

THIRTEEN & DRINKING BLOOD

1890

By Author Jonathan David

Created by Author Jonathan David

WARNING This book contains controversial topics that some humans may consider offensive to some readers.

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*Bloodborns can make machines; metalborns can make
blood.*

1 | New Horizons

Monday, October 13th, 1890

Journal,

Just before sunset, I saw the strangest lights in the sky. Streams of yellow, red, and orange stretched across the full horizon without beginning or end. Mother said it must have been one of them space rocks the scientists from the university talk about. She says it is an omen—a good one, I hope. I like to think it is a sign that love is on the horizon for me; how I long to meet the one meant for me. I will be thirteen soon. November 13th—less than a month away. Mother says I will be able to be with child soon. My womanhood is approaching. I am a bit scared about becoming a woman. I am eager to feel the touch of a man in wedlock but still afraid to walk away from my mother and father's comfort. They say I should be readying myself for a man. Father wishes for me to marry one who can live on the farm and help with chores. Or he says: to marry into wealth so that I can elevate our bloodline into a less labor-intensive life. But I love the farm; I couldn't imagine living any other way.

I spent the afternoon in the meadow of our plot's west side, reading and enjoying the breeze. A doe and her fawns sauntered past me as I rested in the

grass. The mother was so close I could have touched her, but I didn't want to frighten her away. They looked at such peace while grazing. Then the light shot clear across the sky in the blink of an eye, and they scurried off. The strange thing appeared to land far off into the distance, crashing into something. One could hear the impact from far away. I hope to seek it out tomorrow – if possible. I could not make an accurate measure of how far it is from home. I will inspect tomorrow after chores.

Wednesday, October 15th, 1890

Journal,

The weather grows colder each day, with winter on its way. I need to knit some warmer clothes before I make my way to inspect the object and where it landed. Yesterday the weather did not permit for travels. Mother and I spent the better half of the day working cream into fat for butter molds. Father will be pleased. I don't think he loves anything on this green earth more than buttered bread with mother's wild blueberry jam. Father says: the blueberry harvest was the largest he's seen since he was my age. Said he'd be turning purple by spring with all of Mother's jam. I hope she jarred some for pie. I prefer pie to jam.

Thursday, October 16th, 1890

Journal,

I tried to make my way to the object but was unable to find anything. It must have landed somewhere far-far out in the distance. I was so hoping to see something from another world. Pastor Dave says it was likely an angel coming to check in on us, making sure we are treating our friends, family, and neighbors better than we treat ourselves. He is a good man, always worrying about everyone in town and how they are doing. I wonder if he would be a good fit for me. Can he even lay with a woman? I am unsure of the rules of the church. I would hate to learn that he must remain celibate to leave this place without passing on his good-natured ways. I should bring him some of mother's jam. If he likes it as much as father – maybe that would be the sign I am looking for.

Tuesday, October 28th, 1890

Journal,

A strange man has been riding his horse on the outskirts of our lands the past week. He only seems to ride as the sun goes down. Father says he must be the new neighbor that bought up land on the other side of the creek. He looks so mysterious out there

riding all alone. I'd like to meet him and learn about where he comes from and whether he has a wife or children. His horse looks beautiful. She is dark brown with a long wisp of hair hanging over her head. I think I will take Betsy out next time I see him. Mother says to invite him for supper if he is willing. I believe mother wants me wedded more than I – well, I don't know if that is entirely true. Marriage is all I think about. She does want grandchildren, though. Poor mother couldn't bear any more children after me. The doctor said she got torn up inside and that I am lucky to even be here today. I cannot wait to give her grandchildren and grow our family.

Saturday, November 1st, 1890

Journal,

Father has given me the day off of chores, and the weather is quite forgiving. I hope to ride out and meet the new neighbor later. I missed him the past few nights. He has been riding along the creek that divides our land each evening but not for the past few. I hope to see him tonight. Maybe he had been reluctant to venture out due to the cold. Tonight, the temperature will drop again, but the day will stay warm until sunset. Father says it is a sign of a harsh winter when the oncoming days are warmer than

the passing days. He likes to say, “For every summer day amid fall, an extra week of winter is paid by spring.” Then mother tells him to hush and says, “Unexpected days of warmth is nature’s way of reminding us how delicate we are, and to prepare for what’s to come.” They sometimes bicker in silly ways. It can be adorable. They are still in love. I hope to find the same. Father says: I just need to follow my heart—and I will, but to be careful not to confuse the heart’s desire with the loins desire.

I saddled Betsy, and we walked down to the creek and waited until sunset. Finally, he and his animal came galloping through his meadows up to the stream. He came right up and across from me, where his horse can drink from an easily accessible vein of water. He stared at me for a moment. At least, I think he did. It was just getting dark, and the sun was setting behind him so that I couldn’t see much more than his body’s shape. I wanted to say something, but nothing came out. I suppose I am a bit shy or nervous around this man. After his horse finished drinking, he turned around and went back off into the fields. I will try to reencounter him tomorrow. I wish to see his face.

Wednesday, November 5th, 1890

Journal,

Each night I have gone out to the creek in search of the unknown man. Father has also walked up to his ranch to try and make his acquaintance but was unsuccessful. I haven't seen him since he came up to the creek – until early this morning. Father wants me to get up extra early to make sure the ground isn't starting to frost. We have some crops that need to be pulled before the frost begins, but he wants them to stay connected to the plant as long as possible. When I was out checking the grounds, I saw the man standing in the middle of the east field. He was just standing there. It's a good thing father wasn't awake yet, for he may have gone after him with his rifle. I wonder what he was doing out there on our land. It was bizarre. He didn't even move when he saw me. He just stood there watching me and then turned around and looked off into the distance. I didn't know what to do, so I went back inside until the sun came up. Do you think he wanted me to come to him? I had the strangest sensation that he wanted me to go to him. It was almost as if I could hear his thoughts telling me to come to him. He again stood with the sun to his back. The light in my eyes made it so I couldn't get a clear look at him.

Friday, November 7th, 1890

Journal,

This afternoon, we are going into Fort Pierre city. Father is to speak with the townspeople about what is to come of our land now that South Dakota has been admitted to the united states' union. He fears the government is to try and steal our plot from us. It is a lengthy trip. It is also the first time father is allowing me to leave the land – outside of some extended riding. I expect he wishes for me to meet some friends of his. He has a brother that lives there, and we are to take up residence with him when we arrive—staying for the weekend. Mother is also coming.

Should I tell them about the man standing on our land? I don't think they would leave if I did. I don't think he means harm. I don't think he even knew he was on our land. It is difficult to know where one's land starts and the other ends without a map. Besides, I think he was there for me. He must have been. It is the second time he has approached me. But why doesn't he come further than to just stand there? I suppose he is thinking the same of me: ("Why doesn't she come to me instead of just stand there?") Mother tells me that men are often thinking the same thing we are, but it is perceived as the opposite. She said to me: if I feel a certain way about a man and he is near me, he feels the same way

regardless of what message I think he is trying to send. She then says, “I should take charge because men may be strong on the outside, but they are weak on the inside, just the opposite of women. We live in a physical and non-physical world where men have outer strength and women have inner strength. That is why God gave the female spirit the duty of bearing children—a man’s spirit could never handle the physically demanding responsibility.”

