can never give this fat lord a true prophecy. He wants to know only what is good for him. Or he will kill me, that much is certain. I keep my desire for the totem plate in my mind and intend to abide to this fat chief's wishes and keep silent unless I think of words that will flatter his rancid ego.

When we return to the great room, Grasshopper Lizard invites Wounded Black Bear and his band of Puebloan thieves to feast for the night. He orders his sons and wives to begin preparations in the central plaza. Meanwhile, with the help of Dragonfly, the fat chief takes me to a room in his complex that has wolf pelts on the floor and human skulls around the wall border and dangling from the ceiling. They are all the cured and bejeweled skulls of children and the sight of them makes me tremble. They unnerve my spirit because I know they were all treated badly and their tormented spirits are lingering in this room, in this settlement.

I cannot yet sing to them and pacify their unrest because Grasshopper Lizard remains in the room. With the help of his son-in-law, he tries to strip me of my deer skin shirt and britches. I resist because the man repulses my spirit. He is offensive in every manner. He smells of disease and his spirit isn't one I would mingle with mine. I don't want his children and if he is my only option, I want no children at all. I'm afraid that if I do become pregnant in this settlement, the fat lord will kill and feast on my child and probably on me.

At first Grasshopper Lizard hits me with the femur bone he carries as Dragonfly holds him up by the elbow. He seems prepared to bash-in my head but he stops when I remind him that I am a great Hohokam prophet who can give him boons of good fortune from the Creator himself. From all the spirits of Earth and sky.

For a moment, the fat chief says nothing as he stands with his bone weapon held up in the air. Then he grabs me by the hair and orders Dragonfly to drag me to the fire pit on the plaza where his family and the thieving Puebloans are holding their feast.

When we arrive and the son-in-law pushes me onto the stone plaza, the thieving men are already eating roasted agave, prickly pear pads, corn, squash, and whatever meat the Mogollon tribe provides.

I sit beside a group of women at the fire pit. They are presumably the wives and daughters of the fat chief who sits across from us beside Wounded Black Bear who is gorging on a leg of rabbit. When the Puebloan leader raises his vessel of agave liquor to Grasshopper Lizard, Dragonfly stands from the wolf pelt next to his father-in-law and before the fire. He yanks an obsidian blade from his belt and reaches over and slits the throat of Wounded Black Bear.

The fat chief struggles to stand as he says to the corpse of Wounded Black Bear, "You tried to deceive me by claiming your Hohokam slave was a boy. You wanted to trick me." As he speaks, Mogollon men begin appearing from the settlement houses to kill and behead the rest of the Puebloan thieves.

Fearing my life is in danger, I stand from the group of huddling women and say to Grasshopper Lizard, "I will grant you the magic of the Hohokam spirits who can bring you vast pleasures and fortune and a long life of more than 1000 years."

Grasshopper Lizard doesn't hear me speak and the carnage and frenzy continue around me. The Mogollon men grab the Puebloan bounty that originated from my Paquime caravan and head to store it inside the adobe complex.

I sneak away amid the chaos to the treasure room that has the Mimbres pottery. Neither Grasshopper Lizard nor his sons follow me and I remain alone in the room for many hours while

contemplating the magic of all the treasures and the horror of all the skulls. As I curl up to sleep on the wolf pelts, I pick up the pregnant deer plate and hold it against my chest. I am hoping the magic of the totem will preserve my life like a fawn deep inside the womb of the pregnant deer. I fall asleep and dream that the totem's magic makes me conceive a child.

Chapter 15: Great Bear Hunts Deer Spirit

600 Years Later (May 1997)

Jessie June Ellars

I awake from a dream and fade in and out like a static radio station. My mind is completely dead, then zap, I'm feeling clear and coherent. I've just hit my head on the entryway ceiling at the Casa Grande, I remember, and fell onto the ground and into my dream about my deer antler totem.

"Are you all right, lady?" I hear the voice of a boy. I sit up and look over to the little doorway into the room. A ten-year-old Hispanic boy is peering down at me. The evening sun is angling through the west window and casting a rectangle of light on the adobe wall above the door.

Embarrassed, I clamber to my feet, brush off my hopelessly ruined tweed suit, and say, "My heel broke. I think I twisted my ankle."

“They’re closing the park now,” the boy says. I smile and follow him back through the passageway. I stop a moment at the east caliche wall of the Grand House and phone Bob to explain that I had business in Tucson and am going to be late.

“I’ll have dinner waiting,” he tells me like nothing is amiss between us or ever has been. “And a glass of chilled wine,” he adds, buttering me up, I know. But for what? Maybe he has something to spring on me. Another surprise!

I arrive home at eight PM and Bob does have a pasta dinner waiting. While we eat, he sits across the table from me happily discussing our upcoming trip to the Bahamas. I’m inclined to ask if he will stow away his paramour in the guest bungalow. But I can hardly look at Bob anymore. I know I must confront him someday soon because I’ll never be able to make love to him again. It’s impossible anymore. Even my mystical fantasies about John Eldron, if that’s what they were, don’t work. Something has broken the totem’s spell. And I’m weary of keeping up the pretense that our marriage is intact. Pretending has become intolerable like everything else. I do care, after all, and Bob disgusts me.

After dinner we watch *The Island of Dr. Moreau* on video. Bob sits on the floor at the coffee table with his laptop before him and I curl up on the sofa thinking *What is this guy made of? How can he need two women? How can he lie to his best friend of twenty years? His childhood sweetheart. It’s unbelievable*.

But the evening quickly passes and I don’t confront Bob. Dr. Moreau gives way.

Over the next week I find myself thinking less often about John Eldron and the Navajo man on death row. Instead, I’m trying to focus on what I must do and when and how to do it. I’ve delayed the inevitable too long. I must set up my future without Bob or I’ll end up a dead-

end lawyer in a crutch career when all I want to do is be an artist with the spirit of a deer marked by the Great Bear in the dipper of the Milky Way.

To begin exploring the steps I need to start taking before I file for divorce, I meet with Suzanne, my friend from law school who is now practicing family law. Suzanne was a featured personality of the "ladies' clique" which is what I called a group of perhaps twenty women law students in their thirties and forties who got together for "bee sessions" at the Coffee Plantation near the law school. I tended to keep to myself during law school. For this reason, some of the ladies didn't seem to like me. I thought they were snobs and maybe some of them thought I was a snob because I avoided their little get togethers. But I always thought Suzanne was friendly and astute.

When I tell her about my situation with Bob, his betrayal and my financial dependence on him, and the fact that I don't trust him at all, Suzanne helps me go over the reality of the divorce process and the division of property in a community property state. She advises me to learn all I can about my husband and suggests he may have assets hidden away, probably in the Bahamas where we travel every year to stay at the firm's condo. I decide to delay filing for divorce and first investigate Bob's financial dealings on my own so I can be well positioned when I take my philandering husband completely unaware. Suzanne suggests that if Bob knows what I intend to do he might make preparations against me and hide more of our assets.

A few days after Memorial Day Weekend, May 28, Bob fortuitously announces he has a business trip to San Francisco. I suspect the trip is really one he plans to take with Ms. Frank-Lymonne and I plan to call her office to verify if she is indeed absent while Bob's away on this little trip.

Although I often feel apathetic about the whole matter, I'm also relieved when Bob is away because I'm afraid he'll start noticing that I can't stand him, no matter how hard I try to carry on normally. If he has noticed, he says nothing about it. Even concerning my avoiding his sexual advances which I'm sure he's noticed and is wondering about. Maybe he doesn't really care, I tell myself. It's typical behavior, anyway, even before the crisis. Bob is generally non-confrontational with me. And often in the past, when I confronted him about matters important to me, he tended to say things like, "You always argue if I don't kiss your ass." Our arguments become circular and exhausting and over the years I've learned to avoid them like I now avoid sex. Well, these days I'm realizing why Bob doesn't like to argue, a confrontation would bring out the truth.

On the Wednesday Bob travels to San Francisco, June 4, I'm returning home from Williams and Chen when I see a forest green tow truck parked at the curb down the street from my house. Even in the dimming twilight I recognize John's unmistakable old vehicle. It's a relic like a Vietnam veteran's patched biker vest or his veteran's cap. Now I know for certain that John Eldron is tracking me in Phoenix.

I park outside the three-car garage of our two-story stucco house and cautiously look around. A creepy feeling in the atmosphere makes me shiver. For one thing, the front door is ajar which happened only once before and that was when I caught my husband cheating in my bed! I don't know what kind of surprise might be inside my house. Bob could be trying to trick me. Perhaps he somehow got word of my plans to divorce him. He does have a lot of connections in the legal community and perhaps Suzanne is one of them. I just don't know. I find it hard to trust anyone anymore and for all I know maybe one of the ladies in the "ladies' clique," one who

didn't like me during law school, found out from Suzanne and she told Bob. I'm suspicious of everyone now.

As I enter the house I grow increasingly concerned. Even if John Eldron is inside, how can I trust him? I spoke to him for only a few days. But then again, he did rescue me and his sister did nurse me back to health. My gut tells me I have nothing to fear while my heart tells me that I am his prey.

"John," I call as I walk through the living and dining rooms. No one answers. I hear the humming wall clock and the whooshing ceiling fan that we always leave on. The house never seemed so empty. And what if it's not John? I ask myself as I quietly step toward the kitchen. What if a robber has broken into my home?

I cautiously enter the kitchen and see him sitting at the solid oak table in the breakfast nook surrounded by bay windows overlooking the sloped desert hillside. Over his bare chest he's wearing his leather vest with patches. From behind dark glasses, he's staring at me like the bear skull on his right arm. As I walk past the Jenn-Air, the eating bar, and the central island, he leans back in his chair, not changing his expression and not saying a word.

The light from outside surrounds him like the aura of an apparition. It engulfs me and my spirit seems to spread from my body and fill the room as I near him. Then he takes off his dark glasses and stands tall before me. With one hand I feel the totem in my pocket, with the other I brush my fingers along the diagonal scars on his chest. He lifts me from the floor and together we fall on the tabletop scattered with law magazines and the WSJ. I have never wanted him as much as I want him now.

He takes me to where dark billowing clouds flash lightning as eastern storms shatter and clear the earth and give me what I need to replenish my spirit. In a dream-vision he leads me into

the whirlpool of the sky where bees swarm and the sun drinks my essence. *Bless me with a child* I hear the words ring through my mind like copper bells. I feel the Creator breathing his sky spirit into me.

We quietly lie together on the caliche earth. The fragrance of sage and creosote surrounds us. I inhale his scent. He smells of the fertile earth that grows corn, beans, and squash. He tastes of wild bee honey, of pollen, of deer antler powder, of the mammary glands of a great bear. We gaze at each other. I see myself in his dark eyes, my face, my smile, my own eyes. His eyes hold me in a trance. I want to go nowhere. Become nothing. I only want to be with him, the man who possesses my fragile spirit, holds up my life, and makes that life a remarkable place to be.

Then our lips touch and I taste his flesh as if I'm consuming him while he's consuming me.

He says nothing to me and I say nothing to him. Words are too small a matter for us to share. We hold each other in our mind-spirits and I'm not sure if I'm having another vision. It's like I've hit my head so hard that I've become unconscious and am living in a dream world.

I smile. He smiles back. And then he begins chanting in a soft whisper and I know he's singing to the Great Bear in the Milky Way dipper because he's now reassuring me that he, and he alone, can remedy my tattered psyche and spirit.

His words begin to blend together until it sounds like he's humming. Like the buzzing of bees, like the fluttering of hummingbirds, like the calling of a Gambel's quail from his perch on a creosote. *Pshaw*. He's calling to his mate, to his brood, his family. To me.

I close my eyes and picture the desert around me as his voice lulls me to sleep in his embrace.

In a moment, maybe less, I wake and find myself upstairs in our master bedroom suite. I'm not alone in our king bed that is ruffled up. I see him, my husband, and I'm shocked and don't know what to say. I thought the shapeshifting had ended and that it had really been John that I encountered at our breakfast nook table. I'm confused and greatly disappointed. Worried now. Even disgusted. Have I just made love to the man I detest when it had been such powerful spiritual love. I'm naked and worried that I've misplaced the totem but then I see it beside me on the nightstand table.

"I thought you were going to the Bay Area," I say to my husband. He's propping his head up by his elbow and looking at me. I can think of nothing else to say.

"I wanted to surprise you, Jessie Bressie," he says. "I wanted to tell you everything is all right. I'm here for you. Just like your man from Sacaton was in the desert. But don't worry. He won't be bothering you anymore. Miss Lady."

I hear his words but deep in my mind and heart-spirit I somehow know that our story is far from over. The story of me and Bob Ellars is not the story of Great Bear and Deer Spirit.

Chapter 16: Escape from Grasshopper Lizard

600 years earlier

Indolent Moon

When the dim light of Young Sun enters the ceiling hole of the adobe room where I slept, a barefoot woman dressed in leggings under her yucca tunic and with red zigzags painted on her face enters the room with water and corn cakes. She sits beside me on the wolf pelts and offers me a ladle of water.

At first she doesn't speak a dialect I know but her kindness is clear. She then uses a more familiar language and I understand most of her words. The young woman, who is perhaps 14 northern suns, takes my hand and welcomes me as her elder sister. Her name is Juniper Berry. She is the youngest wife of Grasshopper Lizard and comes from the far away nation of Patayan which lies many days journey west of my father's nation and city.

"I fear Chief Grasshopper Lizard, my master," she softly whispers to me. "He will use you as a sorcerous to cast his devious tricks. If you don't follow his commands, he will behead you and eat your flesh to gain your powers. Your skull will be one of his treasured trophies. My master finds much pleasure in his skulls and the flesh of children. He collects women to bear him children to raise as his slaves or to eat so he can possess their youthful spirits. He is a cruel man with the heart of a melting stone. A devil spirit from the core of the sun. I hate him but I cannot live without his protection. I have no place to go. I am with fetus and I fear what he will do to my child after its birth. He lives by the whim of his evil handedness. I do not care for my fat husband. If you kill him, I will be overjoyed. He is cruel to me much of the time and beds me with harshness. He makes threats that if I don't give him a boy he will take away my life's powers."

"I will call you Little Sister," I say to Juniper Berry as I hold her in my arms. "And I will teach you my songs and methods of healing. I too know the threats of a man of bad spirit."

“You mean WOUNDED BLACK BEAR, the warmonger who brought you to our village?”

“OH NO. I DIDN’T REALLY FEAR HIM. I OUTSMARTED HIM BY USING HIS OWN WEAKNESSES. HIS LUST AND DESIRE TO KNOW HIS FATE.”

“HOW DID YOU COME TO BE IN HIS CARAVAN OF THIEVING PUEBLANS? YOU, A HOHOKAM PRINCESS AND PROHPET:”

I TELL MY NEW LITTLE SISTER AND FRIEND MY STORY, INCLUDING MY CURSE AND INSTINCT TO BECOME MY TOTEM NAME, PREGNANT DEER. THEN I reveal to her my third vision in which I saw Lord Eagle Heart of Paquime show me the stone effigy of his name from a cliff where he pushes me to my death. “I HAD NO OTHER MEANS OF ESCAPE BUT WITH WOUNDED BLACK BEAR AND HIS CARAVAN OF THIEVING PUEBLANS,” I ADD.

“ELDER SISTER,” JUNIPER SAYS AND TIGHTENS HER HUG IN MY ARMS. “My ancestors also made desert pictures for sky spirits to see. from the varnished desert rocks of Patayan. THEY MADE STONE effigies of men, beasts, and patterns of the Earth. BUT ONLY SKY SPIRITS CAN TRULY SEE THESE REMARKABLE STONE DRAWINGS. WE HAVE NO GREAT CLIFFS TO CLIMB TO SEE THEM.”

“HOW DID YOU travel such a great distance from YOUR nation to this Mogollon settlement and end up enslaved to Grasshopper Lizard?”

“I was visiting one of the sky spirit shrines with my sisters QUAIL PINE AND RABBIT FLOWER. WE WERE PAYING respect to Great Hummingbird who looks down from the sky. A BAND OF MEN from south of Paquime came along and took us captive. They were slave

traders of children and women and they forced us to travel across the world. My younger sisters died along the way."

"I'M SAD for your sorrows," I tell Juniper Berry. "For the life evil men forced upon you."

"AND YOU, ELDER SISTER INDOLENT MOON. The traders sold me to a band of Mogollon thieves who brought me to this settlement. That was two solar cycles ago. I am fortunate that Grasshopper Lizard took me as his bride. He said he had never had a woman from Patayan and he wanted children from me."

For two lunar cycles to follow, I stay in the Mogollon settlement of Grasshopper Lizard. I make pottery and baskets with his wives and the daughters he keeps as tokens of trade or to bed with to bear him more children. I tell the women about my settlement's traditions and the wives teach me their ways.

At times I feel as I did among my sisters of the Three Sisters Society except these women are slaves to a cruel man and they behave differently when they share stories in our common dialect. They do not share personal matters like I did with my society sisters and they rarely make jokes, poke fun at one another, and laugh. They like to work at their tasks and they rarely sing. They have no religion or healing methods to speak about. Or if they do it is a taboo subject in their family band. All that aside, they are sweet quiet women without much deepness of thought. Tragedy has embraced each one of them because a bitter man is their slave-master on Earth.

Because I trust and love Juniper Berry with my life and heart spirits, I ask her to help me escape from the settlement, to somehow drug the fat chief when he takes her alone in his bed.

But Juniper Berry is the least favorite wife of the fat warmonger because she hasn't yet produced him a child. I doubt my friend can sway her master to take her to bed on her whim. And Juniper Berry isn't close or friendly with the master's favorite wife Moon Whisper. There is no love there. Not even any trust.

The youngest wife of Grasshopper Lizard suggests I wait until travelers on the trade route stop at the settlement. "Then you can sneak away with them after stealing treasures from Grasshopper Lizard. Your fate is better in the hands of strangers than under this evil house."

Nearly every evening the fat chief gathers his wives, daughters, two sons, and son-in-law on the grand plaza. In the communal roasting pit, the men cook the meat from the day's hunt. When it rains or the winds blow too strongly, we meet in the grand room to share a communal meal that the wives prepare.

Late into the nights, Grasshopper Lizard often comes to the private room he provides me and demands I tell him his fate and the location of treasures on the great caravan roads. For over a lunar cycle, I am able to avoid his lustful cravings by claiming to have my bleeding for two weeks and then saying that if I bed with a man it will taint any prophecy I make. "It would cause the night sky to incorrectly align," I suggest and give myself time to plot my escape but I know the fat demon won't tolerate many more excuses from me.