Continued- We are now at father’s brother’s house. Uncle Tommy is what father calls him. It is the first time I have met him since I was too young to remember, says father. His home is interesting; it is not on farm as ours is. He has two daughters, Cynthia and Kathryn, and a son, Johnny. Johnny is cute. He is my age or a year older, maybe. Cynthia and Kathryn are twins and are older than Johnny. They do not look alike but were born the same day and from the same womb. Uncle Tommy says I am the spitting image of my mother when she was only a few years older than I. Mother and father wedded when she was fifteen. I’m not sure how old Father was – just that he is older than Mother. Uncle Tommy is younger than father but was married before him. I don’t know his wife; they do not speak of her much, and I don’t wish to upset uncle Tommy by asking about her. Something must have

happened to her. It is just the four of them living together.

The town is fascinating. The people have roads made of stones weaving through it and around their homes. It hurts Betsy's feet, so I walk her off on the grass, but the townspeople do not like this. I don't think I like the city. All the people so close together causes too much friction between them. Space is healthy, mother says.

Monday, November 10th, 1890

Journal,

We spent the whole weekend with Uncle Tommy and his kids and are now preparing to head back home. I don't know where to call home now. I never thought to have to label where we live. Father says he has confirmed that our land will stay our land, and he also found out the name of our mysterious neighbor. I think father was worried that the neighbor is trying to take on our land, but after talking to the townspeople, he learned that he isn't. Father says his name is Alexandru and he is not from the Americas. Maybe this is why he did not speak to me. He must not know the language. When we get home, I am going to find him and talk to him.

Tuesday, November 11th, 1890

Journal,

Father is beside himself. After our long travels back from Fort Pierre, we all went straight to bed. When we woke, a few of the cattle were not in the stalls waiting to be milked. They never wander off when it is time to be milked unless we don't show up. One time daddy and mother were sick, and I was too young to milk the cattle, so they all went out into the fields to graze, and their milk just leaked right out the teat onto the soil. We had a good crop the following year when we planted at that graze. Since then, father pours any milk we have leftover on the seasons grazed sites.

Continued- Father is now really beside himself. I am too. We found two of the cows out in the field, and they were lifeless—dead. Father tied them up and dragged them back to the barn to see if their meat can be salvaged. When he opened them up, he didn't find any blood. He hasn't the faintest clue as to what happened to them. Except, he thinks it was the legendary Maskelmela beast the Natives warned the settlers about when they took the land from them. They told them: Those who choose to live on this land choose to be cursed. Mother says: It's just misunderstood superstition. But now, she seems

unsure after seeing the cows. She told me the story—she said, “The tail tells of a visitor who comes from the sky, riding a snake made of fire. The creature then takes up residence in the woods and absorbs the life and flowing blood of whatever encounters it.” The lights in the sky, and the cows, seem a bit too coincidental, says father. I don’t know – maybe it is an animal that attacked them, and the blood just dried up. Father did say there were marks on the cows—some type of teeth or claw marks. Puncture wounds – deep puncture wounds he said they were. None like he has ever seen; six of them all lined up down the side of the neck in a row. I don’t know.

Wednesday, November 12th, 1890

Journal,

Something strange is going on as of late. The missing blood from those animals seems to have found its way into my bed. Mother says I am now a woman, and I will bleed each lunar cycle until I lay with man. Is this some sort of punishment or curse? I don’t think it was coincidental that the cows lost their blood, and I come to age the next day. And tomorrow is my birthday; what a gift. It will just be me, father, and mother tomorrow. Father went off to try and speak with Alexandru and see if he had

noticed anything strange while we were gone. Alexandru and Clara. Clara and Alexandru. Mr. and Mrs. ... I wonder what his last name is.

My stomach hurts today. I think it is because of the cycle. Mother gave me the day off of chores. I have been laying on my bed without sheets. It isn't as comfortable – kind of itchy. Something keeps poking me too. I think it is the quill of a feather. I don't know how we can clean this. The blood has soaked clean through to the floor. I have been scooching myself off to the side, so I am not sitting on it. Mother says it will dry, and we can cover it up with heavy blankets in a day or two, and in the summer, we can make a new one with the chicks down. I wonder if father will let me go for a ride today. I'd like to go out past the creek again and look for the object—see if there is any evidence of the Maskelmela.

Thursday, November 13th, 1890

Journal,

It is my birthday today. It was nice. Mother made me a pie from some blueberries she jarred. She had them hidden away so it would be a surprise for me. It was—I was excited, and it tasted so good. I needed something tasty after yesterday. Father never found

out anything about the cows. Alexandru is still yet to be seen outside of my encounters. I don't even know for sure if who I saw is Alexandru. He could have been anybody for all I know, but I feel like it must be the neighbor. Who else would be out there walking and riding freely without care? I think I'd like to set up camp out there and wait for him to arrive. Maybe he will then come to me and take me on the grassy earth, relieving me of this bloody burden.

Thursday, November 20th, 1890

Journal,

My dreams have become ever so real the past nights. I dreamt that Alexandru has come into my bedroom and wakes me without words. It's as if he can speak directly to my thoughts. The first night he stood at my bed's foot and watched me sleep. I didn't wake up, but I knew he was there watching. The second night he sat on the bed and held my hand as I looked into his eyes. I remember looking at his face, into his eyes, but I don't recall what he looks like. The third night he didn't come to my dreams; instead, I had a vision of the object that flew through the sky and where it may have made contact. I think my subconscious is telling me something about what I saw, but I cannot quite make it out. He came back

on the fourth night and again sat on my bed, holding my hand. He kissed the back of my hand before he left, going out the window. I must have been sleepwalking; when I woke the following morning, the window was open, and I was freezing. I must have slept walk up to it, and opened it while dreaming about Alexandru. I have not seen him since that night. I did dream again about the object in the sky. Last night, I dreamt it stopped in the middle of its flight, standing frozen in the sky, leaving half the horizon filled with the trail of fiery colors. It looked shiny – like mother’s silver. It was round but not circular—looked like mother’s silver gravy boat but with no handle or foot.

The day looks to be another unexpected warm day. Mother says there are odd movements in the planetary bodies this year. I read that what I saw is called a meteorite. Uncle Tommy had some old schoolbooks his daughters no longer needed that he let me have for an early birthday present. I don’t think mother and father know much about heavenly objects. The book says that rocks from distant worlds come into our atmosphere, and the heat becomes so intense they ignite into a fiery trail of blazing flames. This is what I must have seen.

Continued- I was taking a nap today on the new sheets mother encased my mattress in. The bed is more comfortable than ever now. I fell right asleep on it when I laid down after lunch. Alexandru returned to me. This time, I felt his presence, and when I opened my eyes, he was floating above me parallel to my body. I couldn't see his face. I was being blinded by some light shining behind his head. But this time, I could see his eyes. They looked shiny and metallic, the same as the object in the sky but at the same time liquid. The material moved over his eyes, sending tiny ripples of liquid metal outward like dropping a cracker into a bowl of thick soup.

2 | Winter

“Clara, honey, time to get up. The first heavy snowfall will come to us in the night, and we need to get everything in order for the oncoming winter.”
“Alright, mom. I will be up in a minute.” “Okay, but don’t spend too much more time in there. Daylight is limited; we need to make the most of what we have.” “I know – I know. I’m coming.” “Daddies already out getting the lining ready for a path to the outhouse. He needs our help to line a trail for the horses as well. I put together some eggs and bacon for you. It’s on the table. You’ll have to eat alone this morning. I have to get started now, else daddy will get upset.” “Thanks, mother. I’ll be up, fed, and out in less than ten minutes.” “Good. Dress warm, hun; it’s gettin chilly.”

Clara puts on her heaviest sweater and thickest dress, along with extra-length socks to keep her legs warm. She then heads out of her room, down the stairs, and to the breakfast table. While she eats, she makes an entry into her journal.

Friday, November 21st, 1890

Journal,

Father says the snow is coming at daybreak. I don’t know how he can tell these things, but he is always

right. I have to help clear and make paths, so the animals don't find themselves stepping into holes in the ground and breaking their legs. One year, one of the cattle walked right into a hole some rodent dug up underneath the snow and snapped its calf right in two. Daddy had to shoot it with his rifle, the poor thing. The snow was red for weeks until a fresh layer covered it up. I suppose it wasn't all bad; we ate well that winter. I wonder how much snow we will get tonight.

After finishing her breakfast, Clara heads outside to the barn to locate her father. When she walks into the barn, she finds him kneeled down at the door, twiddling with an iron latch bolted to it.

"Clara. You finally made it out of the house."
"Sorry, daddy. I was just eating breakfast quick."
"Oh, I am just giving you a hard time, darling. Now, be a sweetheart and grab up some of them stakes over there and start hammerin em in all the way up to the outhouse. Then we'll do the path up to the creek together. Make sure to drive the wood at least a third of the way into the soil. It's gonna be a tough job with the ground being almost frozen. You'll need to hit the head real hard. You think you can handle that?" "Yes, father. I've been practicing with chopping wood." "Good. We'll be warm and mapped out then. After you knock them in the

ground, we are gonna line up a rope connecting each stake so that we can find our way in the night or when a blizzard makes its way through, so we have something to brace ourselves on." "I remember, daddy. I helped last year with the rope." "Ah. Good. You grew up so fast, darling. You look just as beautiful as ever." "Thanks, dad." "We just gotta find you a nice man now, don't we." "Someday, I guess." "Someday? Gotta get yer hopes up higher than 'someday.' We'll get you set up sooner than later. A few nice men down the way—couple acres over. The Sandbowers. Good family. Hardworking and loyal. You've met Scott and his boys, right—a few summers back?" "I remember. Noah, Joshua, and Thomas. Ages 8, 12, and 16. Now, I suppose 11, 15, and 19?" "Something like that? What you think of Joshua and Thomas? Noah won't be a man for a while, if ever. Somethings a miss about that one. Other two are good lads still. You fancy them? We could set up a dinner soon if you like." "Maybe. I don't know. I can barely remember what they look like. They didn't really talk to me much either when they were here." "Oh, well. Boys will be boys. Be different now that you are all filled out. They'll be bucklin at their knees when they get a look at-cha." "You think?" "Oh, yes, darling. You are gonna be quite the prize for any man." "Maybe someone older? Like Alexandru?" "I don't know

about that one, sweetheart. I only heard about him from the townspeople, and they didn't have much good to say. Much bad either. Guess they didn't have much say t'all." "What did they say?" "Gee. Not much, if anything, other than he wasn't from around here. They think he came in from Romania. Must have been a hell of a travel to make it this far across the land. Said he came strolling into town one sunset a few weeks back and bought up the land across the creek with a smooth brick of gold. Think he may have robbed a bank, they said. I doubt that. Why would anyone go and spend that stolen money and then let everyone know where they are? Does that make sense?" "I think not." "Well, if you ever see the man, tell him come on over and meet us. Mother will cook up a feast, and he is welcome." "I seen him, daddy." "You have? When?" "He came up to the creek for a drink of water. Sat on his horse right across from me for a good ten minutes." "What'd he say?" "Nothing. He just sat there. I think he was looking at me, but I couldn't tell because the sun was to his back, and it blinded me." "Hmmm. Next time tell him get his butt on over here and be neighborly." "Okay, daddy." "Looks like your mother's out there waiting for you to bring the stakes over. She has the rope already. I gotta stay in here – make sure these door's latches worken good, so the cows don't freeze to death tonight. Or worse,

stumble on out into the blizzard and get lost. You and mother may have to handle the stakes yourself if I can't get these doors fixed fast enough."

Clara walks out of the barn while holding a bundle of wooden stakes in her arms. She carries them to her mother standing at the outhouse. After setting them down, she heads back to the barn to grab the handheld sledgehammer and returns a few minutes later.

"Mother." "Yes." "Do you think daddy wants me to marry one of the Sandbower boys?" "Do you want to marry one of the Sandbower boys?" "I don't know. I never thought about them that way. I suppose I think I'd like someone a bit older? Like you and dad." "I can understand that, hun. An older man can be appealing. It's not uncommon for a lady to want a gentleman of age. It's natural, really. You see, a woman matures faster than a man and is best for bearing children in her early years—while she is young and healthy. So, a man who has come to age himself will be best suited to a younger woman. At least, according to nature. Some people may say different, but I don't think so." "What do you think about the new neighbor?" "The one no one seems to ever see?" "I seen him, Mother." "You have? When?" "He was standing in the east field the morning before we went to Fort Pierre." "Why

didn't you say anything? I didn't want daddy to go after him with his rifle." "I can understand that. But, why wait until now?" "When we got home, the cattle had been hurt, and I didn't want to make daddy feel any more stressed." "I see. Well, you still should have told us someone was trespassing on our land." "I don't think he knew he was trespassing. I think maybe he was looking for something. He just stood there." "Why didn't you go up and greet him." "I was kind of scared." "Well, what'd he look like?" "I don't know. I couldn't get a good look. His back was to the sun, so I was blinded when trying to get a look at him. All I could see is his clothes. He had on a long jacket and a hat. I think his hair is long, and he might have a beard, but that could have been the collar of his jacket, I saw." "Next time, tell him to get his butt over here for dinner so we can meet our neighbor."

"Here, honey, take this rope. We are gonna slip it through the hole here on the top of the stake, then wrap it around and slide it through again. The house is about thirty paces away. Measure up the rope to match your stepping length, then tie up the next one. Then, drive the stakes into the ground. Make a footpath all the way up to the steps of the house. Make sure the rope has a bit of slack. If it's too tight, it will jerk the stakes out of the ground. Then tie the last bit of rope to the railing so you can

step off into the yard without breaking contact.”
“Alright.” “I’m a get started on the path to the creek.” “Daddy said he may not make it to help.”
“That’s fine.”

The two of them go on driving linked up stakes in the earth until lunchtime. They then meet in the kitchen for some leftover roast beef from the night before. Clara’s mother puts together two plates, each with a small pile of thinly sliced meat and a torn-off hunk of bread. She sets them on the table along with two glasses of milk.

“Where is father?” “He took himself a sandwich on out to the barn with him. Said he’s having trouble with one of the latches.” “What else does he want us to do today?” “Just make sure we have enough firewood brought inside to last till morning. Hmmm. And something else he wanted done. It slips my mind. It’ll come to me. Mostly he just wants to make sure we have a lifeline to the outhouse. Remember that one winter he got lost coming back from it? You may have been too young to remember.” “I remember. He was so cold by the time he found his way back, he curled up in all the blankets and slept next to the fireplace.” “He sure did. Coldest night, I had all by myself with just a thin sheet. Had to have you come cuddle up with me and keep me warm. Hadn’t had you in the bed

since you were a baby. How are you feeling?" "I feel better." "Has the bleeding stopped?" "Yeah. A few days ago." "That's good. How about your dreams— anything strange? I always have the oddest dreams when I am cycling." "Ummm. I guess."

(Should I tell her about Alexandru?)

"Bet they were about a man, weren't they?"