All the while Juniper Berry warns me that her master believes there's as much magic and power in a skull as in a live being. "He would just as soon kill you for your bones," she warns me, "than await your prophecies or take you to bed."

At the second thirteenth moon after my arrival in the settlement, I have a dream that an owl in the lavender sky before Young Sun appears on an ironwood branch as I am walking by.

The owl suddenly takes flight and swoops ten feet before me three times. He warns that I must quickly leave the Mogollon settlement if I wish to spare my life.

That very day a small band of reverent pilgrims from Paquime pass through our Mimbres pueblo. They are on their way to Chaco Canyon to witness an event of the sky spirits known throughout the world. Among them are three men, three women, and three children—a family unit of brothers and their wives. The men are well armed with flint knives and the women also bear arms with the bundle baskets on their backs. They are weary travelers dressed in tattered buckskin leggings and yucca tunics. They do not wear adornments or have tattoos.

With the help of Dragonfly, Grasshopper Lizard walks to his settlement's edge to welcome the traveling pilgrims, invite them to share the night's feast and offer them a place to have a night's rest. That evening, as the fat chief's wives and sons prepare a meal on the main plaza, the pilgrims speak about the upcoming event in Chaco Canyon.

"On a towering pillar of Earth," the headman among them says as Everyone listens intently and eats ravenously. "The Sun tells us he is our Creator. He sends us great power when he marks the spiral on the stone tower with His sun dagger. We hope to gain magic power, if we survive. No one is ever certain if he will live or die on such a journey as ours across the world."

I am sitting beside the fat chief as his ornament, his exotic Hohokam prophet. It is a fact that helps me stay alive. As I eat roasted quail and rabbit, I watch my friend Juniper Berry serve the pilgrims and then dance for them at the command of her fat master. I see that my dear little sister bears a worried face. It makes me wonder if Grasshopper Lizard has carnage on his mind. I can never forget what I witnessed and endured when this warmonger demon slaughtered Wounded Black Bear and his men and made their heads into trophy skulls. Grasshopper Lizard is probably lusting for the trophy skulls and femurs of these religious Paquime pilgrims. He might

think such items will bring him power and magic and I know he craves their children, the underworld devil that he is.

After the feast and the sharing of stories, the pilgrims bed down under the stars on the plaza. They sleep on top of straw beside the smoldering embers of the night's fire. Juniper and I sit alone in my room, something she likes doing when the fat chief doesn't notice anything but his gut. Juniper and I are sisters in spirit like sisters of the holy society and I want to protect her and the child in her belly. She is a pregnant deer to me and I love her like the owl of night. Together we whisper our fears for the pilgrims who are good people because they worship the Creator and his creation. And we equally fear for my life. I tell Juniper about my dream-vision of the owl and we conclude that I must escape the compound that very night along with the family band of pilgrims.

"And you will come with me," I say to Juniper holding her hands.

"I cannot," she tells me. "I am too afraid to leave my master. He is mean to me, beats me, and keeps me as a slave, but he keeps me alive and I cannot travel far in my condition."

Together we devise a plan. We do not want to kill the fat chief but we want to create evidence that suggests the traveling pilgrims drugged him and looted his treasures and then kidnapped me by force. I don't want Grasshopper Lizard to conclude that Juniper had anything to do with the robbery and my escape.

Before the evil lord carries out his plan to kill all the pilgrims and cause mayhem, Juniper Berry mixes powder from a desert flower in her husband's nightly cacao drink and the drinks of his sons and Dragonfly and favorite wife Moon Whisper. By the latest darkness of night and earliest light of morning, Grasshopper Lizard, Moon Whisper, and the sons are asleep like the dead and will remain so for many hours. Meanwhile, the pilgrims and I sort through the fat

chief's treasures. All nine of the pilgrims grab what they can carry to trade with other travelers along the route and to offer to the priests at Chaco Canyon.

Juniper Berry provides me with a bundle basket to carry on my back during my journey north. We are standing in the treasure room with the pilgrims. "Is there anything you want, elder sister?" she asks me. "From me to you. I already give you my heart but let me give you a gift of treasure."

We hug and I say, "I want the Mimbres plate Pregnant Deer. I want it for my burial. I don't know how far away that will be. And I pray the totem will bring me the power to create a new life in my womb before I travel on to the brilliant road painted across the night sky of darkness."

At the rising of Young Son and long before the warmonger and his kin are awake, the band of pilgrims and I sneak away from the Mogollon settlement in the Mimbres Valley. In my bundle I am carrying a gourd of water, dried meat and my precious pregnant deer totem plate, a gift from little sister Juniper Berry.

Chapter 17: Something's Amiss

600 Years Later (June, July 1997)

Jessie June Ellars

A few weeks after Memorial Day on Saturday June 14, I'm feeling inspired to resume my tabletop artwork. Maybe the deer antler totem influences me. Or the wonderful episodes I was

having when Bob shapeshifted into John Eldron during the times we were supposedly having sex. Maybe Bob believed I was pleasing him sexually, something he had always complained about. He had even called me “frigid” at times. That was before I returned home from Portland. Before I caught him in bed with his hussy.

To help me create a new tabletop design, I decide to drive to the top of South Mountain and take digital pictures of the petroglyphs along the way. I’ve gone horseback riding on the mountain before, hiked there a few times with Bob, twice on my own, and once with friends from the Environmental Law Society in law school.

South Mountain Park and Reserve is one of the largest urban parks in the world and it’s practically in our backyard. Although to reach the main entry point at Central Avenue, I must drive several miles through the urban sprawl of new subdivisions in the foothills to Baseline Road.

The park is full of ancient Hohokam petroglyphs off the main road up to Dobbins Viewpoint on top of the mountain. I believe many such petroglyphs remain hidden and undiscovered, rather like the Lost Dutchman’s Mine on the Superstitions at the east end of the Phoenix metropolis sprawl.

To be polite, I invite Bob to come along on my drive up the mountain. Or maybe I want to keep tabs on him. I don’t trust him and the longer I postpone filing for divorce the more suspicious of him I become. I’ve got a sneaking suspicion he’s up to no good. That he knows what I’m intending to do and he wants to best me before I best him.

On Saturdays, Bob usually heads to Goldstein’s in the afternoon which gives him a modicum of time off. As expected, he declines from going with me because he has too much work to do.

“So do I,” I argue because I feel like Bob implies that maybe my taking up my new art project is a bit laggard compared to his important work. “My case load is just as taxing as yours! Besides, *All work and no play makes Jack a bad boy!”*

“Sure Jess. Whatever you say,” Bob offers another remark to discount me, one he’s used plenty of times before. But he takes the time to gas up my Beemer, as he customarily does.

Everything seems fine as I drive to the north entrance in the early morning sunshine. On the way up the mountain, I stop here and there to take pictures of the saguaros, flowering prickly pears, birds, lizards, and the ancient Hohokam petroglyphs. From what I learned in my anthropology classes at ASU, archaic cultures existed in the SW deserts since the end of the last ice age 11,700 years ago.

Except for the petroglyphs, these ancient people left no written records and archaeologists have pieced together their cultures by examining the bones, relics, and the ruins they left behind. The three main ancient cultures of Arizona are the Ancestral Puebloans, formerly called the Anasazi, the Mogollon, and the Hohokam. Each of these cultures made pottery depicting animals and geometric designs of the sun, rivers, stars, and dust devils—the types of designs I use on my tabletop paintings. Most likely, the ancients cast the spiritual auras of the animals and plants and the geological and astronomical phenomena into their drawings. Like Special’s old grandmothers cast their ancestral legends and spirits into the baskets they wove. I believe John Eldron does the same thing when he makes his deer antler totems. Anyway, I know the totem he gave me possess spiritual powers beyond anything I’ve ever experienced or even imagined.

When I pull into the parking lot at Dobbins Lookout only a few people are around. I sit on the bench inside the stone shelter that the city built during the Great Depression when they

were establishing the park. I scan the spectacular view of the massive valley, the skyscrapers of downtown Phoenix, Camelback and North Mountains, Sky Harbor, Papago Park, and Piestewa Peak.

I sip on an energy drink and remember how thirsty I had been when John Eldron rescued me from the desert heat. When he saved my life. The thought of him makes me quiver and I anticipate the totem's powers in my bed tonight, if Bob comes home early enough. Then I wonder if the totem will bring him forth again without my loser husband shapeshifting. Like it did when I encountered him at our breakfast nook table.

I touch the totem in my pocket and wish for that to happen. Then I return to my new ruby red Beemer and set off on my drive back down the mountain eager to upload my pictures on my PC and get started on my next tabletop art project.

As soon as I start driving down the slope, my car begins to accelerate. I try to slow down but my brakes don't seem to be working. The pedal is only pumping air. I desperately keep engaging the brake pedal while trying to steer the car and stay on the winding road edged by steep ravines of creosote, brittlebush, prickly pear, and a few saguaros. I swerve and skid like I'm driving on the black ice of Portland or Boston.

I yank on the parking brakes only to find they are useless, too. My stomach churns with fear as a few cars pass me on their way up to Dobbins Lookout. Nobody seems to realize my hazardous situation including the kids in the back seats. They don't seem to notice the panic on my face.

I whirl around a lone bicyclist and blast my horn as a warning that I can't slow down or control my car. He flips me off because I nearly hit him and there is very little berm on the narrow road. Foolish man. I honk again and continue precariously careening downhill while

pumping my breaks to no avail. I begin blasting my horn continuously as a cry for help. But no one is around, no passing cars, no foolish bicyclist or even a morning jogger.

Somehow, as if God is taking the wheel, I manage to gain enough control to swing into a pull-off lookout point. The Beemer slams into a boulder at the edge of a precipitous hill and my head jolts forward onto the steering wheel. The horn begins blaring away and I black out.

Maybe ten minutes pass by before I wake up. The horn has stopped blasting. I catch my breath and think *All is well with my soul*. Then I noticed that the car is listing on my side and soon realize that the tire is flat. I try to call Bob and then AAA but my phone is dead and I can't charge it because the car won't start. There probably isn't any reception anyway. I don't know where I've ended up on the mountain, probably halfway down. And no one else is in the pull off or driving by on the road to help me. It's probably still too early for there to be a lot of visitors on the mountain preserve.

My head is throbbing. I touch my forehead and feel a bump and see blood on my fingers. I look in the rearview mirror and see an abrasion, a huge purple bleeding welt. Panic surges inside me. Mostly, I'm afraid I have a concussion and if I don't get help, I'll pass out again and die. I touch my deer antler totem to be sure it's still with me and ask that its powers see me safely out of this situation.

I take another deep breath and then hear a distant revving sound. Someone is approaching on the road on their way down from Dobbins Lookout. It sounds vaguely familiar. A motorcycle, I'm certain.

As the roar and revving grow louder, I lean back on my seat with my head on the headrest, unable to move. My head is pounding like I'm suffering from heatstroke.

I glance into the rearview mirror and see the large man from Sacaton approaching my stranded car on his Harley Bobcat. He's wearing his patchwork vest, dark sunglasses, and a red scarf headband but no helmet. His massive tattooed arms are extended to his handlebars and his long black hair hangs in two braids.

He stops beside my window. I still cannot move, not even blink, and now my breathing is heavy and shallow. He parks his bike, dismounts, and tries to open my door but it's locked. I raise my hand from my lap and see his face through the window. His teardrop tattoo appears to me even through his dark shades.

I unlock the door. He doesn't say a word and neither do I as he unbuckles my seatbelt. His large rough hand takes mine and he eases me from the car and helps me onto the back of his Bobcat. He mounts the seat before me and I firmly grasp his waist. I press my forehead upon the back of his vest and can taste the scent of marijuana. He revs up his Harley and drives away from my red Beemer with its driver's door left open.

As he takes me down the mountain road it feels like we're riding one of John's wild mustangs. The cooling wind tangles my hair and soothes me. No car passes us by as if we have the mountain to ourselves. Maybe we do.

John turns onto a trailhead road where people on bicycles and horses like to ride. I don't know where he is taking me and don't care. I'm just happy to be with him, to have him rescue me once again. My head has stopped throbbing as if he has applied soothing aloe to my frontal lobe, the part of my brain that brings about logic and forethought. Who needs logic when I have the mystical and spiritual powers of a deer antler eagle totem? When the man from Sacaton is rescuing me and taking me into monumental bliss once again?

John maneuvers the Bobcat over rocks and crevices and around boulders, patches of mesquites, paloverdes, brittlebush shrubs, and up a ravine with red barrel cacti. He stops at an enclave of large orange-red boulders covered with vivid Hohokam petroglyphs that I have never seen before on any of my previous hikes on South Mountain.

John parks the Bobcat and kicks out the kickstand with his large black square toed boots with buckles, straps, and rivets. He helps me climb off. Then he grabs a Hopi blanket from his side pack and leads me up the red barrel ravine to the most prominent boulder of petroglyphs. On a rough patch of ground beneath the boulders, he shakes out the blanket and helps me recline on the ground. John lights a joint and we share it as he sits behind me, holding me in his arms, nearly on his lap. Silently, we both examine the beautiful etchings ancient people made more than a thousand years before.

One boulder displays spirals and circles that are probably aligned with the solstice and equinox. On another rock, the desert flute player floats above trees while playing music to four adult deer and two fawns crossing a barranca.

"I wonder how these ancient people were so inspired to create such beautiful pictures," I say feeling relaxed and lost in John's protective arms.

He kisses the crown of my head and says in in a soft raspy voice that is almost a whisper, "The boulder spirits inspired these drawings and now they guide our interpretations."

"How do you interpret these glyphs, John Eldron?" I exhale smoke from the joint we share.

"I see a deer family in the rock. They are related through the first mother who gave birth to them all. They stay together and taste and smell the Wind Spirits."

“Wind spirit? Like the dust devil?” I lean back against his chest and relax like I’ve never done before. Like I’ve just experienced the extasy of love, an orgasm, and now the world comes together for me. All is well with my soul.

“Yes, Wind Spirit is the servant of Bitter Man, the first man on Earth. *Do not go down the road of Bitter Man and leave you spirit to the wind* is an ancient O’odham saying.”

“Will your wind spirit bless me with a child?” I ask and look back at John. He smiles at me. I know we will make love. Again. I have no pain or bump on my forehead anymore and I still have his totem in my pocket.

“You want a child, Red?”

“I think so. My husband has robbed me all these years. He’s a sterile man; he’s only recently told me. Maybe he’s your bitter man and the wind has taken his spirit. But yes, John Eldron. I would like to have a child. Your child.”

“Then ask the Creator to breath his sky spirit into yours.”

I lie back and we caress and make soft and sensual love. Then we lie together and I rest in his massive arms. “Tell me about your Creator, John Eldron. My parents raised me to believe God came to Earth as a man. And that he will return when the world of people wears itself out. When we destroy ourselves.”

I gaze at the boulder before me and listen to him tell me the story.

“Our Creator arose from darkness before the time of light. He created Earth, plants, animals, and the sun, moon and stars to shed light on his creation. The union of Earth and Sky gave birth to Elder Brother, Coyote, and Vulture. Earth Doctor and Elder Brother created the first people from the caliche soil. But these people overpopulated the world because they never died naturally. Earth Doctor crushed them with the sky but to save himself, he dug a hole into the

Earth. When he re-emerged, he created the second set of people. But these second people displeased Elder Brother and he sent a flood to destroy them but some second people escaped through the hole to inner Earth. When the waters subsided, Elder Brother created the third people and this angered Earth Doctor. The third people turned on their creator, Elder Brother, but he survived and caused them misery. From the hole to inner Earth, Elder Brother led an army of second people to fight a great war with the third people who were of his own creation. To save himself, Elder Brother built a maze house on South Mountain. When the third people tried to reach him in the center of his maze house, they piled up in the dark winding passageways and Elder Brother remained safe."

"Is this where you live, John Eldron?" I ask. "In a maze house on South Mountain?" I feel warm and secure in his arms, as if I'm inside his maze house safe from harm and danger. Safe from my own enemies, from Bob, from the people of the third creation.

"A maze house is where we all live, dear lady."

We caress and make love again with even more passion. I feel no pain. Only pleasure. Only happiness and hope that my life is being fulfilled by whatever is now happening to me. Fantasy or reality. A vision or a fact.

I then hear the flute player's music, copper bells, and gourd rattles. I watch the petroglyph deer family come to life as John touches my belly and we begin floating into the clouds of nothingness.

When I wake up, I am in my own bed in my home on Windemere Avenue. My bedside clock calendar tells me it's 10 AM, Sunday June 15. A day has slipped by and someone brought me home. "John?" I yell and see the totem on my nightstand where I always place it at night

before I go to sleep. But I don't remember coming home or anything else except for the accident and John Eldron rescuing me and taking me on his Bobcat to the deer family petroglyph. I remember floating in air and then nothing more. "John?" I call again and my bedroom door bursts open.

It's Bob. My husband. Did he bring me home?

"How are you feeling boo boo bear?" he asks, as if this is all casual and normal. As if nothing is amiss. It's just another Sunday morning and I've slept in a little late.

But everything is amiss. I don't know how I got home. Why my breaks had failed. Bob had gassed up the car for me. Does he have some kind of malicious intent going on? I'm confused but don't want to say anything to my husband. Not now. Maybe not ever. I grab my deer antler totem and decide to ask, "Did you pick up my car?"

"Where is it?" he asks standing at my bedside as if he knows nothing. Does he even know how I got into bed. Is he being sinister and playing head games with me?

"It's on South Mountain, as if you don't know. What happened to the breaks? I thought you kept my car serviced. What did you do when you gassed up?"

"Gassed up. Like I always do. What do you think, Miss lady?" Now he's becoming defensive as he hovers over me like a vulture.

"Well," I say. "Go pick up my car or call AAA."

"Why'd you leave it there" he asks as if he's clueless. "What happened? Jessie."

I turn my head, squeeze the totem in my fist, and think about what I want to say. There's no way I'll ever tell my husband what I'm really experiencing. And I myself am not sure if John really rescued me or if it was all in my head. But no. I'm convinced it was real. All the pleasure and the remarkable spirit words at the petroglyph boulder.

I feel my forehead. There is no bump, no pain, and I decide to make up a story to tell my husband. “I slammed into the pullout and no one was around. No phone service. So, I waited and waited and then this shady looking scraggly man pulled up next to me in some kind of an old bucket. A Chevie, perhaps. He scared me because his eyes had the look of someone up to no good. A man up to mischief. I thought maybe while I was walking around Dobbins, taking pictures, he had scouted me out and tampered with my breaks. It just didn’t seem like a coincidence that he showed up like he did.”