Clara blushes and looks down to her plate, embarrassed.

"There is nothing to be ashamed of, sweetie. It's completely natural to dream about men. It's just your body telling you it's ready. Was it anyone unparticular?" "No, not really. I don't see his face ever." "A mystery we have on our hands. Sometimes the dreams are more than they appear. They are messages from our truest inner self. Often, we hide who we really are, but that person is still there shouting to us in our dreams. Did I ever tell you about the night you were born?" "I don't think so." "I have been thinking about it lately since that night the big stone flew in from the sky. I hadn't seen one of those but twice in my life. Once when I was a little girl and the other, the day you were born. It was a cold November like any other when you came into the world. In the midst of your birthing, the sky lit up and turned night into day. It was a beautiful sight to see. I took it as a sign that you are very special." "Were there any Maskelmela when

that happened?" "That is just an old Indian legend. Jargon they told each other to keep their minds occupied, and their children scared." "But what of the cows?" "That happens every so often. Some type of an animal out there no one has seen just yet."

"You ladies done jibber-jabbering in here? We gots more work to get done before sunset. Clara, can you run on up to the creek and ride along with it up until it hits the river. Make sure there ain't nothin' cloggen it up. If there is anything come get me so we can clear it out." "Okay, daddy." "Have you ever ridden all the way up to the river before?" "I've only gone about halfway, I think." "Alright, well, the creek flows with a strong current, connecting to and leading from the Missouri River. It stretches across the land, dividing our plot and Alexandru's. You take Betsy on up to it and ride against the current until you hit the river. Ride slow so you can search for rubbish or anything that may obstruct the flow of water. If the creek doesn't flow, it will freeze over, and the cows and horses will die of thirst. It's about an hour-long ride going at a slow pace to reach the start of the creek and then another hour to come back and reach the end. After you do that, it should be starting to get dark, so ride on back, and mother should have dinner ready." "Okay." "Alright, get to it." "Mother, you wanna get started on the fire and bring in the milk, so it don't freeze." "Sure thing,

hun. Did you get enough to eat?" "Yea. But I'll be ready for supper; that's for sure. And don't forget to bring in enough wood to last the night. It's gonna be cold."

Clara gets Betsy saddled up and makes her way out to the creek.

She rides along the flowing water, taking slow trots so she may examine every nook and cranny. The creek is mostly clear except for a few rocks piled up here and there. She doesn't address them; she recalls her mother saying: stone piles help to filter the water and make it pure.

Just shy of an hour passes when Clara nears the river. The creek has been clear leading up to the tributary. Then she sees, right at the headwater, what is clearly the work of animals. There is a pile of wood sticks crisscrossing every which way.

(I think that is one of them beaver dam's daddy was talkin bout. Should I go get him? By the time I do, it will be dark. I think I could just pull it out myself. The water looks to be only a few inches deep. He'd be proud of me for taking charge and getting the job done without him. But he did say to come get him.)

Clara swings her leg over Betsy's saddle and then slides off her, landing in some sandy soil. She then walks over to the creek to take a closer look at

the wood structure. It is just over an arm's length to reach, so she'll need to walk into the stream to collect the wood. She estimates there are about a hundred pieces, and she can carry five to ten at-a-time, so it shouldn't take but ten to fifteen minutes to clear it.

(I'd better scatter the wood about or take it back home and burn it so them beavers don't get at it again. Better yet, we should hunt down the beavers as well. Don't want them a comen back and ruin our crick. I got a blanket tucked up in the saddlebag. I can use it to tie up the sticks, and Betsy can hall them back.)

Clara disregards her father's wishes. She gets the blanket and places it on the ground spread out. She then begins to venture into the rushing water to retrieve the wood. Before she steps in, she sits down on a small flat boulder at the bay of the creek to take her shoes and socks off. She then stands up and pulls her dress up to the top of her thighs, tying it in a knot. Once she is bare from the waist down, she steps toward the water, feeling coarse dirt squish up between her toes. Simultaneously, the freezing earth prickles at her feet, and an icy breeze stings her hind end.

As she stands at the creek's base, she continues to feel the wind flow through her exposed thighs. She takes another step forward, and her foot

becomes submerged in a welling pool of ice-cold water and says, shivering, “Ooooo. That is cold. Maybe this is a bad idea.”

Clara walks to the edge of the water so that the tips of her toes meet the miniature waves coming to shore. She feels both feet sink into a diluted gravel and sand mixture. It feels good yet slightly painful at the same time. She then takes one foot and steps into the flowing water while crouching to keep her balance and reaches for a branch. As she extends her arm out, her foot slips on a slick rock, and it startles her. She pulls it back in, planting it back next to her other foot sunk in the ground. She then quickly stretches both arms out to her sides, moving them up and down to regain her balance.

Once she is stabilized, she decides that she shouldn't be doing this on her own, realizing why her father told her to come back and get him.

(The task of clearing the creek is far too dangerous to do by one's self. I see why father told me to come get him. I will ride back and tell him about the beaver's home.)

Clara stands stiff, keeping her equilibrium, and then begins to pull her foot out of the water. Just as she does, a beaver comes shooting out from under the mound of sticks and crawls right over her feet. It frightens her. She feels her heart pound in her

chest, accompanied by the sensation of being mildly electrocuted.

As the beaver zips past her, just before disappearing into the dried-up grass of the meadows, Clara's instincts kick in. She tries to run, but her foot again slips on a stone as she maneuvers out of the creek, and she is sent flying into the air, coming down right on her back. Just as her back is about to make contact with the ground, her occipital slams into the large rock she had just been sitting on, and everything goes dark.

3 | Found

“Lydia. You seen Clara? It’s almost dark.” “I haven’t. How long has it been since she left?” “Almost three hours now. She should have been back at least a half-hour ago.” “Maybe she ran into the neighbor and got to talking.” “Maybe, but I don’t like this – her being out past dark out there. It’s too dangerous for a young girl to be out this late at night, by herself.” “Have you gotten the latches fixed?” “Yes. I was just waiting for the cattle to come in.” “I can take over if you want. Supper is ready – keeping warm in the oven.” “Alright. You do that. I am gonna saddle up one of the horses and go see where Clara is at.” “Alright, Joseph. Be careful out there. The snow is starting to come in heavy.”

The Following Morning

“Are you awake, sweet?” “Ma – Mom? Where am I?” “Oh, thank you, Jesus. We thought you may never wake up.” “Mom. What?” “Daddy and I found you out in the east field laying on the ground. Betsy came home while he was out looking for you, so I knew something was wrong. I jumped right on her and headed out to help. Do you remember what happened?” “I-I – I don’t. I was riding up along the creek looking for blockage.” “We don’t want you riding off out by yourself from now on. It’s too dangerous in this weather. We didn’t find you until

clear past midnight after a good three inches of snow fell to the ground. If it wasn't for the snow, we might have never found you. Once the field was blanketed white, you popped up out of it like an anthill. We think you must have caught a cold while out there. Your skin was pale as the snow when we found you. You are gonna have to stay in bed for a few days until your body temperature gets back to normal."

Clara is barely alert while her mother talks to her. She drifts back to sleep.

"Okay, honey. You take it easy. Just happy to know you are alive. Next time we will have a safety talk. Sleep well."

Lydia bends over Clara's bed, kisses her forehead, and then pulls the blankets up around her tight and snug. She watches her sleep for a few minutes and then retreats to the kitchen, where Joseph is eating breakfast.

"It looks like Clara's gonna be okay. She just woke up. Just for a minute, and then she fell back asleep." "She say what happened?" "No. She just said she was riding along the crick, and then she fell back asleep." "Alright. I'll have a talk with her after she is rested." "You want some more coffee?" "Nah. I'm good. Still exhausted from last night. I'm gonna need a nap before lunch today to catch up."

Sunday, November 23rd, 1890

Journal,

Something strange happened to me when I was out inspecting the creek. I don't remember what it was. Mother and Father found me lying in the middle of the east field, and Betsy had run off back to the barn. They said I was lying in the snow when they found me, but no footprints were leading to me. I don't feel well, and my head hurts. Mother says My body was starting to freeze when they found me, and I will have to stay in bed under the blankets until I warm up and that I'll likely suffer a harsh cold. I hate being sick.

Monday, November 24th, 1890

Journal,

Mother was right; I am starting to feel sick now. My body is sweating, but I don't feel hot. I have to take the covers off me and put them back on every few minutes unless I am sleeping. I hope this doesn't last long.

Two Weeks Later

["Who are you? What do you want?"]

A man stands at the opposite end of the room, staring at Clara as she lays in her bed. He speaks to

her using his mind and without language. He sends intentions of love and passion into her head. She feels excited upon receiving.

Clara asks: Are you Alexandru? He responds with a delivered awareness that gives her her first sexual sensation. The unexpected pleasure is overwhelming, flustering her.

“Wha-what are you doing to me? It feels strange.” (But I like it.) *I know*. “How are you doing this. Can you read my mind?” *Yes*. “Where are you from?”

The man does not respond. He continues telepathically pleasuring Clara while standing in the corner, draped in shadows.

“Can I see your face?”

He steps towards the bed. Clara scrunches the sheets against her chest, feeling frightened while still being stimulated by the man’s seemingly supernatural powers. With each step closer, she feels the manifested pleasure increase. It courses from the center of her body outward. The reaction is overpowering, escalating into an unknown climax. She slams her hands to the mattress and grips it as hard as she can. The man kneels up on the foot of the bed. When she feels the pressure he puts on the mattress shift her slightly, she also feels an explosion within her loins. The unfamiliar delight causes her to moan vociferously.

“What did you do to me?”

The man crawls over her as she lays frozen in ecstasy. His long black hair dangles down past his face tickling her cheeks. The room is too dark for her to see anything. He presses his lips to hers and puts his hand to her neck with his thumb on her jaw. He then scrapes the nail of his thumb down her jawbone, slicing into the skin, releasing tiny droplets of blood. She doesn't feel any pain. His tongue slips out of his mouth and into hers, barely touching the tip of her tongue. He then drags it down her bottom lip to her chin just before it finds its way sliding across the expelled blood.

Clara continues to feel orgasmic pleasure while the man rests atop her body without touching hers, having his arms and knees to her sides. She desperately wants to say something, but she cannot move. Whatever he has done to her has paralyzed her from head to toe.

She hears him in her head say to her slowly, *You are mine, little one—forever.*

For a moment, their minds become entangled, giving Clara access to his memories. She still cannot see his face but begins interpreting what it looks like while riding passenger to his consciousness. He senses her snooping around and breaks the connection.

“You are Alexandru, aren’t you? Where are you from?” *The-*

“Clara. Clara. Are you alright?”

[“Mother? Where are you? I cannot see you.”

The man blasts off Clara, flying backward away from the bed. He then disappears into the corner of the room, vanishing from sight.]

“Mother?” Lydia walks into Clara’s bedroom carrying a candle and sits on the edge of her bed.

“Are you alright, honey? I heard you moaning in here. It sounded like you were in pain?” “I was? I don’t know. I guess I was dreaming.” “The mattress is moist, hun. Did you wet yourself?” “I don’t think so.” “It’s alright, sweetheart. You have been in bed for over two weeks now. Are you feeling any better yet?” “I think so. Maybe. I am not sure.”

Clara pulls her hands out from under the sheets to find them painted red with blood.

“Oh honey, you are cycling again. Looks like it came a few days Early. Don’t worry, you’ll learn when it’s about to happen, and you can do as I showed you to prevent leakage.” “Okay.” “Get on up and go wash yourself off. I’ll get some clean sheets for you.” “Okay, Mom.”

Monday, December 8th, 1890

Journal,

I had another dream about Alexandru last night. I didn't want to tell Mother about it. I haven't dreamt of him since the first time I cycled. It must be my hormones crying out for love. I wonder if he'll return to my dreams again tonight. I feel I am falling for him even though I have yet to properly meet the man. I must sleep now; I am still fatigued. Mother says I caught something wicked out there, and it could be close to a month before I am truly better. She said she had gotten sick like this when she was about my age. She got stuck outside in the cold and suffered some kind of virus that kept her in bed for two full moons.

Tuesday, December 9th, 1890

Journal,

I am still not feeling quite well. I don't think it is from having been sick, though; I think it is because I am bleeding again. It hurts inside, and I don't want to leave my bed. I also don't want to leave my mattress in hopes of falling asleep and see Alexandru again. He had revisited me last night. I couldn't see him, but I felt his hands all over my body. He understands my body better than I do. He makes me feel such a way I hadn't even known was possible. I didn't need to say a word the whole time he was here, nor did he. In fact, he hasn't said a

word once—except for in my thoughts. He speaks to me without opening his mouth. It's like we are connected. Maybe that is why he didn't say anything when I seen him out at the creek and in the field; he was probably trying to communicate with me in my mind. Is that crazy? I was just dreaming. I need to go find him. I can feel a strong connection between us.

“Mother. MOTHER. MOM.” “Yes, honey. I'll be right up.”

Lydia sets down the dishes she is cleaning and makes her way up the stairs to Clara's bedroom.

“What is it, honey?” “Can you bring me some more books to read?” “You feeling better?” “I am not as tired anymore. It's boring up here. I want to go out and ride Betsy.” “Not until you are recovered, honey. You don't want to chase the tail of this cold with another. I'll go find you some more books to read. I think I have some old titles from when I lived with Grandpa up in the attic. I had been putting off going through the crates. It was too emotional at the time.” “Can I come?” “You are supposed to stay in bed said Dr. Ballew, and your Father wouldn't like it. But what they don't know won't hurt them. Daddy is out on a ride reinspecting the creek and won't be back for an hour or so. Come – let us be quick about it.”

Clara gets a big smile on her face, and her mother returns the jester. Lydia pulls the blankets off Clara, and Clara slides out of bed and then slips her feet into her slippers. The two of them go out into the hallway. Lydia then props a step ladder up against the wall where there is a latched door in the ceiling above it. Lydia climbs up the ladder, unlatches the door, and pops it back, and it slams onto the attic's floor.

"Wait until I am in the attic before you climb up. This old ladder isn't strong enough to support the two of us."

Clara waits until she sees her mother's feet disappear into the attic, then she climbs up after. When she reaches the top of the ladder, her mother grabs her arms and helps pull her up.

"Alright, now where did I put those old boxes. Look for wooden crates Clara. I think there is a chest as well."

The two of them search around for a few minutes pushing aside random objects to clear the area.

"Here, Mom. Is this the chest? It won't open. I think it needs a key." "Oh yes, that is grandpas. He never let me look in it, and I never received the key when he passed." "What's in it?" "I haven't the faintest clue." "Do you know where the key is?" "I don't. I guess it could be in one of the crates. I haven't looked in those yet either." "What

happened to Grandma?" "She passed away when she was just a few years older than you. It was just me and my daddy after that. I was about five or six, I think. I don't really remember her much." "I'm sorry, Mom." "It's alright, sweetie. These things happen in life. The trick is to learn to accept things for what they are instead of trying to will things into the way you want them." "What happened to her?" "I am not sure. Grandpa wouldn't ever tell me the story. Just said, 'It was her time.'"