“Jessie!” Bob exclaims as he sits on the bed and tries to take my hand, the one with the totem in my fist. I pull away. “How did you get home?”

“Never mind if you don’t already know. Maybe I called a taxi. Someone else came along. Or maybe the shady guy brought me home.” I sit up, push Bob away, climb out of bed, and toss on my robe.

“You’re being difficult Jessie. But I’ll tell you one thing,” Bob says as he follows me out of our bedroom. “I’m buying you a Glock pistol to carry around in your car if you’re going to go on these exploration trips to remote parks. And you’re going to take lessons at Shooter’s World. No ifs ands or buts about it.”

Bob retreats to his private office across the hall as if he has just finished his closing argument at trial. He never likes me having the last word and I can tell he’s angry because of my attitude toward him and because he doesn’t know how I got home. And neither do I.

Over the next several weeks Bob takes me to Shooters World several times. He presses me to learn how to shoot the Glock he buys me. What’s his motive? I have to wonder. What was his motive for pushing me into law school and into a law career when I was happy with my

tabletop art? Sure, my artwork hasn't gotten me anywhere, financially, but it satisfies a creative need I have. And god knows Bob makes plenty of money.

It seems I've just been going along with my husband all these years and now I'm forced into shooting the Glock because of my little story to explain what I couldn't explain. Still, I wonder if Bob wants me to have a gun for his own reasons and not for my protection. I don't believe for a moment that he's looking out for my best interests. Not anymore. Not with his continual lies and betrayal.

Am I playing along in some kind of game and I don't know why? I haven't filed for divorce, yet, because I don't feel prepared to go at it on my own. I guess I need a little more time to investigate things and find out what Bob really has going on, as Suzanne suggests. Maybe I'm a coward or I'm stringing him along like he is me. I'm glued to the status quo for now, keeping my totem always with me and putting him off whenever he makes any kind sexual advances toward me. Fortunately, this rarely happens anymore.

All this makes my life feel pathetic. My only hope or desire is that John Eldron will somehow return and find me. Maybe rescue me again and steal me away from Bob for good. Maybe I could be a reservation wife and live simply, like Special does. Maybe I could even have a child after all these years of a sterile marriage before I reach the evolutionary age of no return. Menopause and all that.

On the home front, everything continues as normal, as if nothing unusual is going on, until Sunday July 27. It's another ordinary blistering hot day in Phoenix and my day off from Williams and Chen. Bob is playing golf at the Papago course with Intel execs, or at least that's what he tells me, while I'm quietly painting a coffee tabletop in my art studio using the digital pictures of the Hohokam deer and flute player glyphs from South Mountain. The pictures are

proof that I had been to the site John took me to, although there aren't any pictures of John or selfies of me, only close up pictures of the glyphs. I don't even remember taking these pictures and don't question how this happened; I just accept it as a fact that I had been there with John.

At about five, Bob returns home from the golf course. He greets me in the Arizona room where I'm watching the movie *Ghost* on video then he heads straight upstairs to soak in the spa bathtub. I say nothing to him. It's become a habit.

I hear the tub water running and pretty soon Bob starts yelling from the bathroom suite, "Boo boo bear. Come up here will you?"

"What do you want?" I yell back, feeling irritated. "I'm watching Patrick Swayze and don't want to be bothered with you."

Bob hollers again.

"Okay, I'm coming, boo boo Bob," I yell pleased with my quip. I'm hoping he isn't after a romantic night, although we haven't had a one for several weeks. You would think he'd get the message that I'm not interested in sex anymore. Not after my totem brought John to me on South Mountain instead of through shapeshifting sex with my husband. But Bob's a persistent man and he seems to always coerce me, manipulate me, push me into doing things I'm reluctant to do. He thinks this is a good thing. I don't.

In our master bathroom, Bob is soaking in the whirlpool tub like he's the king of Sheba, or is it Ceasar soaking in the baths of Bath, England? A place I've been to during my travels.

"Come to daddy," Bob says from the tub.

I stare at him a moment and ask, "What do you want? I was watching my favorite movie. Relaxing."

"Boo boo bear. I'm feeling romantic and have something special for you."

“What are you talking about?” I lean against the double sink counter. “I’m not in the mood for anything from you. I only want to return to Patrick Swayze. He’s a man I can feel romantic about. Not you!”

“Now, now, don’t be harsh.” Bob stirs in the spa water and adds more lavender salts to his bath. He’s not ready to get out. “Please, I forgot to bring up my briefcase. My gift for you is inside it. Run down to the garage and get it for me, will you? It’s on the passenger seat of my Beemer. Hurry, now. I’m afraid it might wilt and melt. It’s hot down there, you know. The garage isn’t airconditioned.”

“You forgot?” I ask. “Not you. Not my Harvard Bob. You never forget. What’s going on with you?”

“I was exhausted when I got home and wanted to soak. I had a long day on the golf course.”

“And you’re still feeling romantic? It doesn’t add up, boo boo Bob.”

“Just go, Jessie. Get my briefcase will you?”

“Well, all right,” I say. “I’m tired of standing here looking at your shriveled self.” I head from our master suite and down the spiral stairs feeling both disgusted with Bob and with myself for even humoring him. Since my casino night, Bob has given me many expensive gifts to make up for his betrayal and I never turn them down. Why should I? He owes me for my still being with him in this sham of a marriage.

As I near the laundry room off the kitchen, I swear to myself that I’m calling Suzanne first thing Monday morning and telling her to start filing the papers.

I stop at the door to our triple garage because I hear car engines running. I'm wondering why. What in the hell is Bob thinking? Can he be that tired? I've never known him to be absentminded or careless. He's always been Harvard smart, Kennedy sharp.

But I'm quite curious about this gift he has for me so I open the door to the garage and a blast of heat and exhaust accosts me. Yes. I was right. Both Bob's and my Beemers are running as well as my husband's metallic green T-Bird, his pride and joy. In fact, the Bird is loudly playing the cassette *Take me to the limit* Bob's favorite Eagles song.

What a careless asshole, I think as I hold my breath and enter the garage as the laundry room door slams behind me. For some stupid reason, my first instinct is to cut off all the engines before I even question what's going on. But first I hasten to open the garage door to clear out the air. Before I even reach it, I gasp for air and the carbon monoxide filling the garage sends my head spinning. I curse Bob as I collapse beside my car. Fortunately, I'm coherent enough to touch the totem in my pocket.

I fall asleep for I don't know how long. Maybe only an instant. Then I snap awake and hear the garage door open despite the noise of the running engines, the loud Eagle's music, and my head spinning with its own static cacophony. I feel an immediate shockwave of revitalizing air and look toward the garage door.

Silhouetted in the evening light, the large O'odham man from Sacaton stands holding up the door wearing his worker's shirt with the sleeves cut off. I see his teardrop tattoo and the tattoos on his massive arms.

"John Eldron," I mutter as he quickly enters the garage, picks me up off the concrete floor, and carries me outside into the fresh air. I gasp and inhale.

“Breathe deeply, Red,” I hear him say as he continues to carry me to his Forest Green wrecker truck. He gently places me in the passenger seat and straps me inside. Then he goes to the driver’s seat, hands me bottled water, and caresses my face with his massive rough hand. “You are safe now,” he says.

I take a drink of the warm bottled water, lean back on the seat, and dreamlessly sleep for what seems a very long while.

Chapter 18: Cloud Spirit Dancers at Chaco Canyon

July 27, 1997

Jessie June Ellars

I open my eyes and see Vega overhead in the Summer Triangle and the white Milky Way splashing across the sky like a road to heaven or at least into the unknown. Am I even alive? I wonder. Suddenly, I hear the lute music Lyra and turn to see the quarter moon rising over distant mesas. I look the other way and see the Big Dipper near the horizon with its handle pointing toward zenith. The Great Bear seems to be stepping down from the sky and approaching me where I’m lying on a blanket on the hard earth. I feel warm, almost sweaty, although the air is chilled and I’m covered with a Navajo blanket. Nearby, I see John Eldron brewing something in

a coffee pot on the burning embers of a campfire. I don't smell the aroma of coffee so I wonder what he could be brewing.

"You awake, Red?" he asks and I see him smiling at me; his face and long black braid are gleaming from the campfire's flames. He wears an Army jacket now and a red handkerchief headband.

"John?" I ask as I prop myself up with my arms outstretched behind me. I'm wearing a large denim jacket that must belong to John. "Where are we? I don't remember arriving here. In fact, I remember nothing but the Eagle's song, the exhaust, and you, John Eldron, saving my life once again. What's happened to us? To me?"

"We're on the overlook cliffs at Chaco Canyon," John says as he pours me a cup of what smells like sage and cinnamon tea, maybe with creosote. I sip it and instantly feel its warmth penetrate my body and my every corpuscle. The moon and campfire flames are lighting the skin of my hands and John's pleasant face, his broad nose and mouth, his strong dark eyes, and his teardrop tattoo.

"Chaco Canyon?" I savor another swallow of the tea. Without even asking, I know the tea is cleansing me of the horrible exhaust, of Bob, because John has given it to me. "How is it possible? We're in New Mexico? Four hundred miles from my home?"

"Yes, Red." John sits on the earth beside me. "We're just above the Pueblo Bonito ruins. I will show them to you after you finish the tea. After you recover I will take you there to watch the cloud spirits dance."

"I don't remember the long drive. Was I asleep that long? And where's your tow truck?" I ask and look around in the darkness. I see nothing but the flat ground and the sphere of stars above and the quarter moon creeping toward the Great Bear as the lyra continues to play its

music, at least in my head. “Where are we really, John?” I feel dreamy as if halfway into a vision and halfway out of reality. It must be what it’s like to trip on acid.

John doesn’t answer. Instead, he touches my face and hair and tells me to deeply breathe the pure air of the mesas and canyon.

“Chaco Canyon,” I say and set aside my tea and take his rough hand in mine. It feels good to be with him. I feel protected and safe. No one will harm me when I’m with him, Special’s elder brother.

I feel recovered and anticipate another mystical sexual experience, a spiritual reckoning without Bob shapeshifting like he did before I encountered John in our breakfast nook and before John rescued me on South Mountain and took me to the deer family petroglyphs. I’m ready for him but know he must lead the way. It’s his powers, the powers of his totem, not mine, that bring about the most marvelous sensations of my life. Of life itself.

“I’ve been here once before,” I say and take another sip of John’s tea. “About eight years ago with Environmental Law friends during law school. We walked around the ruins, through the giant kivas, and along the walls, but I was never up here on the cliffs. How did we get here? In your green tow truck?”

“Our spirits are here,” John says then begins singing in his language as he rises from where he’s sitting beside me. He returns to the campfire. I think he’s stoking the flames but then I realize he’s roasting something on a skewer. Some kind of meat.

“What’s that I smell, John?” I get up from my blankets and approach him.

“Diamondback. I caught it beside those sandstone rocks over there.” He points beyond me with a stick. I turn to look and see a scattering of boulders glimmering in the moonlight. I wonder if there are any Anasazi markings on the rock. But I don’t see any from where I stand by

the fire. My legs feel stiff and cramped, almost numb, as if I haven't walked on them for a long while. It's a peculiar feeling.

"Did you catch it with your hands?" I ask although I know that he did.

"That's how I take hold of the Diamondback's spirit," he says.

I feel for the totem in my pocket and am relieved to know it's still with me. Instead of taking it out and showing John, I ask him what's on my mind, concerning the power of the totem. "When will we be making spiritual love in the clouds of nothingness, John Eldron?"

"After you eat," he says. He removes his MSI knife at his waist, cuts a strip of the snake, and hands it to me on his knife.

"I've never eaten snake before." I hesitate to take it from him.

In the distance I hear a coyote howl probably at the rising moon although it could be a night owl.

"You need to eat it to absorb the power of the Diamondback's spirit. He will heal you and then we can dance the cloud spirit dance into nothingness."

I take hold of the white strip of flesh and bite it. It's tender but I have nothing to compare it to. It's not like fish, chicken or pork. It's not like anything I've ever tasted.

"It tastes like turtle," John says reading my thoughts as he always does. He takes a strip of the meat and eats it in one swallow. "How do you feel now, Red?"

I finish chewing the snake then look at John's face in the flickering light of the campfire. I reach up and touch his strong smooth jaw and he takes hold of my hand with a firm yet tender grip.

"Now your spirit has recovered. You are ready to dance with the cloud spirits of Chaco Canyon."

"Will we go inside the kivas or straight into the clouds like the eagle?" I ask.

John takes my hand and tells me, "Only Chaco priests and their apprentices worship the Creator inside the great kiva circles." He leads me to the edge of the mesa overlooking the Pueblo Bonito ruins. When I gaze at the valley bellow, I don't see crumbled ruins in the light of the rising quarter moon. Instead, I see an intact city with fires burning at the plazas and beside the massive kivas. People are gathered around these fires. I can hear their voices. They are singing words that sound like chants, like the calls of quails or doves or maybe of owls.

"Watch the smoke billow from the central roof hole of the large kiva," John tells me as he steps behind me and his large arms and body embrace me, hold me as I watch the activity below in the dim moonlight. His warmth, his strength, his essence fill me with spiritual desire and cleanse my body of impurities. "Wisewomen are teaching the pilgrims who come to Chaco Canyon how to sing to the Creator."

"What are they singing?" I ask.

"*We are the soil and sweat of our Creator. We respect his creation and the people who toiled before us and gave us tools for our survival. We honor the Creator when we respect our elders, our uncles, and sisters and ourselves. Upon our passing, we become cloud spirits that nourish the people now living in the world."*

"What are the holy men of Chaco Canyon doing inside the kivas?" I ask John as I hold his arms around me.

"The Chaco priests wear deerskin pants covered with symbols of clouds, lightning, and rain and they dance with dolls made of cornhusks and wood. The dolls bring forth the cloud spirits who dance with the priests while the pilgrims sing and absorb their spirit powers."

I listen to John softly chant words foreign to me. But I sense their meaning as his spiritual force takes hold of me. We rise into the sky of the Great Bear under the music of Lyra.

In scattered clouds we dance until the Great Bear leaves and the east and west horizons turn striated red orange and pink and the cliff walls ignite like the embers of John's campfire.

Dancing cloud spirits descend from the sky in the rising sunlight. They cover our heads and shoulders string ribbons of shells and beads as they sing, *we shower you with those who have passed before. The people of bone. . .*

I open my eyes and find myself slumped in the driver's seat of Bob's T-Bird. The Eagle's tape is still blasting a song over radio but someone, not me, has shut off all the car engines in the garage. It's dark but I see streetlights in the rearview mirror because the garage doors are open and so is the side window of Bob's car. The air is still and hot but clear of exhaust.

I notice Bob's briefcase in the passenger seat beside me and I look inside but see nothing but legal files. No gift. No card. No flowers or chocolates as my husband had implied. My calendar watch tells me it's 9 PM on July 27. Has a day passed me by? I ask myself. Or has little or no time passed. My head is in a dither, as if I'm suffering from a concussion, then I remember feeling overcome by the carbon monoxide from the running car engines. But before I can completely come to my senses, Bob appears at the laundry room door dressed in his black silk robe and mule slippers.

"Jessie," he yells from the door. It seems he doesn't want to soil his slippers on the garage floor. "What are you doing?" he asks but I have no energy to confront him or to show my anger for what he's done.

Because I lean back in my seat, close my eyes, and say nothing, Bob walks over to me, reaches through my window, and turns off the music. He takes hold of his briefcase, helps me from the car, and guides me upstairs to bed.

"Go to sleep, Jessie," he says as he covers me with the duvet. I say nothing and he leaves me alone. I reach into my pocket and am relieved to feel the deer antler totem. I don't know what has happened to me. How I ended up in the T-Bird. But I remember being with John Eldron at Chaco Canyon under the Summer Triangle with the Great Bear and quarter moon at the opposite horizons. I remember dancing with cloud spirits as John was singing his chants. I felt his embrace, his essence, his spirit mingling with mine, but I don't know where he went or whether he really rescued me or if Bob was up to no good and trying to do away with me. I believe my husband has probably retreated to his office to call his lover Barbara but I don't care anymore what Bob does. I just want to sleep with my totem in my fist and dream about the Great Bear under Lyra's music in Chaco Canyon and about John Eldron rescuing me from another life-threatening crisis.

Chapter 19: Discovery and Evidence

August 1997, one month before Labor Day Weekend at Lake Powell

Jessie June Ellars

Since 1988 Bob and I have gone on the Lake Powell Labor Day trips sponsored by Bob's firm Goldstein Patent Law. For five "labor free" days the firm rents three 75-foot houseboats.

Each one is larger than our Natick apartment in Massachusetts and includes a fireplace, hot tub, and grill on the top deck, six staterooms with queen beds, and state of the art TV and stereo systems. Local caterers from Page stock the houseboats with food and a vast selection of liquor. During the day, the partners and their guests jet ski to narrow coves or use the speedboats in tow to fish on the lake or return to the Marina and drive to Page or to the many attractions surrounding the lake.

I've always enjoyed these trips as an opportunity to explore the archaeological sites and think about the ancient people who inspire my tabletop artwork with their animal totems and drawings of celestial events. At Lake Powell, I easily forget any troubles and woes about law school, about my PI job, and these days, of course, about my philandering husband and lackadaisical marriage.

For me, the setting is an artist's haven. Everywhere the shapes and formations become figures and faces. The canyon cliffs rise from the lake like the ruins surrounding the Grand House at the Hohokam site in Coolidge. The sun reflects the twisted red orange and beige sandstone in the 80-degree blue water. Whenever I leave Lake Powell, I feel spiritually revived as an artist and determined to paint a few tables with the petroglyphs I encountered on the canyon walls.

I had missed last year's Labor Day trip because of my retreat to Portland and I don't want to go this year because I no longer trust Bob and suspect him of trying to harm me in some kind of way. Besides, I'm hardly in the mood to hobnob with my husband's lawyer friends and their spouses. My graciousness at being Bob's wife greatly diminished after his betrayal. "Be polite and bright," Bob's been saying lately because of my attitude when I'm with him or hosting one of his parties.

Bob, however, keeps urging me to join him on this year's trip by saying, "My partners might think something's wrong between us. And I don't want that to happen. Appearance is everything at the firm." When this argument doesn't work he suggests I invite a couple of my own friends as guests on our houseboat the Kokopelli which is something Bob's never offered me before.