"Here – here is one of them crates." "What's in it?" "I am not sure. Can you hand me that bar over there – see if I can pry it open. I may need to go out to the shed and grab a tool." "Here you go, Mom."

Lydia tries unsuccessfully to open the wooden box. The metal rod is too thick to get between the pieces of wood.

"I can run downstairs and go grab a prybar." "You'd better not, honey. Stay inside where it's warm. I'll go grab one. There should be one more crate in here. You keep looking for it while I go get the tool." "Okay."

While Lydia goes off to retrieve the proper tool, Clara scrounges around the attic, searching for the other crate. She stops for a moment without reason and moves to the dormer. She is high up so she can see clear across the ranch and out to the creek—a view she hadn't been aware she had access to.

Something tells her to look that way, and when she does, she can see her father strolling along the stream in the far distance. (My toes are cold. I feel the water surrounding my feet.) When she sees him approach the connecting river, she has a sudden flashback of dipping her toes into the water.

(I remember now. I was at the creek. I saw something in the water. What was it? I need to go back out there. Daddy will never let me ride out there alone again, though.)

Clara hears her mother coming back up the ladder and goes back to locating the other crate.

"Here we are, honey. I have the tool." "I found the other crate." "Great. Let's see what's in them."

Clara slides the crates together, lining them up with the chest. Lydia then jams a small crowbar into one of them, pops the lid, and repeats to the other.

"Should we try and open the chest?" "No. Not yet. Let's see what is in these crates first. Maybe the key will be in one of them." "Just looks like a bunch of old clothes, Mom." "Sounds about right. My wedding dress is in one of them. My mother wore it, and you can as well. There should be some books in one of these."

"What's this?" "Oh my. I haven't seen that in over a decade. That was my mother's by her mother. It's called an asabikeshiinh or dreamcatcher." "Indians?" "Yes. My mother is half Ojibwe. She

came from what is now North Dakota, where the tribe is mainly located. Her Father—my Grandpa—was a recent settler, and he fell in love with one of the tribe women—your great Grandmother, and she him. The people welcomed him with open arms, and she was quick to be with child. Sadly, she passed while giving birth to my mother—your grandmother. After that, Grandfather—your great Grandfather, wasn't welcome no more, so he took mother and left. Some of grandma's sisters would come visit mother and Grandpa on occasion. I think they even came to see me once, but I was too young to remember. Anyhow, that is where this came from. I only have a vague memory, seeing the tribe's woman standing outside the house when they gave it to her. Yes- Mother was having terrifying nightmares recur, and the asabikeshiinh is supposed to help with that. It wasn't but a few months later that she passed." "Is it alright if I take it?" "Sure, honey. You are supposed to hang it on the wall at the head of your bed, and it will keep bad dreams from coming." (What about good dreams?) "Does it stop dreaming all together?" "Oh, honey. I don't think it actually does a thing. It's just something them Natives made up to keep the children's minds occupied or to help them sleep without fear, I guess." "Aren't them Indians our ancestors?" "I suppose so. Hadn't put too much

thought into it since they banished your great Grandfather. Seems they don't have too much interest in us pale skin folk." "Can we go and visit them sometime? Maybe. I do have aunts, uncles, and cousins up there. I haven't seen them since you were born." "Maybe someday when you are older. You'd have to convince your Father still. He wouldn't like that much. He ain't never had any good run-ins with the natives. Here they are. Alright. We have Frankenstein by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley. This one is scary, hun. You may wanna hold off if you are having nightmares. And The Scarlett Letter. One of my favorites. I may have to read this, again, myself—a Tale of Two Cities by Charles Dickens. There is a mess of old books in here. Let's put them in a sack and take them downstairs. You can sort through them. Should keep you busy for a while. Everything else in here is pretty much useless. I'll take it up to the church when the weather permits."

Clara finishes putting all the books in an old pillowcase she found in one of the crates and then goes back down the ladder to her bedroom. While she makes her way, her mother shouts out, "You feeling hungry, Clara?", and Clara shouts back, "Not really." "Alright, just let me know when you want to eat, and I'll fix ya up some soup if you like."

I made some chicken soup while you were sleeping.” “Okay, Mom.”

When she gets back to her room, she jumps up on her bed and dumps the books over it. One book stands out to her. It is the smallest of the collection and is bound in some sort of metallic-like fabric. She picks it up and sees that the cover is blank, so she flips to the first page. It reads:

Maskelmela and The Natives
by Nathaniel James Clark
1848 – Dakota Territory

(Is this great-Grandpa Clark? Mother says my middle name is named after his first name, but I don't remember her mentioning what it was. Nathaniel – Natalial. It's almost the same, just without the h, and the n is replaced with an l. I'll have to ask her later.)

Clara flips to the next page and then flips through a few pages to look for machine print.

(The entire book is handwritten. If this is Great Grandpa, he must have written this while he was living with the Ojibwe people.)

She stacks up all the books she brought from the attic and puts them on her dresser while leaving the handwritten title on her pillow. Before she returns to the bed, she slips the dreamcatcher on a loose nail

sticking out of the wall above her headboard. She then returns to the mattress and sits Indian-style to read the apparent journal while facing the woven object.

Before she begins reading, she contemplates the ages of her relatives to try and convince herself that this book was written by her great grandfather.

(Mother had me at fifteen. I was born in seventy-seven, and my Mother was born in sixty-one or sixty-two, I think. Then Grandma died in sixty-seven or sixty-eight when she was seventeen. Mother was six, so then great-Grandma died seventeen or so years earlier in fifty or fifty-one, just a few years after this book was written. It must be great Grandpa's handwriting. But that would mean Grandma became pregnant at age ten or eleven. That doesn't seem right. I'll need to ask mom about dates and get some ink and paper to write this down and make a more accurate calculation.)

She opens to the next page and reads to herself: ("Dedicated to my dear wife: Bawaajige." This must be what great Grandmother's name was. Mother never told me about her before.)

Maskemela and The Natives
by Nathaniel James Clark
(draft)

1848 – Dakota Territory

Dedicated to my dear wife,
Bawaajige.

Preface

I first moved to the Dakota Territory in 1945 with no intentions of staying in the region. However, fate would make its own decision for me.

I first came through the land on horseback, making my way from Wisconsin to California. News traveled from the west for the need of miners at a place called Sutter's Mill. The news told of great fortunes being pulled from the earth—more wealth than one hundred thousand men could carry. I intended to join the so-called 'gold rush.' However, there is one treasure far more valuable than all the precious metals in the world, and that is 'exact love.' Something I found unexpectedly on my journeys.

As I hiked the land for game and forage, I came across a tribe of Native Americans:

3

The Ojibwe Tribe. They invited me into their camp for rest and food. I immediately took a shine to one of the leaders' daughters—and she I.

Before meeting the Ojibwe people, I was under the impression that the natives did not want to mix their bloodlines with the white settlers. Surprisingly, the tribe leaders were eager for me to take one of their daughters' hands—just so long as I stayed with them on their reservation. I learned later that their wise man or 'Shaman' had

foreseen the survival of their tribe as well as all people, being dependent upon the interbreeding of each Earthly race. They all tried to pair me with one of their eldest daughters on the first night, but the head leader's daughter, Bawaajige, stole my heart the instant I saw her.