In the end, I agree to go because I want to invite Juliann. I have bragged to my law school mentor and managing attorney at Williams and Chen about the Labor Day outings and showed her the pictures. She's often remarked that she'd like to go there some day. I'm happy to do something special for her but mostly, I want to discuss with her my suspicions about Bob because Juliann's a very sharp attorney.

Over coffee at the Plantation on Mill Avenue in Tempe, at an outdoor table in the plaza, I invite Juliann to Lake Powell and she quickly accepts. "You can bring along a guest as well," I add while wondering who she might ask since she's going through her third divorce. Juliann doesn't tend to share with me details about her personal life and who she's dating. We mostly stick to the legal cases and issues I'm working on. But I'm hoping this will change on the Kokopelli, at least for me. And that she'll have some good advice or suggestions concerning my situation.

"Can I bring along my new boyfriend?" Juliann asks as she sits across the table from me looking as coiffed and elegant as ever; her dark brown pageboy accentuating her sweet oval face and her petite and yellow Calvin Klein suit without a wrinkle.

"Of course," I say. "Who are you seeing these days?"

"I'm going to invite Greg Scott," she says.

“The assistant DA of Maricopa County?” I ask, intrigued by the prospect of meeting with him as well.

Juliann sips her coffee, smiles at me with pride, and says, “That’s right. We’ve gone out a few times. Hit it off. I know he’d love to go jet skiing and fishing. He’d enjoy exploring the sights. He comes from Philadelphia and I’m sure he’s never seen anything like Lake Powell.”

“He sounds perfect.” I add a little brown sugar to my dark roast. “Who knows, maybe I’ll have a few legal questions for him. About Bob. To be honest, Julian, I hesitated to go on this trip until Bob suggested I bring along a friend and I immediately thought of you.”

“Why were you hesitating?” Juliann asks just as a group of ASU law students walk through the plaza. They stop at our table and greet us. Juliann is mentor to one of the young women. She has in fact asked me to mentor a law student through WLSA, but I feel too needy myself to be an attorney role model. And I’m not very enthusiastic about my legal career. I hardly want to admit to a young impressionable student that I was mediocre in law school, took the LAST three times, the bar twice, and that I hate my job. Of course, this isn’t what I’ve told Julian. I simply say that my marriage is in too much turmoil and once I get it ironed out I’ll happily be an attorney mentor for some WLSA student.

“I know you love going on this trip to the lake, because of all the archaeology,” Juliann continues after the flock of students move on. “Were you hesitating because of Bob?”

“You’ve got it, girlfriend.”

“Then why are you hesitating to divorce him if he makes you so unhappy,” my friend asks with concern.

“Look Julian,” I say as a siren wails down Mill Avenue. As soon as the ambulance passes, I continue. “I’m planning to file for divorce when we return from Lake Powell. I’ve

delayed it because I need to be well prepared. Bob will be a masterful opponent. Harvard patent man that he is."

I'm not surprised when Juliann recommends a good divorce lawyer and I quickly tell her that I've already met with Suzanne from law school. "She's advised me to start snooping around to see if Bob has been hiding assets from me."

"Good advice."

"I've got a month before the Labor Day trip to dig into my husband's computer files and search through his office which I've never done before. Bob has always kept it locked and his laptop and phone secure and out of my hands."

"Why haven't you?" Juliann asks. "I've always snooped on my husbands before they became my ex'es. That's how I discovered it was time to divorce them."

"Bob made it very clear to me when we moved into the house, 16 years ago, that this was his private office and that he had a lot of patented secrets inside and that if I were to ever enter without his permission, it would be some kind of breach of trust with his clients and firm. Or some such bullshit. I agreed because I didn't care. I had my own art studio on the ground floor with a view of the desert slope."

"Yes I know," Juliann says because I've shown her my office and artwork once or twice when she's been over at one of Bob's parties.

"Although, Bob seems to think he can freely walk in and out of my studio without a problem from me. I have nothing to hide. Never have. It's just the double standard of our marriage. Maybe of marriage in general. The man is superior, at least in his mind and in the mind of the church, and the woman is his wife, his property, it seems, even though women as chattel has been outlawed for at least a century. I suppose the truth is I grew up a good catholic girl and

as such I've never been comfortable prying and certainly not being lustful or a liar. Anyway, Bob is always checking my phone and laptop. He says he's just keeping the systems up to date, making sure I'm not getting any spam or viruses."

"On you Nikia?" Juliann asks.

"No. As far as my phone goes, Bob's admitted that he just wants to see what I'm doing."

"Doesn't he trust you?" Juliann asks.

"That's exactly what I ask him each time he looks over my phone. *Of course, I trust you* he says. *I don't trust everyone else and I want to make sure you're safe. You've had a lot of close calls lately and I don't like that thug on South Mountain checking you out* he says. *And what about some of these foreign places you've been to. Maybe someone got a hold of your phone and somehow made changes . . ."*

"That sounds lame," Juliann says as she finishes her coffee and digs through her Saint Laurent purse to leave a tip. "I'd say your husband is a control freak. But then again, he lets you travel the world and stay with some of his clients."

I look at my watch and see it's time we head back to the office. "Bob always claims he has my best interests at heart. That he has my back. But let's forget about him and talk about our trip to the lake. It'll be so much fun."

I feel a bit exposed at having said so much about myself and my personal life. But it's something I need to do. I need a confidant, someone to unload the burdens I've been carrying lately, a good friend and someone other than a divorce attorney on retainer. I'm glad Juliann and her DA friend will be joining me on our trip to the lake. I'll have much more to say when I have their full and undivided attention; after I've had a chance to investigate the dealings my husband is keeping from me. I have a feeling Bob's been hiding a lot of important matters.

As soon as I return home from work and see that Bob is away, I call Suzanne and tell her to start filing my divorce papers as soon as I return from my trip to Lake Powell.

"Have you found any evidence of offshore accounts or anything like that?" she asks. I admit I haven't had the chance to snoop around, yet. "Don't delay this," she adds. "You need to check his computer files. Make copies of what you find. Someone as prominent, rich, and smart as your husband must have several back up plans."

Finally, on August 5, Bob himself presents me with the perfect opportunity to begin my investigation of discovery for evidence, of what, I'm not sure. But I'm secretly elated when he tells me at the breakfast nook table that he's going to DC for a week, maybe two, to arbitrate questions regarding patent licensing and infringement at the US Patent and Trademark Office. Or so he claims.

"What about our trip to Lake Powell?" I stand to clear away the dishes. I'm not trying to dissuade Bob from going. He has to go as he so often does. In fact, I want him to take off but I don't want him to think I'm eager for him to be gone.

"I promise to be back before Labor Day," Bob tells me as he takes his own coffee mug to the sink. "And if for some reason I can't make it, you and your law firm pal can still go. Or I'll come back just for the weekend trip. It'll all work out boo boo. No frets." He pinches me on the rear as I stand at the sink just like he used to do when I was a little girl and he came to our house to hang out with my older brother Randy.

"I'm off," my husband says and pecks a kiss on my head. "Got trademarks to register and patents to file."

“I’m off, too,” I say and set the dishes aside for the housekeeper who will arrive later today. “Can’t keep those DUI scumbags waiting,” I add with sarcasm.

After Bob leaves for the airport on August 7, I wait a full day and a half so I have time away from Williams and Chen when I start my search for evidence. I’m also a little worried that Bob could be lurking around to show up and surprise me. He could be setting me up and if not, he probably suspects me of something. After all, when someone is devious and conniving, guilty of lying and cheating, they probably assume everyone else is too.

Saturday morning a locksmith opens the door to Bob’s private office across from our bedroom suite. I pay the man extra because it’s the weekend and I need him to make me a key so I can open and relock the door while Bob’s away. I’m sure he keeps his office key with him at all times rather like I keep my deer antler eagle totem in my pocket or on my nightstand.

I tell the locksmith that I lost my key although I hardly need to come up with a story for the old weary looking man with a white beard who seems to have had a few beers because it’s his day off.

Before I even enter Bob’s private domain, I put on latex gloves and shower caps on my head and over my shoes to keep traces of my presence at a minimum. Bob is more than meticulous. He’s a top-notch Harvard attorney who has probably tested me several times before, set up traps to see if I’ve invaded his office like placing a strand of my hair on his drawers or filing cabinets. By now he must realize I suspect him of a lot more than just his sordid affair. Who knows? Maybe he has lots of lovers, both women and men. The truth is, as I told Suzanne, I really don’t know my husband at all except that he’s a lustful liar. Probably a thief or a double agent spy for that matter.

With my digital camera in hand to document my discoveries, I enter Bob's secret world. I immediately see a very large mahogany desk, bookshelves, and filing cabinets, the kind in a top-notch law office. I don't know when he had it all moved in, possibly before he showed me our house back in 1981. I was so naïve back then believing Bob was such a good husband buying our beautiful house as a surprise for me. Now I know he was just stringing me along. Barbara was already in Phoenix and it would have been fine with Bob if I had stayed in Boston at the New England School of Law.

I sit behind the large desk and imagine myself as a Harvard patent attorney. But the fantasy doesn't fit. I don't like it. It makes me feel like a belligerent snob, which I'm not. I'm just a simple nobody, an artist trying to find her way out of a mess and to find herself in the process. Certainly, I'm not fitting into the PI attorney profile either.

I shake my head to shed my rambling thoughts and focus on the task at hand. At the back of my mind, I feel pressed for time because there is no telling when Bob might return to surprise me.

I proceed to open his desk drawers but discover that they are locked as securely as safes. No matter, I tell myself. Bob keeps spare keys for everything. I know my husband. I search through his office, under trophies and lawbooks and look through the bookshelves for a secret cut-out book. Then I search our bedroom closet and find a ring of small keys in a pair of shoes I had bought him and that he never wears. *Too brown*, he told me. Bob is predictable most of the time. Or at least I thought so.

I feel lucky because the keys fit his desk drawers. In the top one I find passports and drivers licenses with pictures of my husband. In each passport he uses a different alias and

disguise—different wigs, a fake moustache or beard, a goatee, a scar, mole, a tattoo. What a clown. What a jerk. I think to myself as I sit at my husband's desk.

The room begins feeling stuffy and I wonder if Bob smokes in here, cigarettes or maybe marijuana. Maybe he thinks I wouldn't approve and he's probably right. The room also feels cramped and formal, so unlike my art studio downstairs which is airy and has beautiful arcadian doors looking out onto the patio with my potted herbs and the desert slope beyond the backyard. And my studio walls have my drawings of the desert animals and plants and the ancient petroglyph and pottery totems. In contrast, Bob's office walls are filled with diplomas and framed patents and a few staid pictures of Bob shaking hands with executives and clients from around the world.

I start to feel like the room is closing in on me, like it's an entity unto itself, a frightful enemy. It makes me shudder to think that Bob will suddenly pop into his office and cause me great harm. Maybe even shoot me with the Glock he bought me. He knows I keep it in my night stand unless I'm driving somewhere and put it in the glovebox according to his instructions. In fact, he probably has his own gun, or guns, that I don't even know about, like a lot of things. It seems Bob has always kept this hidden side of himself while I've always tried to do what he suggests. Even these days when I feel so totally detached from him and ready to permanently sever our ties.

I touch my deer antler eagle totem hoping it's powers will cause this dreadful feeling to pass. I have too much investigative work to do to let fear get in my way.

My concerns about Bob fade away as I continue looking through the desk drawers. I find documents, ledgers, seals for nonprofit corporations in the Bahamas, and a folder with news

articles from the Boston Globe and WSJ about white-collar crimes like corporate embezzlement, baking financial data, money laundering, securities fraud, and intellectual property theft.

In a manila folder bound with a rubber band I discover a stack of letters between Barbara and Bob. As I scan through them and take pictures, I realize that these aren't love letters but some kind of coded memos. I don't really understand what they're saying to each other. It's too odd and way over my head like geek codes between Phi Beta Kappa and Summa Cum Laude. In fact, these letters are using the same terms I overheard when I was standing outside Bob's office the other day. Now I know for certain that he was on the phone with Barbara.

After I've recorded everything that I think might be important for my divorce, I put things back exactly as I found them and begin digging through his file cabinets and bookshelves. This takes a good two hours but I don't find any files concerning hidden assets. The files are legal casework or copies of patents and trademarks and trade secrets. Boring stuff. Nothing interesting like my DUI cases which involve lots of drama.

Before I leave the room for the night, I decide to check out the walk-in closet. It's locked, of course, but one of the keys on the ring of keys fits the lock. When I open the door I'm shocked to discover that it's not a walk-in closet at all. It's a huge room with shelves filled with sex toys. Dominatrix type stuff. Sodom and Gomorrah. Cuffs, chains, and masks. A video recorder and TV equipment. Porno pictures and tapes with labels I don't even want to say. *Boo Boo Bear Come to Daddy* is one that really stands out. That's what he's called me since we were kids. I worry now that Bob has been filming me while I'm sleeping. Maybe he's drugged me and did terrible things to violate me. But then I decide that this couldn't have happened. I would know. I'm a light sleeper and I'd know if Bob had drugged me.

What I see is so overwhelming, I quickly take pictures then close the door, lock it back up, and return to Bob's mahogany desk. I really don't want to touch anything in Bob's sex room. It's too vile.

I sit at the desk for a while, scanning through the pictures in my camera, then decide to look again in the bottom drawer. At the very back I discover a grey metal lockbox.

I stop short of removing the box from the drawer because the eerie feeling about my husband returns. I feel his presence in the room and again fear that at any moment he could burst through the door. Then I start thinking that maybe he has hidden cameras that are filming my every move. I didn't see any when I scoured through the room, but still, they could be miniscule and extremely well hidden. Or there may be some kind of electronic bug or motion detectors that my clever husband secretly patented himself. I again touch my totem but this time the bad feeling doesn't go away so I decide to call Bob right from where I'm sitting at his desk. He answers on the first ring.

"Yes, Jessie," he says. "Are you all right?"

"I'm fine," I say. "I was just wondering how you were. Where are you now? What are you doing?"

"What do you think I'm doing? I'm in the middle of arbitration. We're on a short recess which is the only reason I'm able to answer your call. Again, are you all right? Are you missing me?" Bob asks. I hear nothing in the background. No voices, no commotion from a room of people. Only silence. And I can't help but wonder where Bob really is and why he answered my call so quickly. Maybe he really does know I'm in his office, somehow.

"Bob," I say. "Do you know when you'll be back? Are you going to be here in time for our trip to Lake Powell or am I going to have to go alone and hobnob with your partners?" I

can’t think of anything else to say and I feel a need to prolong the call to see if I can pick up anything in the background. I touch my totem for reassurance.

“Stop your worrying, Jess. I’ll be home for the trip. Like I said. I have to go now.” He hangs up on me and leaves me feeling even more ill at ease. About him. About us. And about what I’m now doing. Looking for evidence to nail him, I remind myself. I pull out the locked metal box and shake it to assess its contents. It seems to be filled with papers and metal things that clank.

I try the ring of keys I found in Bob’s shoe, but none of them fit the lockbox. I decide to leave the office for the night and in the morning take the box to a different locksmith because I don’t need one man knowing all about what I’m doing.

It’s early Monday morning when I take the box to a locksmith nearby Williams and Chen on Rural Road. But I wait until I return home that evening and am back in Bob’s office at his sumptuous desk before I look inside. I find class rings, tie clips, news articles, an old reel of 8 mm film, and several handwritten letters to Bob from my brother Randy, two men I intensely dislike these days. I have always felt that my brother was a bit off, despite his brilliance. He had been mean to me when I was little and I’ve always thought Randy, like Bob, thought too much of himself, that he was enormously special because he went to Benson and MIT. *Just because a person is exceptionally smart doesn’t mean they’re good people* I think to myself as I take digital pictures of everything in the box and reflect on moments from my childhood.

In 1968 when I was in the eighth grade, Bob and my brother Randy went away to MIT. They were joined at the hip as best friends and avoided the Vietnam draft because of their academic abilities. My husband had graduated summa cum laude from Benson High and my

brother wasn't far behind. It was a terrible year, that year, because of the assassinations of MLK and Bobby K, and because my parents' business on Lombard Street was losing money. My father sold the dry-cleaners, bought a Dairy Queen franchise in Tigard, and moved us from North Portland to the Southwest Hills so my sister and I could attend high school in a better part of town. We didn't have the option of going to Benson, like Randy, and because my parents could no longer afford a private Catholic school, we had to attend a conventional high school.

After high school I lived at home and studied art at Portland Community College, Sylvania Campus, also in Portland's southwest hills. In May of 1975, during my second year at PCC, I re-encountered my future husband Bobby Ellars at my brother's twenty-fifth birthday party. It was raining cats and dogs that day like a typical day in Portland, but my brother was prepared and held his kegger in a huge army tent pitched in his backyard.

Randy was also celebrating his promotion to a journeyman plumber. For no apparent reason, my oldest brother had mysteriously dropped out of MIT and took up the trade of our father's father who had taught himself how to be a plumber during the Great Depression. I always found this a bizarre move on Randy's part and he never explained why he did it. *Why in the hell did Randy leave MIT to become a plumber?*

I sit back in the office chair and practically hear the pattering rain under Randy's green canvas tent as Bobby and I talked beside the large kegger of beer. Most everyone else had taken their red cello beer cups into the house and out of the rain. "You've really grown, boo boo bear," Bob had said as he made a toasting gesture. "And I like what I see."

And I liked what I saw. Bobby Ellars was no longer a lanky kid with a pimply brow, a nerd from Benson High. He had dishwater blond hair and blue eyes. He was handsome and pleasantly built at five foot eleven.

By the time he had finished telling me about himself, I had fallen in love although maybe I still had my childhood crush on him. Bobby Ellars had earned an engineering degree from MIT then went on to Harvard Law, studied the procedures and rules of the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, passed the patent bar, and landed a position at a prominent firm in Boston. He was far afield from my other dating prospects at PCC and the night clubs I frequented with my college and high school girlfriends.

When I told Bobby I was an art student I remember him saying, "Randy suggested you'd make a good forger." The comment had taken me by surprise, but we had both laughed. Now I wonder what he really meant and what he had in mind. Over the years of our marriage, he has asked me several times to forge signatures on documents that he needed signed.

"This can't be legal," I said a few times and my husband always assured me that the person whose signature I was forging was either dead or out of the country and that it was just a matter of expediting the procedure without his having to fly overseas or filing tons of paperwork. *Just a matter of convenience. No harm no foul* my husband's words echo through my head.

Now I'm not so sure what Bob had coerced me into doing and I have a sick feeling in my stomach that he's put me in some kind of detrimental position. He's made me into a criminal forger, somehow. Maybe this is one of his "black up" plans to keep me in line. A card he'll pull out if and when I ever file a lawsuit against him.

But like the torrents of rain falling on Randy's canvas tent, I had fallen for Bobby's charm. I slept with him that night, something I had resisted doing with all the other men I'd been dating. I remember thinking that Bobby, with all his stamina, cleverness, sense of humor, and credentials, was too perfect. What was I holding out for anyway? By that time, I was not a practicing Catholic.

After three days of romance sparked at my brother's kegger, Bob returned to Lambert Patent Law in Boston and I continued studying art at PCC until Bob summoned me to Boston then proposed marriage one month after I moved into his Natick apartment. I had wanted to be with him, the perfect man for me, and for some silly reason, I believed I was the right woman for him.

That was nearly 22 years ago and for that many years I've remained the same naïve, gullible, and stupid little catholic girl. But not anymore, I think as I sit at Bob's mahogany desk.

I examine the class ring from Benson High, class of '68, and begin thinking about something else that's always puzzled me. Why did the close friendship between Randy and Bob abruptly end after our wedding? It's a mystery that I've never understood. I don't talk with my family very much and when I do it's never about personal matters, and I never asked Randy or Bob what had happened. Either I didn't care or didn't want to know. Or maybe, yet again, it was the catholic girl inside me telling me it wasn't polite or wasn't my place to be nosey and butt into other people's business. Especially that of my older brother.

I carefully place the letters to Bob from Randy in chronological order then photograph them while scanning them over. It doesn't take me long to realize that Randy started blackmailing Bob just after he dropped out of MIT back in 1970. In his letters to my husband, Randy vaguely mentions some sort of crime but doesn't explicitly say what kind. He writes things like, "the matter concerning what you did," or "your unmentionable act" but I believe all the evidence for a heinous sex crime lies in the tidy little lockbox or in my husband's sex room. Bob's a memento keeper, a collector of cars, porno, and probably of guns and women. He displays trophies on window shelves so the outside world can view his merit and accolades. He's such an arrogant elitist.

I set Randy's letters aside and decide I'd better call Bob again to make sure he's not on his way home for some unexpected reason. To my relief, Bob tells me he will be delayed for several more days and because I hear what sounds like legal chatter in the background, I feel a little more confident. I'm pretty sure his girlfriend Barbara is with him because she's been away from her office every time I've called to see if she's there, but I don't confront my husband about this. Not anymore. It's no longer my focus and concern. I just want to get what I'm entitled to and make certain that Bob gets what's coming to him.

I decide that my next step is to have the 8 mm film processed into digital or video format. It doesn't take long to find a company online that can quickly make a video. I drive straight to Digitpics is in Paradise Valley and pay them a hefty fee for a quick turnaround so I can get the film converted before Bob returns. I want to make sure the film is neatly back in Bob's lockbox and in his desk drawer so Bob won't notice anything is amiss in his office. In the process of digging through all his drawers and files I've been taking meticulous pictures so I can be sure to return everything to its proper place.

In a few days, I drive back to Paradise Valley and collect a video copy of the 8 mm film. At home, on the comfort of our sofa in the Arizona Room, I watch it on our VCR several times and read over and over again everything I've documented from the lockbox. It doesn't take me long to piece together what took place back in 1970 and what I uncover is beyond shocking and horrifying. It surpasses my worst suspicions about my husband and brother. Not only is Bobby Ellars a liar, a cheat, and a thief who has committed endless white-collar fraud crimes, he's a cold-blooded murderer.

It turns out that Randy, Bob, and Bob's girlfriend, this Barbara Frank-Lymonne who went by the name Jennifer Smith at the time, were happy go lucky MIT topnotch students with

scads of underhanded capers going on. They were brilliant schemers and figured out lots of ways to take advantage of the system. At the same time, they were sex fanatics and indulged in every kind of sexual whim—soliciting prostitutes to make sex tapes to sell, having orgies, taking drugs, and who knows what else. Things that aren't in the realm of my experience or imagination.

I had always felt so irritated when Bob pressed me to partake in sexual games and fantasies that went against my integrity, my upbring, my sense of self-dignity and morality. And then he had always tried to make me feel guilty for not "satisfying" him like he wanted me to. Saying things like "it's the wife's duty to please her husband, to have sex at his whim" and so on. And we weren't even practicing any religion that hinted at this husband-wife rule, if that's where it comes from. I mean, I suppose it comes from the Bible when Adam gave Eve his rib, or something like that.

As I look back I can't help but wonder why Bob ever bothered with me when he had his sexual side kick whom I'm sure pleases him in every kind of way. But that no longer matters. Now the only thing that's important is that I present all this evidence to Juliann and her DA boyfriend this Labor Day Weekend.

According to Randy's blackmail letters, the newspaper clippings in Bob's lockbox, and the 8mm film, some evening in 1970 maybe in April or May, the three musketeers were Juniors at MIT. They went to the red-light district in Boston known as the Combat Zone. Maybe they went there quite often to find a prostitute or two to make their porno tapes. One evening, they evidently lassoed in a woman for a sex party at a dive motel in Watertown. They filmed their wild orgy with an 8mm Kodak movie camera and my brilliant husband couldn't part with the graphic film. He probably thought no one would ever find it, but I did, and now it's going to be self-incriminating evidence that Bob was too vain to destroy.

In the 8 mm film video, Bob, Jennifer Smith aka Barbara, Randy, and the poor hooker from the Combat Zone are drinking beer and hard liquor, snorting drugs, possibly cocaine, smoking marijuana, possibly laced with angel dust, and maybe even dropping hits of acid. I can't tell for sure. The film is old and there are lots of scratchy parts.

It was a wild sex party and they filmed each other performing perverted sex games, such as strangulation and bondage on the poor hooker. I can't even be sure what she really looked like but I think her hair was dyed blond, like Barbara's. It's on the tape. During their little game, my husband is straddling the hooker on the sordid bed in the smokey room and strangling her.

If I'm not mistaken, I think this is supposed to bring about some kind of erotic orgasm, or at least intensify it, but after a short burst of struggle the woman goes limp and stops moving. Did she have an orgasm? I wonder at first. Then I realize she is struggling to breathe. Bob removes his grip on her throat, shakes her, slaps her, gives her mouth to mouth, but she remains motionless. Then Bob asks whomever is filming, probably Randy, to stop. And the orgy tape ends.

I can only speculate about what happened next. I believe the three sex pals hid the woman's body. To them she was nothing but a whore from the Combat Zone where they probably got their drugs. She was simply collateral damage in a war zone.

The three stooges signed pacts to keep the secret among them. That was the first pact signed by all three but in the pact they don't specifically say "murder" but it's implied and quite obvious to me after seeing the film. This is why my brother dropped out of MIT and became a plumber. He had to hide away under a new guise. A stupid one at that.

In one letter Randy wrote to Bob "Mum's the word as long as you keep paying me dividends and marry my sister and not Jenn." I knew this request was a childhood dare, some

sick boyhood mistreatment of girls. Randy is Machiavellian, just like Bob. He manipulated me when I was little. Pure little girl misogyny. And he made me do things in his place. Made me fib to Mom and Dad to cover his own misbehavior. One time he drew a giant swastika on the outside wall of my grade school St. Cecilia. I saw the used felt pens in the bathroom trash, same color, worn to the nubs. I put two and two together and told Mom. Randy didn't like that. But why would Randy make such a drastic request to Bob? Why would he make Bob marry me?

When I was a naïve little girl, I thought there was something special between me and Bob. But he's been duping me all along. By the magic of love? The lure of adventure? Happiness? By a man's charisma and career? What is it that lures a woman into a man's trap?

For me, what really clinches my theory about this murder is the news article that my husband also kept in his little gray trophy lockbox. Dated June 21, 1970, the article describes the discovery of a woman's body, a poor unfortunate and unidentified nobody dumped and disregarded in the Charles. The article shows an artist's sketch of her face. Even though what I see in the film is as sketchy as the newspaper drawing, there's a definite resemblance. And the blond hair is the same shoulder length.

I know the body is the same hooker on the 8mm film. Otherwise, why would Bob keep the article? I'll never understand how my husband, brother, and their side-kick whore, could render someone's life as so meaningless. Are they completely heartless and without remorse. It seems so. And from what I learned in Crim Law 101, such people are sociopaths and or psychopaths. They have no conscience or heart. They do things to please only themselves. They cannot think beyond what brings them self-gratification.

After I spend a few days compiling my circumstantial evidence, for that's all it is, I call Bob to make sure he's still tied up in arbitration. But instead of calling him on his cell, I phone

the law firm where he's working, Schonberg and Heart Patent Law DC. I'm able to reach him and at least feel satisfied that he's in DC. But he's angry that I called the office and not his cell.

"What's going on Jess? Is there some reason you're calling me here? Don't you trust me?" he asks with a tone of annoyance. Well too bad. I think, because I'm angry with him.

"Look," I say trying to think at the top of my head when my mind is cluttered with all the circumstantial evidence I've compiled against him. When I know he's a cold-blooded psychopathic killer. "I wanted to surprise you. That's all. I wanted to tell you about the outfits I bought for our trip to Lake Powell. Matching green polo shirts and grey sweat hoodies." I'm trying to sound as pleasant and sincere as I can.

"Jessie, I have to go. If you need anything, call me back on my cell." He hangs up on me again, something he's rarely done before. Now I know he must be quite agitated about something. Possibly about me. Maybe Barbara did something. I don't know. Do psychopaths become agitated?

I then call the office of Barbara Frank-Lymonne and the secretary confirms that she's out of the office but she doesn't tell me why or where she is and I leave it at that. I've already called her office five or six times while Bob's been gone and each time Ms. Frank-Lymonne has been "away." Well, I'm pretty sure I know where and why.

I decide to return to Bob's office to make sure I haven't disturbed anything and to take another thorough look around. Deeply hidden between two ARS volumes in a mahogany bookcase, I discover two recently drawn up life insurance policies. I sit back down at Bob's desk to examine them and discover that I'm the one being covered for two million dollars and Bob is the beneficiary. In the policies Bob claims that I am a *highly valued and necessary asset as a unique artist and attorney who provides necessary income.* I can't believe the hogwash.

After I carefully read the policies over and over again, like a lawyer wrestling with case law, I put together that Bob's been trying to kill me and make it appear like an accident because from my accidental death he'll get three million dollars. He doesn't want a divorce. And he's in some kind of desperate need for money. I've seen it before in criminal case law, back in law school. He's lost money somehow. Got himself in some kind of a jam. I don't know the man I thought was my soulmate. His infidelity merely opened a can of worms. His worms. He juggles many schemes and capers. I am one of them.

I take several pictures of the Med Life policies and carefully place them back in their hidey-hole between the ARS volumes. Then I tiptoe out of Bob's office as if I'm afraid to make any noise and rattle anything through my vibration.

Chapter 20: The Sun Dagger Event at Chaco Canyon

600 years earlier

Indolent Moon

Frog Moon and the great bear spirit who circles his little sister in the north sky, guides us on our journey from Mimbres to Chaco Canyon. The Paquime men lead and their women, children and myself trail behind carrying bundles of water and food and the loot we took from Grasshopper Lizard to trade along the way. The men refer to their females in this family band as

Rabbit, Wren, and Coyote Pup. They have named themselves after the animals they hunt and the head man calls himself Peccary Dragon because during a dream-vision a horned toad feathered dragon marked his face with long vertical lines below his eyes. The three children have the names of flowers.

For fifteen days we walk steadily singing praises to the morning and evening stars and the Young Sun who paints flowers across the morning sky. When any member in our band falls ill or stumbles and injures himself, he turns to me, the "Hohokam" healer among them.

While walking over plains and through the pine forests and juniper groves, past rocky ledges and ravines, I watch my every step and think about my little sister Juniper Berry. I also think about her when falling asleep at night on pine needle bedding under the stars.

When we sit at the evening cook fire, under the Great Eagle that spans the zenith of darkness, my companions and I share stories about our peoples and the Creator.

The Gathering at Chaco Canyon

The settlement and trade center at Chaco Canyon lies mostly in ruins when we arrive. Time has toppled the stone and adobe walls and homes of ancient people. Many generations ago, the Puebloans abandoned their holy city on the trade routes. They wandered south into the nation of my people, the true people. Some of them intermingled with the Mogollon such as the people living in the Mimbres Valley.

In the city of ruins are about two thousand pilgrims from around the world. Most are Puebloan and Mogollon, some are from Paquime or settlements farther south. I'm the only person from the "Hohokam" nation. We stay in abandoned adobe lodges and cook communally at the central roasting pits on the plazas. The men hunt rabbit, deer, and quail and the women collect agave hearts to roast in the fires. All the pilgrims fill the plaza with songs and we dance in

praise to the Creator and Earth spirits in anticipation of the Sun Dagger event on the most prominent towering butte in the canyon.

A society of priests are living in the adobe great houses. Most are elder men and some are young male apprentices. Some priests are Puebloan whose families have lived at Chaco Canyon for many generations. Others have come from far away to live a holy life. A few have wives but they do not bed with them. People call these elder wives "Grandmothers" because they are like the dried maize kernels at the end of their reproductive cycles. These wisewomen make baskets and sew shells, feathers, and bones onto the buckskin tunics they stitch for their men. On the garments they also draw totems. With their medicines from Earth and their songs, these wisewomen heal the community of priestly men and the pilgrims who have come to witness the event.

The pilgrims grow to know me as a Hohokam prophet with the power to heal and make a prophesy. Because of this, the elder priests of Chaco select me to climb the butte with their young apprentice priests and witness the Sun's dagger slice the spiral etched on the rock. The elder Chaco men and their wisewomen are much too feeble to make the climb.

On the morning of the north sun, pilgrims wave spruce branches as they stand at the canyon floor around the towering butte with the sun dagger spiral. They make offerings of stones, vessels, baskets, and totems—items they've carried from their settlements. Men, women, and children dance and sing around smoking pit fires scented with juniper and pine.

The elder Chaco priests sit with their wisewomen at the central fire before the first ladder up the butte cliffs. They have painted their faces sunset colors and colors of earth. They blow

tobacco smoke on prayer sticks made from the ribs of dead cacti. The smoke becomes the cloud people who bring power to the prayer sticks.

I follow four young Chaco priests and climb the ladders to the spirals on the rock. Along the way I chant holy words to the pilgrims watching me from the bottom of the butte. I am the youngest of those honored to witness the Sun's dagger appear in the spiral in the same way I had watched Frog Moon appear indolent in my father's Grand Palace before I set forth on this long journey under the comet moon.

Near the top of the pillaring stone butte, the young priests and I stand on a ledge where three limestone slabs rise before the spirals on the rock wall. The largest spiral has nine and a half circle turns to represent the passage of solar cycles between the Indolent Frog Moons. The other spiral on the rock wall is a snake that marks the middle sun.

At the moment the Sun dagger slices the spiral, the priests and I sing *After the flood rose as high as a flying woodpecker's tail, the Creator sent a quail east and a roadrunner west to see where the water subsided. When the birds returned He determined Earth's center and dug a hole to enter and hide. When the Creator re-emerged, He created people from his sweat. We are the best of His creation.*

After we return to the canyon floor, I say to the pilgrims, "The Creator gives us a path to follow like the sun travels from young to old by day and by night. Like the old moon travels to new like a comet across the night sky. Our ancestors, the people of bone, drew the spiral on the butte to give us footprints to follow . . ."

My words suddenly stop because a lightning bolt streaks across the blue sky and strikes my forehead. I brace myself against the first ladder at the cliff and feel my body bursts with

energy as I receive power from the Creator who created everything because he had grown tired of existing in dark empty nothingness..

The pilgrims all around me are cheering, bowing, and adulating me for my healing prophecies. The elder priests then tell me that the sky has marked my brow with a sun dagger with the power of creation.

In my mind and heart-spirit, I know the Creator has gifted me with a child and I will become a true mother and grandmother. I will fulfil my totem name promise. I am Indolent Moon Pregnant Deer marked by the Sun dagger of the Creator.

Chapter 21: Unraveling Barbara and Bob

600 years later

Jessie June Ellars

I close and lock Bob's office door and head to my own desk in my art studio to re-read my copies of the "coded letters" between Bob and Barbara and piece together their story as part of my chronology of evidence against them.

Both Bob and Barbara have genius IQ's; they are both scheming, ruthless, and insatiably lustful. They both must have some kind of manic genius obsessive compulsive disorder. And, like my fucked-up oldest brother, they are also psychopaths.

Possibly, as soon as they met, Barbara and Bob put their heads together to become partners in crime. I know for a fact that Bob and Randy were schemers at Benson High. I overheard them talking a few times about contriving ways to acquire cash. But I never said anything about it to my parents because I didn't like squealing on my brother. He had ways of finding things out and making me feel sorry if I crossed the line, his line, and tattled on him. And besides, I didn't want to rat on Randy and get Bobby in trouble because, as a little girl, I had a crush on him.

At Benson, Bob and Randy were the two brightest boys in the city's school for bright boys. Together, they got into MIT and avoided the Vietnam draft but everything changed between Randy and Bob sophomore year, when Bobby Ellars met Jennifer Smith aka Barbara Frank-Lymonne. They became fused together for life and Randy became a tag along, I'm assuming, like he used to call me when I was a little girl. Randy was probably jealous of his best friend. Maybe he had a crush on Barbara. I'm not sure. Anyway, the crux of this story is that Barbara is the love of Bob's life. She possesses him, outwits his own genius. Bob is Barbara's slave. I am their dupe.

My husband and Barbara decided that their best course of action was for one of them to become a patent attorney and the other a corporate attorney, positions at the top of the attorney caste system. They were so dam smart the world belonged to them. Like magic. They both easily slid into Harvard Law School, made Harvard Law Review, then landed positions at top Boston law firms. All the while they were scheming and plotting and laughing and fornicating in all kinds of ways. In 1975, Bob brought me into the picture. Or perhaps it was Randy who did. I had no clue something was going on other than I married the most impressive man I'd ever met. I imagine Bob and his lover saw me as a clueless idiot.

At my brother's kegger for his promotion to a journeyman plumber, I thought I re-met Bobby Ellars by chance. But the truth is Randy arranged for Bob to come to his party specifically to start courting and marrying me. At the time I knew Randy had dropped out of MIT but I didn't know why and had thought Randy and Bob were still best friends. But they weren't. It was all a blackmailing ruse. Randy's sick revenge scheme against his former best friend and me, his stupid little sister.