4

Bawaajige and I spent the first night staring at the stars. She had learned some English, so it wasn't difficult to communicate, despite the lack of some essential slang and sentence structure. I stayed for another week, spending each day with Bawaajige. She showed me around the land, teaching me the difference between native plant life and animal life. Which animals are sacred, and which plants are poisonous and or medicinal. Each day I became more infatuated with her. Her intelligence and strengths are matched only by her beauty.

It wasn't but a month into my stay that we were married. Her father was tribe leader, so he performed the ceremony and bonded us together for the remainder of our physical years. The thought of riches had depleted from my desires.

5

I became one with the land and the tribe. I now understand that most Men know not what true

happiness is. These people have shown me the path to genuine existence in life.

After years of living with the Ojibwe people, I have become fascinated with their history. Particularly their mythological stories. Their tails of so-called Maskelmela—the blood-drinking creatures of the stars are most interesting. I have spent much of my time here interviewing the elders to learn more about their history, participating in ceremonies. I learned of traditions and interpretations of their ancient hieroglyphics, markings that describe such stories. This book tells of the mythological history of the Ojibwe people.

6

tap-tap-tap Light knocking of knuckles on Clara's bedroom door becomes present. "Clara – Clara. Mother says you are feeling better. Is this true?" "Yes, Daddy. I do, but I am a little sluggish from sitting in bed for so long, and my nose is still running (I am running from other parts too)." "Good, Honey. I am glad you didn't get it any worse. It could have been so much worse had we not found you as quickly as we did. Do you remember anything yet?" "No, not really." (Should I tell him that I slipped, and I don't know how I got moved away from the stream?)

“Why don’t you get dressed and cleaned up and meet us downstairs for dinner. You’ll feel more energized if you get your butt move-in again.” “Ok, Daddy. I will.”

4 | Back to Work

Friday, December 12th, 1890

Journal,

I am finally starting to feel better, and the bleeding has gone away. I don't like that this is going to happen each month. At least I won't have a wicked cold each time. The combination was almost too much to bear. Mother also says the first few times are the worst. Alexandru has come, again, to my dreams each night since I started cycling, except last night. I miss his visits already. We spent each night this week together under the covers of my bed. The first night he laid with me on his side, sliding his fingers gently up and down my hips—slowly along my thighs then back up close to my chest. The second night, he embraced me, pressing his stomach and chest against my back pushing in towards me. I pushed my tailbone up against him as he forced harder against me while gently biting on my shoulder. It was a pain that felt indescribably good. The following night he laid atop me, pressing my knees to the sides of my hips, and kissed me with pure love. His hands slid up my inner thighs, and I became heavy with moisture—something I had not felt before. He then rubbed me gently and put himself inside me. I cannot remember much after that other than waking up and my legs trembling—

soaking wet. Oh my. I am feeling it just writing this down. I think my Mother said my fantasies would be on overdrive during my cycle, but this is a bit too real to deny. It must just be my imagination going haywire. I need to find him and see if this feeling and the nightly visions have any truth to them and if what I feel in my dreams will be the same in reality. But, Father says he doesn't want me going out into the fields alone anymore, though. I have to find a way to get out there without him knowing. But they have barely let me out of my room since that night they found me. I just started eating at the dinner table again—a few nights back, but I could hardly take a bite before I had to go back to bed.

Continued- Mother says that I can get back to work today, now that my skin is feeling warmer and not so cold and sweaty, and I have stopped dripping from the nose amongst other areas. She says I will have to work double for a while to catch up on my chores. I don't like that; it's not fair. I guess I should just be happy that I am alive and didn't suffer any permanent damage. I still haven't gained back my appetite. Food just doesn't seem as good to me as of late. Father says it's just because I have been bedridden. Mother says it's because my body is transforming into a woman's and learning to crave new energy sources to accommodate the providing

of nutrients for baby. Mother said her favorite foods changed when she changed too. But mostly, when I get back to work, I will build up an appetite and start craving foods again.

A Few Days Later

“Clara: How are you feeling today?” “I am feeling much better—finally.” “You think you are feeling well enough to help me carry some wood into the sitting room?” “Yes, I don’t think that will be a problem. I’ve been in and out of bed now for a couple days while you’ve been out in the fields.” “Good. That’s my girl. Alright then, why don’t you get started, and I’ll be over there just as soon as I finish patching up this loose panel under the window. We have a bit of a cold breeze leaking in, and it’s really starting to freeze over out there. I expect we will see heavy snowfall soon. Have you been eating?” “Uh – kind of – I guess.” “Alright.” (I don’t want to tell him that I haven’t had any food for two days now and I don’t feel very hungry.)

Clara heads out of her bedroom after dressing appropriately for the cold weather. It is an uneventful day for her. She helps with chores and has dinner with her mother and father, barely eating anything. Her mother asks if she is still not feeling well, but she says she is fine and just hasn’t the

appetite she once did. Her mother doesn't say anything with her father present but assumes it is because of her body changing. Clara asks if she can be excused and head back to her room to read. She is permitted — without resistance.

Clara is eager to get back to her grandfather's journal. She hadn't looked at it since the day she found it after getting caught up in "The Scarlet Letter." She leaves the kitchen table to head up the stairs to her bedroom. She is somewhat exhausted from the day's labor, making her take the stairs slowly while gripping onto the railing. Her parents watch her walk up the stairs, wondering if she really is or isn't feeling well. Once Clara is out of sight, the two of them begin gossiping about her.

"Joseph, do you think she is feeling alright? I have not seen her eat anything for days. I think she is trying to hide it from us. Do you think she has it?" "I don't know. I have been so busy I haven't been paying attention. You say she hasn't eaten anything, or has she just been picking at food?" "I don't think she has eaten anything. Every time I ask her if she wants some food, she just says, 'Not now.' or 'I'll get something later.'" "Hmmm. I don't know; maybe wait a few more days and see what happens. She is probably just stressed from the cold amongst other bodily changes." "Maybe, but I don't remember

ever not being hungry like that. Especially when I first became a woman. I wanted to eat everything all the time. My ancestors told me about the lack of hunger being a sign of. Well, you know.” “I have a hard time believe-in that rubbish, Lydia.” “I know. Me too, but it is kind of hard to deny the stories with everything that has been happening. And her eyes.” “I don’t know, Lydia. She is just a young girl. Probably can’t get her mind off of meeting a fella.” “Probably.” “I think we should introduce her to the Sandbowers boys this week—see if she takes a liking to any of them.” “That sounds like a good idea. Do you think they would be a good fit?” “Well – I don’t know. They are kind of a bit off for my taste, but the eldest boy has some qualities I like. He ain’t a bad-looken fella either. Can’t think of many other options around here anyhow.” “Alright. I can make up a good feast. Maybe, we could all get together on Christmas eve for dinner as well—if it goes well.” “Yeah, that’d be nice. Be nice to get a family going other than us three for a change.” “It really would. I hope Clara doesn’t lose the ability to have more children like me.” “She won’t, Honey; you just got the bad luck of the draw.” “What about that, Alexandru fella. You think he’d like to join as well?” “I couldn’t say—still haven’t met the man. I saw him riding down along the creek a few times now, but he doesn’t stop or seem to be interested in a meet

and greet." "Clara said she had seen him a few times. Once in our field." "She did? Why didn't she tell me?" "She said she was scared that you may get angry and that she felt he didn't realize that he was on our land." "I see. She still should have told me someone was trespassing on our land. They may set game traps out there and cause us or our animals to get seriously injured. We need to know the layout of our land with absolute precision. Remember when one of the cattle broke its foot. We can't be have-in that." "OK, Hun. I will talk to her in the morning and explain." "No – no. Let me do it. She needs to know that she doesn't have to fear me. It needs to come from my mouth." "Alright. Did you want any dessert? I made up some buckle this afternoon. Cup of tea?" "Tea and buckle sounds delightful. I'll get the fireplace replenished while you get the goodies." "Sounds wonderful."