How naïve I've been all these years. About everything it seems. Not anymore. Now it's my turn to change the dynamics of these psychopath schemers, including my brother. He's not off the hook. He too, is in the 8 mm film of their little Combat Zone orgy.

In 1980-81, the feds started sniffing around and got too close to one of Barbara and Bob's capers I surmise from a news clipping and one of Barbara's letters. That's when "Jennifer" changed her name to Barbara Frank-Lymonne and fled to Phoenix. Bob followed. I tagged along because I wanted to stay with Bob. I was afraid I'd lose him if I lagged behind in Boston, enrolled in a low-ranking law school. As it turned out, Bob was probably planning on leaving me to flounder high and dry, like a fish unhooked on the boat deck. I believe that over the years my husband and his lover have embezzled millions of dollars and stored their money in off-shore accounts in the Bahamas.

For fifteen years I thought Bob's law firm owned properties in Nassau and in Vail. But I discovered three property deeds in Bob's filing cabinets. Bob and Barbara own the beach house in Nassau, the condo in Vail, and together they own a house in Sedona. Their love nest when Bob gets away from me which has happened quite often during our marriage, both when I've traveled and when he went on so many business trips sometimes for a week or even two at a time. Not to mention his month-long overseas trips to Dubai and Europe.

I've discovered another shocker from one of the files I found in my husband's office. Bob isn't even a partner at Goldstein Patent Law. He's a limited partner, a consultant and investor, and only an invited guest on the houseboat trips Labor Day weekends. Bob had his own money and he had me believing his myth. I never knew the difference. He kept me busy one way or the other. I traveled, hosted parties, attended events as his cute redheaded wife. My life was exciting, full, and I just didn't catch-on that my husband was away from me much of the time because I was his ruse, not his soulmate. Not the love of his life as he would tell me during sex. Bob is a brilliant man and his true soulmate, Barbara, is even smarter and more cunning than he is.

I probably haven't unraveled most of their schemes. They've always carefully concealed whatever they've done. But Bob keeps records, letters, and mementos because of his pride. I've only been to his office at Goldstein a few times. I'm sure it was just a prop for him, a perk from the firm for his huge investment in their equity account. There's simple too much that went on, is going on, for me alone to uncover.

From the documents I've read, the letters, and news articles, I surmise that the crimes of my husband and Barbara include trafficking counterfeit trademarks, selling trade secrets, forging patent letters which they finagled me into doing without my knowing what I was doing, setting up false companies to money launder, trafficking in false labels, and trafficking porno in places like Japan, Thailand, Indonesia, and Dubai. The places Bob sent me to visit his contacts and deliver his files and packages personally, during the many years I thought I was just a world traveler enjoying the rewards of being married to a rich man. I was but a stupe in a stupor. Barbara and Bob did whatever made money and didn't bring about unwanted attention. They were on top of their game for more than 25 years. But I can't find any ledgers or accounts. Perhaps Barbara keeps all that.

During my last search through Bob's office, I found hidden in a cut out legal tome a recent letter from my brother to my husband that helps me understand why Bob has taken out the two insurance policies on me. I believe he embezzled funds from the partner's equity at Goldstein's, or he lost a big investment. I'm not sure which.

Here's what I think happened. Last year I called my mother and she said Randy's plumbing business went belly up because the economy went dry and no one was building in Portland. Randy was in trouble with debt. He contacted his old Benson buddy and partner in murder, although they had been estranged for many years. Randy demanded two million dollars or he was going to come forth with DNA evidence of the murder back in 1970. Randy's blackmail letter claims that he kept "a certain woman's purse with her makeup and hairbrush" believing it might come in handy one day.

Even though he didn't know about DNA evidence back in 1970. Like Barbara and Bob, my brother is a brilliant resourceful man. It makes me sick to my stomach to think I'm related to such a person as Randy and that I married such a man as Bob. Slept with him. Thank God I didn't have a child with him, at least that's one good thing. Thank God Bob's sterile.

Randy's blackmail threat isn't Bob's only problem. It seems the IRS is auditing our personal finances. Bob's finances. Bob is in charge of our finances and has always paid the bills and let me freely withdraw from our accounts because I was never extravagant. Until my casino night last year.

Bob hadn't even told me about this audit. I found a letter in his desk drawer from the IRS asking about an account in the Bahamas under one of his aliases. And so, I surmise, Bob cannot touch his hidden assets. I don't know if Barbara has her own accounts under her own aliases or if

they've mingled everything they have. All Bob's schemes and assets are virtually frozen until after the audit. Until Bob discovers who's sniffing around in the Bahamas.

The world is crashing down on my husband. His past is catching up with him and he's planning that the insurance policy on me will save him and his femme fatal. But he can't seem to get me to die in an accident. He's failed at least twice. Randy is pressuring Bob, auditors are stressing him, and Barbara probably persuaded him to embezzle from Goldstein's to pay off Randy to keep him from throwing attention onto the Combat Zone murder, as I call it now.

My entire married life has been nothing but a sham. Bob conned me into becoming his wife, into traveling, to never having kids, and into going to law school. Everywhere we traveled together, even on our spontaneous trip to NYC the year of our marriage, Bob ran into someone, an associate, and they excused themselves from me for at least half an hour. Nothing was spontaneous.

I suspect that Barbara is the mastermind of my entire married life. She is the dominatrix who pulls the strings. Bob is pussy-whipped and awed by her brilliant mind and gorgeous body. I feel certain now that she even orchestrated my wedding at Walden Pond and that the actor who married us was probably one of her friends.

Together my husband and his lover decided how to proceed. Perhaps Barbara agreed Bob should marry me and not have kids. Kids would just get in the way of their capers. I was a perfect ruse for them. Bob probably got a vasectomy. That's why he's sterile. With me, Bob looked like an ordinary married man.

I'm sure Barbara didn't want to be a wife and mother. It isn't in her DNA. Maybe she suggested Bob send me to law school. But why? To keep me busy? Get me out of the way. I was such a pawn. Did they think if I turned out to be brilliant I'd join them in their capers? Jump in

their bed for a jolly little threesome. And did this bitch entice Bob to murder me for the insurance money because Bob messed up royally?

I married a murderer and I didn't know it. I loved a man who would just as soon kill me as let me live. Bob is just like the guy in my law school class who fooled everyone and concealed his being a convicted murderer who served time for killing 4 men on a drug deal gone bad. Bob, Barbara, and Randy murdered a woman and never paid a nickel of restitution. They've never atoned. But I believe I will change all that.

Chapter 22: Cloud Spirit Women at the Great River Canyon

600 years earlier

Indolent Moon

A few days after the sun turns around on the horizon and marks my forehead with its dagger, I ask many bands of pilgrims where I might go from Chaco Canyon. The Paquime band of migrants I escaped with from the Mimbres warmonger are returning to Paquime. I will never go to that grand city because of my third vision on the night of the Indolent Frog Moon. And I cannot return to my father's city or nation. I would shame my people, my society sisters, and my father Shivering Bear.

Most of the pilgrims are returning to their settlements and nations to the south. They are Mogollon and Puebloan, a few bands are people traveling to their settlements in the far north, and one band is returning to the Patayan nation of Juniper Berry, my little sister and friend. Many pilgrims invite me to join them. They welcome me to their settlement as a Hohokam wisewoman marked by the Sun's dagger.

I speak with a small band of five related women and one unrelated elder man who is their guide because he has traveled the trade routes many times. The five women sit together on the hard soil preparing their bundle baskets with supplies for a long journey back to their settlement. They wear buckskin tunics marked with totems.

The grandmother among them tells me they come from a canyon along a great river in the NW direction of Tlaloc. "It's where the ancient Puebloans lived before they migrated south," she tells me. They left behind the graves of their ancestors, people of bone." The grandmother of the band then asks me to join their society and live with them in a small village among the ruins.

"Our band of holy sisters are daughters and mothers who have traveled to our community from many different settlements in the south," she says. "They want to live a life of piety in our village and care for the ancient ones. Like the elder priests in the kivas of Chaco, our sisters dance with cloud doll spirits from the sky. We call ourselves Cloud Spirit Sisters of the Great River Canyon and we dance in the old kivas the ancient Puebloans left behind. The ones who remained in the canyon as people of bone and those who migrated south. We maintain the graves of the ancients and the kivas of cloud spirits from the sky. We are keepers of spirit and bone."

"Are there men in your village among the ruins?" I ask the grandmother while considering the sun dagger on my forehead. I can't forsake the idea that the Creator marked me

for motherhood. That I will bring life into the world and receive the Creator's most sacred gift. My instincts have never left me.

"The mark on my forehead declares that I am a progenitor of people," I bluntly tell the band of women. "I am not merely a prophet. This is why I ask if there are men in your settlement who can gift me with a child?" I pause in my speech while the band of sisters chuckle.

"I make no commitment to becoming a member of your society," I continue. "My ways and customs are of the desert and river people; the true people you call the Hohokam. We are kindred in spirit but from different nations."

The grandmother says, "The sisters in our settlement have mingled our varied traditions. We would embrace what you have to teach us, Hohokam prophet. You have witnessed the sun dagger slice the spiral. The Sky Spirits, the Sun, the Creator himself has marked you for your good deed. He gave you power beyond what you already possessed. Hohokam sister. We welcome you on our journey back to a beautiful great river canyon that echoes many ancient names."

"I do not wish to be adulated at this point in my life. I want only what the Sky Spirits promise me. And that is to give birth to a child. By the mark on my face, by my totem name Pregnant Deer, this dream will become my reality."

"There are a few men in our settlement," the oldest daughter of the grandmother speaks. She is mother of the sister-daughters. "Elders and warriors live among us as priests in their own right. In the canyon plateau, the young warrior priests guard our perimeter and hunt for our food while we attend to the graves, dance in the kivas, grow our corn gardens, make baskets, weave cloth, and mold clay vessels with totems."

I think to myself about the many things I must consider in deciding which path to follow. Which band of traveling pilgrims do I join? I feel the scar on my forehead, its curve, its blade, its texture, and think out my strategy to make my reality work. “A man must plant his seed inside me. He can be old or young,” I continue. The women erupt with laughter.

“Can I have a child with any of these men in your settlement?”

“No, Hohokam prophet,” the sisters tell me all at once.

“That is taboo,” the mother says. “But come with us. If you want a child, you can have my young daughter.” The mother gestures to the youngest among them, a girl a year past her menarche.

All the women laugh again and then the grandmother tells me, “You are too old now to be a young mother, you misunderstand your mark. Come join us and attend the burials sites of the ancient Puebloans. Lead us as a prophet. Dance with Cloud Spirits in the kivas, like men do. You already speak the dialect of our settlement.”

That night I bed under the stars on the plaza near the small band of Cloud Spirit women. I cannot sleep because I must consider my options. The wisewomen of Chaco Canyon have also invited me to stay and live among them and help the elders during the celestial rites when pilgrims arrive. My options give me no path to bed with a man. The men at both Chaco and the Great River Canyon are priests devoted to worship. They abstain from taking a woman to bed. The men make vows to the Creator, like I did when I became Second Prophet of the Three Sisters Society of White Evening Flower.

I do not want to wander alone or remain in Chaco Canyon and conduct rites before pilgrims and climb the high towering sun dagger butte. I do not need people to adulate me like my people adulated White Evening Flower. And if I join any other band of traveling pilgrims

and become a prophet in their settlement, I also cannot bed with a man. It's taboo for a holy prophet to bed with another in nearly all nations of the world.

Where can I go? I keep asking myself as I toss and turn and watch the night totems passing me by. *What can I do?* My thoughts wander alone among the ancient ruins. I pray to the spirit of my totem name Pregnant Deer and to the Creator about which path I can follow that will lead me to grow a child in my womb.

When Young Sun breaks through the eastern horizon, the Creator says to me, "Carry your name totem plate, Pregnant Deer, to the Great River Canyon to keep for your burial hole. Live a life of reverence for those who have passed before you and for those who will come. The Sun dagger mark on your forehead means you have done your penance. The spirit of Elder Woman releases you from the curse of her death and she gives you the blessings of Indolent Frog Moon. Your totem name Pregnant Deer means that the seed you now plant at the Great River Canyon will bring you my gift of a child in generations to come."

Chapter 23: The Kokopelli

600 years later

Jessie June Ellars

On Labor Day weekend 1997, a year after my casino night, Goldstein Patent Law Firm holds its annual trip to Lake Powell. For a thousand years after 400 AD, the ancient Puebloans,

also known as the Anasazi, inhabited Glen Canyon along the Colorado river on the Colorado Plateau of Northern Arizona and Southern Utah.

In 1956, a year after I was born, Congress authorized the Glen Canyon dam. The government specifically built Page, the main city in the region, so workers on the dam had a place to live and buy groceries. In accordance with the Federal Antiquities Act of 1906, the "Glen Canyon Project" surveyed open pueblos, cliff dwellings, petroglyphs, and the burial grounds of Ancient Puebloans.

On September 13th, two months before the Kennedy assassination, the dam held back the Colorado River, flooded Glen Canyon, and formed Lake Powell. Anasazi dwellings, ceremonial centers, artifacts, and burial grounds now lie under the second largest manmade lake in the SW, after Lake Mead near Las Vegas. People worldwide flock to the reservoir named for the early explorer of the Colorado River and Civil War Veteran amputee John Wesley Powell.

On the first day of the retreat, our houseboat the Kokopelli leisurely passes canyon walls and putters around coves and inlets. It's mid-afternoon when the two senior partners staying on our vessel, Bob, and Juliann's DA boyfriend, Greg Scott, are at the helm on the command bridge steering the boat and most likely discussing case law and legal theories. The wives of the senior partners, Gladys and Patty, are taking video pictures at the fore deck while Juliann and I are relaxing in the vast and airy cabin salon.

A breeze off the lake blows through the open arcadian doors with a trace of the lake's trout, bass, and carp. My friend and I are drinking merlot and snacking on olives, humus, and pita bread. Through the picture windows, I'm filming the passing cliffs rising from the flooded reservoir like cathedrals, fortresses, and castles, as people like to say.

I bought a new JVC compact camcorder at Tempe Camera specifically for this trip. I'm hoping to catch my husband in a lie or some kind of wrongdoing probably with his accomplice Ms. Marie Antoinette. I suspect she's hiding somewhere at the lake or in the nearby city of Page.

For the sake of Juliann and her DA boyfriend, I have documented and sorted all the circumstantial evidence of Bob's alleged crimes based on what I found in his office and recorded in digital format. I've also been doing a lot of deliberating in my head about my sham marriage of twenty years, one I used to think gave me a secure and almost perfect life. A satisfying world to live in, anyway. But it was Bob's world. Not mine. And I went along with the notion that we didn't want kids and even accepted his betrayal and my night at the casino. I took my dosage of Paxil, saw Dr. Burke-Scott, and moved on. Completely numb to reality. My reality. And Bob's.

Not anymore, Boo Boo Bob, I keep telling myself.

I film a passing island pinnacle that the three o'clock sun ignites red, orange, and pink. Then I set aside my JVC and say to my colleague and friend, "He's lying to me."

"Who?" Juliann asks. As if she doesn't know. Who else would I be talking about? A DUI crackhead client?

I rehash Bob's infidelity but I don't reveal to Juliann how Bob has put my life in jeopardy. Not yet anyway. I need more wine and time to gage just how "close" Juliann and I really are. I don't want her to think I'm delusional so I'm careful about how I put things. I need her firmly on my side along with her DA boyfriend Greg.

"Last month," I continue. "Bob went to DC to help arbitrate questions about some patent or trademark infringement. Or so he claimed. While he was gone I took the opportunity to break into his office."

As Juliann sips her wine, I pause with my story to film a blue heron flying above the lake to an island pinnacle. I'm still not ready to reveal that my husband is a murderer and is planning to kill me. But I want to tell Juliann as much as I can without becoming emotional. "Juliann," I continue. "Bob has a secret life. I discovered evidence of all kinds of sordid crimes, white collar fraud mostly."

"I can't believe this," Juliann says, nearly gasping. "I have so much respect for your husband. Now he sounds like a real cad."

I place my hand on Juliann's arm and say, "Yes. But that's not all, girlfriend." I tell her about Bob's sex room off his office and the blackmail letters from my brother. I pause a moment to gage her reaction, sip my wine, and then bring up the murder of the poor woman from the Combat Zone in Boston and describe in detail all the evidence I've accumulated, albeit it's all circumstantial. "Bob and his cohorts recorded everything on an 8 mm film reel Bob keeps in his desk. I guess it's like a trophy memento for him that he can't bear to destroy."

"Murder?" Juliann asks at the edge of her seat. She takes another sip of merlot and so do I. "Did you watch the film? Does it show your husband actually committing murder?"

"Yes. I had it converted to into video format. They were using drugs and performing perverted sex games, such as strangulation and bondage. My mind can't even go there. The woman died of asphyxiation. It's on the tape. And I believe the three sex pals –my brother, my husband, and his lover Barbara, dumped her body in the Charles and then my brother dropped out of MIT and became a plumber to hide under a new guise."

"Your brother is a plumber?" Juliann asks, seemingly surprised she had never learned this before. She sits back, enthralled with my story and I know in her head she sees Bob as a potential matter for her boyfriend Greg.

Suddenly, Gladys and Patty enter the room to retrieve bottled waters from the refrigerator. They smile at us, make a few banal comments about the fabulous scenery, then proceed up the spiral stairs to the top deck.

"Bob strangled her to death!" I continue once the partners' wives are out of earshot.

"Honey, I'm simply miffed by what you're telling me," Juliann says. "Do you have any proof of a crime? Does the film show that the poor woman actually died?" She sits back intently listening.

I set the wine glass on the table between us. One of the partners at the helm toots the houseboat whistle to warn a skiff of our approach. I'm wondering if Bob is being an ass. "According to a news article that my husband kept," I continue with my story, "they found a murdered woman in the Charles. The sketch of her face resembles the hooker on the 8mm film."

"But is there any proof? Or is it all circumstantial? A collection of news articles isn't evidence of a crime. Perhaps the DA can use the letters from your brother, the plumber, as evidence of blackmail," Juliann suggests.

"There's more, girlfriend," I say and tell her about the life insurance policies on me for two million dollars with Bob as beneficiary. "He's lost money somehow. Got himself in some kind of a financial jam. Possibly with his girlfriend or with my brother."

"Jessie," Juliann says. "Do you have any proof of these attempts on your life? Circumstance is one thing but as any lawyer worth her weight in salt knows, it's the evidence that sways a jury, not speculation or word of mouth."

"Juliann, in the past few months Bob has made at least three attempts on my life and I fear he intends to throw me off a canyon wall during this trip. That's why I didn't want to come here at first, until he let me invite you. And that's why I bought my new camcorder. I plan to

film everything that happens between Bob and me during this lovely weekend. I'm taping everything he says as well, when we're together. So far, Bob is keeping busy at the helm with his buddies and I've been putting him off whenever I can. He knows I'm at odds with him so he's been avoiding me and acting especially nice when we're together in front of other people."

"Jessie," Juliann says. "What are you trying to do here? If all this is true? Do you really believe your life's in danger on this trip? Is mine?"

I pour Juliann and myself some more wine and then relate what happened in July. "Bob knew I was driving to the top of South Mountain to take pictures of the petroglyphs." I tell her about the break failure and how I nearly went over the cliff. But of course, I don't mention John Eldron arriving and taking me to the deer family petroglyphs or that I have no clue how I got home. It's too unreal for lawyer talk. Then I relate how Bob bought me a Glock 9mm to keep in my glovebox.

"Bob insisted I take lessons at Shooter's World," I say. "Which I did. Then late one evening, last July, Bob and I had just drunk a bottle of Chablis and he suggested we clean my gun. I protested, claimed I was too intoxicated, but he insisted I need to know how to clean my gun in any state of mind. *Be prepared* that's his motto."

"He sat with me at the breakfast nook table and grilled me on how to properly clean my Glock, step by step. He didn't hand me the gun. It was already on the table. He sat across from me, gazing at me as he pressed me on. Juliann, he had loaded the gun and had all three safeties disengaged, that was the first thing I noticed in my befuddled state of mind. Bob was intense and demanding. He made me fumble and drop the gun a few times. I was giddy. Giggling. I believe he had drugged me somehow. Slipped something in my wine. I clearly remember Bob telling me to look down the barrel to check if it was clear. *Only an idiot would do that* I told him. Juliann,

Bob was setting me up to shoot myself and make it look like an accident. Like I was a moron newbie gunowner."

"But what if you had shot Bob while you were fumbling around?" Juliann asks.

"I know, he's such a dumb cluck. The strangest of all attempts on my life occurred after the gun incident. Bob played golf with Intel execs on a Sunday." I describe Bob's third attempt on my life by carbon monoxide poisoning. Again, I don't mention how John Eldron showed up and we ended up in Chaco Canyon for the night then I woke up back home in Bob's T-Bird. And of course, I don't mention my powerful deer antler totem which I believe has the power to bring John to me when I need him. I've never revealed to anyone the totem or its secrets. Instead, I tell Juliann that the meter reader happened by and opened the garage door in the nick of time.

"How fucking bizarre!" Juliann exclaims, and she never curses.

"When I confronted Bob about the incident and asked him why the cars were running he claimed he left the garage doors open. He said he put engine cleaning fluid in each car and was letting the engines run a while to clear out the gunk. It was a peculiar incident. No harm no foul. I thought at the time. Bob is simply overworked and he's nearing fifty. But I know better than that. My husband's mind never shuts down and hasn't aged since he was a brilliant boy at Benson High. Even while playing golf, his mind is operating. Calculating, maneuvering, strategizing. Running an operation. And all the while he's feeling smug and good about himself because he always has a logical explanation that is nothing but a fabrication to cover his tracks."

"Did you ever see what he got for you? The gift in his briefcase?" Juliann asks.

"Hell no. There were no gifts. It was just a stupid ploy and I fell for it, literally."

"What did he say about your brakes failing?"

“Oh that. He had no explanation other than to blame it on the mechanics who gave my new car its six-month service check. Lame lame excuses, all the way lame. I didn’t get the big picture until I found the life insurance policies in his home office. Guess he isn’t so brilliant after all if he didn’t think I’d start snooping around when he was gone. Just because I never have before. Bob is a sex fiend and a con man who eats off those less fortunate. Sister Glanzel used to tell us, when I was in fourth grade, *Decisive greed and lust open the first door into hell*.”

“We need to keep quiet about all this,” Juliann cautions me. “Bob could’ve bugged this place. Gladys and Patty are probably listening.” I nervously laugh, knowing she may be right. “Let me be your attorney,” Juliann adds. “I’ll give Greg everything you’ve compiled. You do have it in a safe place?”

“I took digital pictures of all the documents, letters, and records. I have the video tape of the sex orgy and murder. Everything but the porno and sex toys. I didn’t want to dig around his sex parlor. But I believe his porno tapes are bootleg tapes he distributes around the world. Some he produces himself. I’m so repulsed. I don’t want to know what’s involved. It’s too damaging to my psychology. I’ve been sleeping with this pervert for twenty plus years. And I thought we loved each other. Now I feel pitiful, pathetic really.”

“No. Don’t feel that way Jessie. He victimized you. You’re a survivor.” Juliann speaks words she’s used many times before when counselling her drug clients or women of domestic violence. “Where are you keeping the evidence?”

“I put the pictures on a CD locked away at a bank vault Bob knows nothing about. I’m sure he examines my laptop files and my camera, so I carefully deleted everything that might make him suspicious. And I made a copy for you to look at.”

“Bravo, girlfriend. When are you filing for divorce?”

"I've been discussing my best options with Suzanne from law school. Because I haven't worked for most of our marriage, because he caused me emotional harm, I'm going for his jugular in alimony. I now know Bob has secret funds and investments made during our marriage. I'm entitled to it all."

"Except for what's criminally acquired, of course," Juliann says. She scratches her head and asks, "Why did you bother coming on this trip? You should be clearing out of the house. Preparing for a coup d'état."

"I don't know. I haven't completely decided how to proceed. Besides, I love this trip. This beautiful canyon and the aura of the ancients on sacred ground beneath our boat. *Let not the sun go down on your wrath and give place to the devil,* Sister Stevens, my 7th grade teacher used to say. Juliann. I wanted this time with you because I need an ally. A witness for the prosecution."

"Witness? For what?"

"During our previous trips to Lake Powell, Bob and I have always taken at least one day-hike. Three years ago, we hiked to Defiance House to see the Anasazi cliff ruins named after the three-warrior petroglyph along the way. Last year we hiked to Rainbow Bridge. This year Bob wanted to hike in Antelope Canyon but then all those French tourists died two weeks ago when that sudden cloudburst caused a wall of water to flush through the slot canyon."

"Yes, I remember that. They say the skies were clear overhead when the tourists set out for the day."

"That's right. Their guide survived but was badly battered with all his clothes stripped off. That ruled out Antelope Canyon and in a way I was relieved. Not for the tourists, but for myself. I told Bob I didn't want to hike this year but he's now saying he wants to hike around

Horseshoe Bend. Of course, he does, Juliann. It's such an easy place to have an accident." I pause and nibble an olive. I don't tell my friend about my vision at the Casa Grande Ruins. That I was a Hohokam princess and that a warlord pushed me off a cliff. I don't want to bring spiritual talk into a serious and coherent unfolding of facts between lawyers.

Wearing a T-shirt and jammers, the assistant DA Greg Scott suddenly appears on the stairs into the fore salon. He tells Juliann that he'd like to take the speedboat to the Marina then drive into Page to purchase a few things at the Walmart Supercenter.

Before Juliann gets up to join her date, I pull her aside and say, "Girlfriend, let's just see how things develop. Please don't say anything to Greg, yet. I don't want him acting strangely around my husband. Bob can easily pick up on a person's subtle changes in behavior. But keep your eyes open and your ears alert."

A few hours later, while Bob is steering the Kokopelli from a fishing spot in Warm Creek Bay to Rainbow Bridge, Juliann and her DA friend return. As Greg pulls the skiff up to the houseboat, Juliann practically yells to me that she saw Barbara Frank-Lymonne at Walmart. I help them tie up the skiff and then usher my friend to a more private location in the engine room.

"I'm sure it was her," Juliann declares over the engine's murmur. "You've shown me her picture. She was alone. Seemed leery; she kept looking around. Just thought I should tell you." Juliann gives me a friendly hug. "Please let me know that you're all right. We have a lot to sort out when we return to Tempe."

I shake my head, sigh, and say, as we exit the sweltering room, "I knew the bitch would be in Page. Juliann, early this morning I overheard Bob speaking in his over-the-top code on his phone. Just outside our state room. He assumed I was asleep. But I wasn't. No. I've been keeping

my ears and eyes wide open during this trip waiting for him to say or do something incriminating."

"What did you hear him say?" Juliann asks.

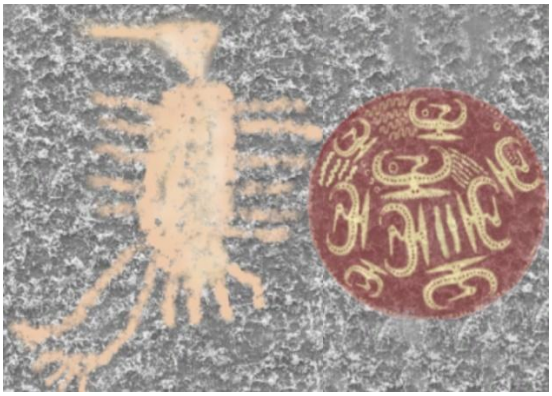
"He asked someone on his phone, presumably Ms. Frank, to meet him at their secret cove, tomorrow at sunset, after he returns from his hike on Horseshoe Bend. Now who else would he ask to come meet him?"

"What about the partners on the other houseboats? Maybe he's planning a sunset fishing competition, or something. What was this code? What do you mean?"

"He uses mathematical terms instead of saying names of people or places. Or animal names. I heard him speaking this way before when I was passing by his office across the hall from our bedroom. The letters between him and Barbara Frank-Lymonne use the same types of coded words. I believe they've worked out a special language between them to help conceal their nefarious intentions."

"Be careful," Juliann warns me as we return to the main deck. "It sounds like this could get ugly. Don't go on that hike alone with this hyena."

"You mean polecat," I say with a wink. "But don't worry. I have no intention of becoming a statistic of my husband and his vamp or remaining the odd man out of their little love triangle."



Chapter 24: Evil will Die in the Hummingbird Sky

600 years earlier

Indolent Moon

The Great River is so mighty that I smell its rushing waters at the canyon rim. On the valley floor, forty Cloud Spirit Sisters welcome back the family band I traveled with and when they learn I'm a Hohokam prophet and see my sun dagger scar, they greet me with adulation.

The eldest sister of the society is an old crone named Song Bird. She takes me to her side and promises to help me settle into their daily routine. The sisters live in small adobe huts that have fire pits and a north hole in the ground to represent where ancient people re-emerged from the Earth's center after the great flood.

The holy sisters refer to the few men in the settlement as their brethren. These holy men stay in their own pit houses and make bows and arrows and flutes and they paint ceremonial sticks and cloud dolls for the ceremonies inside the old kivas. A great midden pile edges the corn fields outside the settlement on the floodplain.

The Cloud Spirit Sisters live lives of worship from the moment they rise before Young Sun to when they sleep at night. At plateaus beside the Great River, they sing and mold clay figurines and vessels to bury with the people of bone or trade with traveling merchants on the

river trade route through the canyons. They tell stories as they weave and sew buckskin and make baskets; they tend gardens and corn fields, and gather seeds to plant and to eat.

Some sisters travel back and forth to their home villages and some are from small bands of related women who come to the canyon for one season or year. But most sisters are permanent residents who tend the graves of ancient people in the cliff dwellings. When they dance in the open kivas with cloud doll spirit messengers, they invoke Tlaloc for rain, a bountiful harvest, and a prosperous, healthy long-life. For their dance and songs, the brethren make the flute music of Ek Chaun. At the ancient graves under adobe houses abandoned long ago, the sisters sing to the people of bones who are the spirits that inhabit the Earth.

Eighteen solar cycles have passed since my arrival in the settlement of Cloud Spirit Sisters. After I watch another Indolent Frog Moon, I die in my sleep.

The sisters and their brethren climb up ladders and paths to the rectangular adobe homes of the ancient cliff dwellers. One brethren carries my corpse on his back. Inside the adobe room of the most prominent house on the side of the cliff, the holy men have prepared my grave under the floor.

A young sister holds the sacred torch as two men lower my corpse into the pit and face me toward the river so my spirit will view the canyon floor. My sisters and their brethren want me to watch over their settlement.

The ten sisters who have climbed up the cliff place offerings in my burial pit. They have brought me gifts of jewelry and cloth, a metate and mano, knives, sparkling crystals, bone awls, and eighteen clay vessels with animal totems. The sisters have dusted my body with sacred powders and ash.

Before they cover my grave, an elder sister places the Mimbres plate of Pregnant Deer at my head while everyone chants songs that reverberate in the rectangular room. A holy man lights a cigar and blows smoke into my grave to make my cloud spirit appear. Then he takes a stone and breaks a small hole in my totem name plate of Pregnant Deer and my cloud spirit escapes into the spirit world of the sky and Earth.

"Like the ancients," my holy sisters sing, "she emerges from the Earth hole. Great Spirit Creator leads her away. The cloud maidens in their corn dresses dance around her like thunder clouds around a towering mountain butte. The wings of Hummingbird Messenger flutter high in the sky and hover over Earth. She whirls above us like a dust devil and she speaks of new corn. When evil harms the spirit messenger, evil will die in the Hummingbird Sky.

Chapter 25: The Three Warriors Hideaway Cove

600 years later

On Monday, Bob and I have the Kokopelli entirely to ourselves. The senior partners and their wives have taken the speedboat to fish for rainbow trout and largemouth bass at a distant spot on the lake, a favorite fishing hole of the most senior partner, Patti's husband Mr. Fremont. Juliann and Greg are out jet skiing for the day and are planning to eat dinner at the marina and spend the night at the Hilton in Page, the only hotel in town with a vacancy due to a cancellation. We suspect that our friend Barbara is staying there and Juliann wants to see what she can learn. She also Juliann plans to start discussing with Greg my evidence against Bob, Barbara, and my brother and wants to be out of earshot from everyone else on the Kokopelli. I gave her a copy of everything I've compiled and told her to go ahead and share it with Greg.

As expected, Bob wants to hike to Horseshoe Bend. "We have two more days and can go tomorrow," I tell him at the breakfast bar on the top deck. "I want to relax on the Kokopelli today since we've got the boat to ourselves. Besides, I'm having period cramps this morning."

"No!" Bob vehemently protests like he's pounding a court gavel. "I've planned this hike for months. Years. You know I've always wanted to go to Horseshoe Bend."

Obviously, I've hampered my husband's little plan. I can see in his eyes that he's trying to regroup and figure out what to do. He and his paramour are counting on my falling off the cliff today and their collecting my death funds. Maybe they feel it's their last hope. And Bob has already arranged for Barbara to meet him at the houseboat tonight at sunset. But I'm out to foil their caper and when Ms. Antoinette shows up, she'll be in for a big surprise. Bigger than the one she and my dear husband gave me when I returned home from Portland a year ago.

"Why do you want to take me to Horseshoe Bend, Bob?" I ask with a bit of sarcasm. "It's one of the most treacherous canyons in the world? What do you have in mind?"

“You can’t always have your way, Missy,” Bob replies. He really has no retort and he’s behaving uncharacteristically angry as if he’s about to flare up into a heated courtroom tactic. He’s on the losing side. I see his intention to murder me deep in the blackness of his pupils. He thinks he’s in charge of my life. My death. That he owns Ms. Messy Jessie Bressie. He runs the show. And now I’m foiling his darkest most devious intentions. It’s there. In his eyes. My husband is not just smug and arrogant anymore. He’s a desperate man. But he can’t force me to go on this hike nor can he explain to me the urgency of his plot.

To pacify his anger, I suggest we relax on the boat and go hiking tomorrow. “We could have Champaign, cheese, crackers, grapes, like Cleopatra and Anthony. Like Louis the Fourteenth and Marie Antoinette.” He doesn’t understand my jibe but he seems to relent. Has to.

So, instead of the day hike, a disappointed Bob tells me, “All right, if I can hit that,” he pinches my buttocks like he did when I was a parochial student in Sister Glanzel’s fourth-grade class.

Bob abruptly grabs his Nikia off the breakfast bar and gets up. “Where are you going?” I ask though I know the answer. He has to call his lover to tell her there’s been a change of plans.

“Just got to pee, boo boo,” he says with a shallow voice.

“With your phone?”

“No. There’s no reception out here anyway,” he says trying to squirm out of something he now has no control over. I’m in control because I know what he’s up to and what’s at stake. My life. His life. His scheming and financial wellbeing. And besides, I know that there’s cellular reception, although it’s spotty. I heard him talking on the phone early yesterday morning, making his arrangements with lover girl. I wonder if he can use the boat’s ham radio to reach Barbara, but then I tell myself that Barbara would have to be in a boat or at a radio station and I believe

she's staying at the Hilton in Page. Probably relaxing in the spa, having her nails done, her hair coifed, her colon cleansed.

"Can I see your phone?" I ask.

"Why? Don't you trust me?" Bob asks.

I don't tell my husband that I obviously don't trust him. I'm not prepared to give away my position of control. He doesn't need to know that I'm suspicious of him and his conniving ways. "I just want to check out the reception," I SAY. "I don't believe you. I think you can make calls from the boat. In fact, I heard you talking on your phone in the bridge just yesterday."

"So, what," he says as he stands beside me at the bar. "I was talking to my partner Mr. Grant on the other boat. The Salado . . ."

"Then why didn't you use the boat's radio?" I ask. "It's what you use to call Mr. Fremont on the speedboat."

"And just what are you worried about? Miss Lady." Bob asks.

I can tell I'm pushing him into a corner and he's about to lash out at me, so I pull back and say, "Nothing. Bob. I'm just playing with you." Then, when he's not expecting it, I grab hold of his phone and look at the cellular bars. I stand from the bar, as if to find better reception by walking around, and purposely trip and hurl Bob's phone into the hot tub.

"Jessie!" Bob yells. "What the hell are you doing?"

"I accidently tripped. Don't you care?" I pick myself up and retrieve Bob's ruined Nikia from the water. "Let me dry it off," I say but when I look back at my husband I see he's halfway down the spiral stairs to the salon head. I know he'll try to radio his lover but I doubt he'll reach her. And he can't use my phone because I've hidden it and told him I left it at home. Everyone

else is gone for the day and won't be back until tonight. I'm not worried about what he'll try to do because I'm on to him and knowledge is power. Like the totem in my pocket.

By noon, later in the day, Bob is at the helm and propelling the houseboat to an inlet with a narrow beach before towering cathedral cliffs. Bob calls the beautiful cove the Three Warriors Hideaway. I've never been to this cove with Bob but I have the feeling he's been here before with Barbara because he steers the Kokopelli right to it. I believe it's where he's planning to meet Barbara tonight.

While my husband anchors the boat, I stand alone on the deck in the penetrating sunshine and think about Lake Powell's stunning beauty covering the ancient communities that have disappeared forever—unless future scuba diving archaeologists explore the lake's bottom. But even then, how many ancient ruins and artifacts has Lake Powell eroded away?

I really don't want to be around Bob because he's been griping all day about missing our hike. When he approaches me at the deck, he pinches my rear and again asks about "hitting that." I suggest that we first spend the afternoon at the top deck bar, listen to music, drink chilled Korbel, and enjoy sandwiches.

He agrees and we head to the bar. While Bob seems to be relaxing to the Doobie Brothers, I keep his champaign glass filled and offer him many toasts hoping he gets drunk. "To us," I say. "To you and your career. To the Kokopelli." Bob seems to be enjoying my frivolity, which puts me more at ease. When he's preoccupied with *Long train runnin'* and *Listen to the Music*, I empty my own drink over the rail into the lake. I need to have a clear sober mind because Bob probably wants me to get drunk so he can easily undo me by some means other than

tossing me off Horseshoe Bend. That way he'll accomplish his mission in time for his rendezvous and it won't matter that he couldn't warn his paramour about the change of plans.

At about 3 PM Bob suggests we go to our stateroom and get it on. "Let's sit in the hot tub first," I suggest in an effort to delay Bob from taking me to our stateroom.

"Thought you had your period," he reminds me.

"I use tampons, dummy."

He touches his groin, a hint of what I have in store. Sometimes, men are so easy to manipulate, I think, when it comes to sex. Every hormone they have bombards them, more so than any woman with PMS.

Because no one is around and won't be returning until well after sunset, Bob climbs into the hot tub naked. The water gurgles and Bob unwinds to the music as I place my tape recorder behind a fake potted Philo plant and begin preparing kamikaze shots at the bar. Then I join Bob in the hot tub, also naked except for the deer antler charm which I've made into a necklace with leather straps. I want to have it on me today at all times. Bob hardly notices it because I usually wear a necklace of some sort, but now he asks, "The Indian give you that?" I don't answer.

Months ago, Bob and I stopped talking about my casino night and John Eldron and we almost never speak about spiritual matters. He wouldn't understand my thoughts and beliefs about the totem's power anyway. He isn't Catholic anymore and he knows nothing about Native American spirituality. He's never even asked me about the totems and symbols on my table top art. Guess he's just too busy and preoccupied with himself. And I'm certainly not going to tell him I wear my deer antler eagle totem for protection against him and use its powers to help me outmaneuver his schemes.

I continue making toasts and when Bob's not looking I empty my shots into the gurgling tub of hot water. I'm not sure why I need my husband sloshed, maybe so we can't have sex. It's just no good. *I can't give my body to a man I detest* I'm thinking as I watch him drink down his kamikaze shots like a good old boy. He wants to be buzzing when he balls his wife. He craves the "highs" of life. And he can find no way to be with his paramour until she meets with him after he finishes me off in some way.

"You're acting strange," Bob says, unexpectedly. "Are you playing games with me Miss Lady?"

"How so? Daddy Boo Boo Bear." I splash him playfully.

"What?" He acts surprised. It's a name I've never called him before but I can't resist.

Bob suddenly steps out of the hot tub and dries off. What does he have in mind? I wonder and look around to see if there's an electrical appliance, a small tv, toaster, lamp, that he might toss in the hot tub to electrocute me and make it look like an accident.

"Too long in the tub?" I tease. "How are you going to get some of this now. Your willy's all shriveled up."

"He's got to pee. Then he's yours." Bob is starting to ramble in his speech and I'm feeling reassured. "Are you going to film us with your new camcorder?" he adds. "Have you changed your mind about porno? Messy Jessie Bressie."

I wonder why Bob is using the name Randy called me when I was a little girl. Is my husband that drunk? Or was that somehow a slip of his brilliant mind. "Sometimes you treat me like my brother did," I say. "Rude and unapologetic. A stuck-up creep who belittles me. Why?"

"Jessie, where's this coming from? You must be drunk."

“Randy never told me why he quit MIT,” I decide to say. Maybe I am a little drunk. “You never told me why either. Why?” I ask before Bob slips away to use the head. I can’t help myself. I want to hear what he has to say.

“What?” Bob stops at the spiral stairs. “Your brother and I haven’t been friends for years. He wasn’t even at our wedding.”

“Randy was your best man. Did you forget?”

Bob squirms his way from the conversation and says, “After that we weren’t friends.” His words fade as he heads below deck to the head.

“Let’s go for a dip,” I yell after him. “You can pee in the lake while you’re swimming.”

After Bob’s gone, I turn off the tape recorder, grab my camcorder, and slip away to the bridge to start the engine. A few years back, Bob demonstrated how to operate the houseboat but I’ve never really steered it anywhere. That privilege belongs almost exclusively to the Goldstein partners. To the men. Now I want the boat’s exhaust to pollute the air at the stern where I’m hoping to entice my husband to swim. It’s an idea that simply popped into my head like a lot of other notions on this Labor Day weekend. I had recently read about two young brothers succumbing to the toxic fumes at the back of their family’s houseboat on Lake Powell.

With the engine in idle, I run to the second level aft deck and sit on a deck chair next to the slide into the lake.

As the afternoon sun approaches the west in the hot turbulent air, I film the small beach along the shore and the scattering of a few clouds above the towering cliffs. Then I call for Bob.

He soon appears dressed in his swim trunks and deck shoes. It seems he’s too drunk to notice the engine humming. I ask him to go down the slide while I’m filming him. He hesitates,

as if he suspects I'm up to something when it's him who is plotting to kill me. It's hardly my fault if he's unaware of the running engine and can't detect the odorless fumes.

"Let's go down the slide together," he suggests. "You can sit on my lap."

"No no. I want to film you, boo bear." Now I'm certain my words sound sarcastic although I'm trying to sound sweet and a little bit drunk. If he thinks I'm drunk then he'll be less likely to detect my suspicions.

I flatter him about his body, things he likes to hear from me. A drunk Bob is easy to puff up and I rarely see him this way. He doesn't drink at home unless we're celebrating something. Even at parties, he's always been careful about how much liquor he consumes. The truth is, over the past twenty years, I've only known a façade of who my husband really is. We've argued like any married couple but he was never abusive or violent toward me. Lustful, yes. Does he have any addictions other than sex? Not that I'm aware of. Yet, according to the 8mm film he evidently enjoys using drugs and has a violent side that killed the prostitute from the Combat Zone. Now he intends to murder me out of desperation for the insurance money. I wonder if he's feigning that he's drunk. I don't know any more what's a ruse or what's real.

The Doobie Brother's music loudly plays from above as we stand on the second aft deck. *Jesus is just all right with me . . .*

I run my hand along his chest and feel a chilling repugnant sensation. He believes I'm trying to arouse him when I'm really thinking about pushing him overboard so that his head hits the deck below. But no. He won't turn me into a murderer. And I won't become his second homicide victim. Unless there are others women he's murdered which could very well be. Another secret scandal for his lockbox, another trophy keepsake saying *I've evaded justice once more*.

“You’ll like what mama has in store for you,” I suggest and walk away from the slide to start filming. “Now go down, big man. I want to tape you in the water before the cliffs at sunset.”

Again, he gives me a hesitant look. But his own bravado lures him onto the slide. He feels mighty and strong, perhaps struck with a new idea of his own. A plan to cause me an accident before his girlfriend shows up. “Start filming,” he says and slides into the 80-degree water.

“Show off your prowess handsome man.” Now I know I’m sounding sarcastic. But it seems Bob is game. Is his brilliant mind slipping that much? Is he so naïve he thinks I’m sincere? Is he just drunk? Or is he tricking me?

“Are you filming this, Jess?” he asks as he paddles in the water.

“Over there. Toward the sun,” I say and motion him closer to the boat. “I have a filter on the lens. It’ll be a magical video; one you could use if you ever run for president.”

He doesn’t hear my joke as he swims toward the stern of the houseboat. He still seems unaware that the engine is quietly murmuring or if he notices the sound, maybe he doesn’t know about the toxic fumes.

I hear quacking Mallards land at clumps of grass and twigs along the sandy lakeshore. They seem to be flying from the clouds accumulating above the cliffs.

“Closer,” I say while filming and pointing to the far shore of the cove.

He laughs and complies. “Come down below to the first deck,” he calls.

The sun is nearing the cliffs and making the clouds shine a brilliant silver and yellow. I walk to the fore deck on the first level and film my husband before the beach cove and the twisted rocky cliffs.

“Okay, Jess,” he says. “I’m ready for you to join me.”

“I’m filming and want to catch the sun setting in the background.” I coax my husband from the back of the boat so he won’t grab my leg out from under me and let my head hit the deck and then make sure that I drown. Perhaps he’ll spill a drink on the wooden deck, vodka, orange liquor, and lime. He’ll make it appear that I slipped on my own spilt kamikaze. “You’ll be a handsome silhouette, a god among the ruins and cliffs of Glen Canyon.”

“Ruins?” He looks around as if searching for an archaeological site. As he paddles his reflection vacillates in the water. Waves brim outward from his movements as I wish him well, in my mind. I have no evil intent in my heart. I’m not a schemer, plotter, or a manipulator. But I’m driven. Purposeful. Some powerful force, perhaps the totem around my neck, is propelling me forward. A hidden undercurrent is steering me to do what I’m doing, like the sisters at St. Cecelia guiding my young mind. “Splash like you’re having fun,” I say. “And I’ll show you what fun is before everyone returns.”

He swims on his back toward the deck where I stand. The engine’s purr is almost silent. The quiet of the lake is like the quiet of the desert except for the hum of a passing motorboat and the shout of someone anchored in a passage beyond our hidden little cove. The voice echoes off the canyon walls as if the ancients buried deep in the water are calling to make themselves known and heard. To tell us they haven’t vanished forever.

As I’m filming I notice a cumulous cloud forming above the cliffs and stretching over the lake. I think about those poor French tourists who died in the slot canyon because a storm had suddenly welled up in the otherwise clear blue skies.

Chapter 26: A Sudden Pulse Storm

Labor Day 1997

Jessie June Ellars

Bob suddenly shouts from the water, "This is enough! Jessie, you come out here this instant!"

He will drown me, I keep thinking. No one is around to witness what I plan to do and that is not to have an accident. If Bob succeeds in his scheme, he will cleverly cover up his crime. His brilliant mind has been doing this for decades in consort with his equally brilliant paramour. There will be no witnesses to my murder. Only Juliann's hearsay evidence concerning what I told her about Bob's intention to kill me for the insurance money. But Juliann will find an exception to the rule. She'll say that what I told her was an "excited utterance," or a "present sense exception" or something. A statement made under the belief of an impending death. And she has copies of all the circumstantial evidence I accumulated including the MetLife policies. She and Greg will certainly have enough to take down Bob, Barbara, and hopefully my brother.

"The sun hasn't set," I say to my husband who is vigorously paddling in the lake. "I want a perfect video of you swimming when the sun hits the mountain cliff and lights up those clouds."

"It's too late for pictures," I hear my husband shout. "I think a pulse storm is forming and about to burst. I'm coming out."

"No," I plead with my camcorder pointed at him. "The cloud hovering over the cliffs will make a very dramatic shot, a perfect backdrop. Look at the striking colors. Like gold and silver brushstrokes on white."

Are you playing games? I think I hear Bob yelling. But his voice is fading and my mind is wandering. I think about the ancients who lived among these cliffs 600 years before congress created the lake. I think about their designs on baskets and pottery buried in their graves. Artifacts and totems to sustain them in the afterlife. I touch the totem around my neck to invoke its many powers.

"*Jessie!"* Bob yells. "Get in here now, you little Redheaded bitch."

Suddenly, wind gusts start picking up from the storm cloud's downdraft and I am feeling drops of rain, or maybe it's the wind blowing water off of the lake. I scan my camcorder back to Bob. He isn't moving for some reason. He isn't trying to swim back to the boat. And he isn't speaking or looking at me. It's as if he's stuck in the lake. Mired like the animals La Brea Tar Pits.

Off in the distance, before the channel into this secluded cove my husband calls the Three Warriors Hideout, I see a lone jet ski approaching. I quickly realize that this has to be Barbara arriving to meet up with her man because her blond hair is blowing behind her. She's wearing a skimpy bikini probably because that's what Bob likes.

As the storm rallies around the cove and starts sending droplets of hail, I look back to Bob who remains in place but now I see through the camcorder a panicked look on his face.

I set aside my camcorder and look back at my husband. All around him a sort of looking glass forms allowing me to see the lake's bottom. I see crumbled dwellings, graves, kivas, and boulders with ancient symbols and totems. Young vibrant spirit women begin to emerge from under their submerged dwellings and graves. They're clad in gossamer buckskins with long flowing hair that covers their faces like sea grass. I watch them rise through the water like effervescent moonbeams.

Are they summoned or have they been disturbed? I ask myself then realize a few of them are holding Bob to his place at the lake's surface and not allowing him to swim back to the boat. Poor Bob, I'm thinking. Does he also see these spirits? Does he even know what's happening? Or does he think he's having a cramp from all those kamikazes?

Now a perfect white anvil has formed above the cathedral cliffs and the cold air is causing a downdraft of hail that loudly pelts the lake and the deck of the boat where I'm sitting. The ice pellets sting my legs but I can't retreat inside. I have to watch what's happening. Perhaps these spirits have me pinned down as well.

Through the sound of the bombarding hail on the wooden deck, I see my husband struggling in turbulent waters. I think about that poor woman from the Combat Zone struggling in one last effort to breathe, to survive, before she succumbed to the hands of my husband. I cover my camcorder with a beach towel to keep it dry. I don't want to film what I'm witnessing. I don't want to create any evidence that I witnessed what seems to be unfolding. I sit back and look at the waves splashing and billowing around Bob. He notices Barbara approaching him in her jet ski. I can barely hear him shouting her name.

The jet ski speeds through the hail falling diagonally in the wind. But Barbara and Bob appear distinctive and clear to me, as clear as the spirit women rising in the lake. I hear Barbara screaming, "Bobby Ellars" and see the spirits raising their hands as if in praise. On long fingers they wear turquoise rings the color of the moon's dark patches. With the fumes, the storm, and the ancient spirits of the lake, I know Bob and his lover don't stand a chance. The power of my totem is too strong.

As the hail, wind, and waves intensify, lightning begins to strike the lake. I become drenched as I smell the turbulent air and taste the splashing storm. It's bitter and acrid. But there is no odor from the boat. Like the spirits of Lake Powell, the fumes are diaphanous and deadly.

I watch the spirit women embrace Bob and begin pulling him under. His head bobs up and down until he is no longer visible to me on the lake's turbulent surface. At the same time, the looking glass closes and the choppy waters turn opaque, the color of black obsidian.

Out of nowhere a long bolt of lightning strikes near the Kokopelli. I feel the charge run up my legs. My hair stands up. I know I must retreat inside to be safe. But I can't move myself from my deck chair.

I helplessly watch Barbara's jet ski pull up to where Bob has disappeared into the lake. Another bolt of lightning strikes and her jet ski ignites into a brilliant blue and white ball of flames knocking Barbara into the lake. I don't know if the lightning killed her but the hands of the spirit women reappear as they reach for Barbara's shoulders and head. They wrench her under and I know they're pulling her down to their watery graves that contain coil pottery with totems of power.

Almost as quickly as it appeared, the hail lets up and the pulse storm plays itself out. Like an apparition, the setting sun emerges from behind the clouds and illuminates the cathedral cliffs edging the cove.

At the shore, one hundred feet beyond where the spirits of Glen Canyon pulled Bob and his lover into the lake, a mule deer approaches the beach for an evening drink. "The sun is nearly set," I say aloud as if Bob can hear me although I know he's gone and so is Barbara. "I can watch it now without it blinding me. I can point my camera at it without ruining the lens."

The lake becomes eerily quiet after the pulse storm dissipates. Although I'm chilled and soaking wet, I pick up my camcorder and zoom-in on the deer, the gentle creature of prey, the hunter's game. As I'm filming the doe take a drink something suddenly alerts her. In fear, she raises her head and perks her ears to listen in all directions. It's dangerous to drink at the lake's edge during twilight when predators lie in wait.

Through my zoom lens I scout the landscape to see what has alarmed her. At the crest of a hill above the beach cove, the man from Sacaton stands with his bow and arrow. His Harley Bobcat sits parked beside him. Or is it a horse? He wears his vest of patches and at his hip is his MSI knife sheathed in black leather.

I look away from the lens to clear my eyes in case I'm seeing an illusion. I touch my deer antler totem and when I zoom back on the hill above the cove, I see him again but now he wears an Army camouflage jacket and has green and black paint on his face. John Eldron is "kill man on point."

In the dimming light I move my camera back to the deer. She has resumed drinking at the lake shore. Then I swing the aperture up the rocky slop and spot him again. Now he appears as a bare-chested warrior in buckskin leggings and war paint, an Anasazi cliff dweller along the Colorado Plateau. I stare at him for a long while until it's almost dark. He looks at me and aims his bow and arrow at the deer. He shoots but the mule deer quietly slips away.

A burning sensation strikes me in the gut. I set my camcorder aside and touch my belly and feel moisture. In the dim light at the boat's stern, I see dark red on my hand. Blood. I'm bleeding as if from an arrow in my gut. But there is no arrow and I feel no pain. When I smell and taste the blood on my fingers I somehow know it's pregnant blood. I also know the father

cannot be my husband. Bob Ellars was sterile. It has to be the man from Sacaton who has gifted me with a child. Or it is a gift to me from the Creator himself?

A sudden breeze wafts across the deck and scrubs the air of any exhaust fumes from the idling engine. I smell the scent of the lake and the pure air that comes after a passing storm.

Bob and his lover are gone. Probably never to be found. Their obituaries will conclude they mysteriously died by drowning. And I know my friends Juliann and Greg will somehow take down my brother as well.

Now I must turn off the engine before the partners pull up in the speedboat. But before I leave, I remain on the deck chair and watch the diminishing light of the sun reflect the cathedral cliffs onto the lake and into the depths beneath me where the spirit women dwell in submerged houses.