Joseph helps clear the table and then shifts to the family room, where he replenishes wood at the fireplace's hearth. The wood he and Clara gathered earlier is stacked up neatly on each side of the mantel. He picks out some thinner splitting pieces to put on top of the thin charred logs. The air can flow through them quickly, and the bristly sticks of wood poking out rapidly catch fire from the red glowing parts under the crusty black shells of the burning wood. Once they have a few inches of

flames bouncing about, he adds some sturdier logs atop them. He then retires to one of two rocking chairs propped in front, angled towards the center of the fire.

After about ten minutes or so, Lydia returns with two cups of hot tea and sets them on a small round table stationed between the chairs. Joseph looks over at them and watches the steam wisp away from the surface of the cup. He is tired, and the swirling fog puts him into a trance. He is then snapped out of it when a plate stacked with crumbling bread is propped in front of him. He pops his eyes open wide and shrugs his head, and then takes the plate from Lydia. He holds it in his hand while resting it on his left knee as he comes back to his senses.

“Thanks, Hun. This looks fantastic. You opened up a jar of blueberries?” “Yes. I thought it would entice Clara to eat.” “Why don’t you go take a piece up to her and put it on her nightstand. Maybe if it’s right there, she won’t be able to resist.” “In a bit. I wanna relax here with you for a while. I think she is deep into reading some books right now. I don’t want to disturb her. I always hated being interrupted during reading.” “What is she reading?” “Not sure exactly. I took her up to that attic and pulled some old books out of a box Daddy left me when he passed. Books I had as a kid.” “That’s good. When she is done with them, let me

have a look. I need some new material to read. Haven't had a new good book in a long time."

The two of them sit at the fire, gently rocking back and forth for a bit longer without talking—letting their food digest—and then Joseph heads off to bed. At the same time, Lydia makes her way to the kitchen. She then puts together a glass of milk and a piece of the blueberry buckle for Clara. Before she takes it up to her, she stops off in her bedroom and changes into her nightgown. After she has changed, she then acquires the snack and heads up the stairs. While she walks up the stairs, she stops halfway and thinks she can hear Clara talking to someone. She becomes completely still and attempts to listen but cannot quite make out if it is her imagination or if Clara is talking. She tries to walk further up the stairs without making a noise, but an anticipated creek makes itself present when she climbs a few more steps. A squeaking sound she attempted to prevent but could not. The instant the sharp screech flew through the air, the talking stopped. She continues up the stairs and lightly knocks on the door while saying, "Clara, Honey, are you decent?" She doesn't get a response, so she slowly opens the door and peeks in to see Clara sleeping soundly. She decides to take the snack back downstairs, but as she turns around to shut the door, she feels a sharp breeze hit her skin and turns

back to see that Clara's bedroom window is open. (Oh my. She is gonna get sick again, letting that cold air in here like that.)

Lydia opens the door slowly and then walks into Clara's bedroom past the dresser across from the foot of Clara's bed. She sets the milk and buckle on top of it and then walks to the window to close it. She pushes it slowly down, but it gets stuck at the slightest angle, not allowing her to push it down any further. She puts her hand at the base of the window and tries to push it back up, but the friction is too strong for her to do it gently, so she gives it a slight whack popping it back up an inch, and then it shoots downward, crashing into the sill. It startles her, and she hears Clara say, "Mom, what's going on?"

"I am sorry, Sweetie. I was just bringing you a snack and saw your window was open. Why did you open the window? It's too cold out, and it's starting to snow." "Huh? I didn't open the window."

Lydia assumes she must be in a half-awake, half-asleep daze. She decides to set the milk and buckle on Clara's nightstand now that she is alert.

"Here: I brought you a snack if you get hungry in the night." "OK, thane-." Clara falls in and out of sleep without finishing her sentence.

Lydia sets down the glass of milk and plate of crumbling bread. At the same time, Clara drifts

away, watching a blueberry fall out of its formerly tucked position. A position wedged inside the fluffy center on the side of the cake. It leaves a purplish cavity like a cave stuck in a rocky mountain made of tasty crumbs. Lydia then watches Clara's eyelids flicker shut, taking a moment to adore her sound sleep. Before she leaves, she bends over and kisses her on the forehead and whispers, "Sleep well, my little angel."

The next morning...

"I think Clara is starting to feel back to her normal self again." "She is?" "Scared me for a bit there." "The young bounce back." "Since she is feeling better, do you think we should have Scott, Jenny, and the boys over?" "I think so. I'd like to catch up with ole Scotty. He's always got some great stories to tell. I'll ride up to his land sometime this week when the snow has settled into the Earth, and the passing wagons have helped clear out the road." "Lovely. Some company will be nice. I've been meaning to become more acquainted with Jenny." "I think she'd like that."

Joseph leaves the house to ride up to the Sandbowers. He is unaware that Lydia had purposely proposed to gather with the Sandbowers to get him out of the house. She had written to her

aunt at the Ojibwe reservation a few weeks back about Clara and her mysterious behavior as of late. She doesn't want Joseph to know because he has resentments towards the tribe after they mostly abandoned them. He is also a skeptic and doesn't believe the history of her relatives, nor does he take faith in their superstitions. Not that Lydia does much either, but something in her heart tells her that there is truth to her family's past.

Lydia knows her aunt or someone from the reservation is near because she found a small stone resting on the porch's railing. It was a childhood way of messaging her cousins. She leaves two stones in its place to indicate to wait for her to let them know when they can come up to the house. This will be when Joseph is gone.

A few weeks earlier...

11-20-80

Dearest Megis,

I write to you with great concern of my daughter. I hadn't any thoughts of the blood-drinking creatures of the stars as more than just stories meant to scare children. Recently some very strange events have occurred and are occurring to my only daughter, Clara. Besides her eyes suddenly coming to with a

yellowish-orangish hue, she has been without food and water for many days. I don't know if she is eating when I am not looking or if she hasn't eaten at all. Only a few days earlier, a cattle was found dry of blood with six puncture wounds down its neck, and a few days before that, there was a fiery snake trail in the sky my daughter saw. I am hoping you may come visit and tell us what you think. I recall Grandpa telling me of a ceremony to help protect the young girls from this creature. If you can come, please do so at a time I can have my husband out of the house. He is not easily persuaded to believe anything that he hasn't thought of himself.

Lydia

The night before the present day...

Lydia's cousin Megis received the letter and traveled to their land. She left a polished stone on the railing of their porch in the night to sign that she had arrived. She then saw Lydia's stones soon after and knew to wait for Joseph to leave before making her presence known.

Lydia will sneak outside to talk with Megis right after Joseph is out of sight and Clara is still sleeping.

5 | Wisped Away in The Night

[Where am I? This isn't my bedroom. Am I outside? I hear the creek's water rushing through the rocks, but I cannot see. Wait, my eyes are clearing up. I see the stars in the sky. They are brilliant—yellow and white sparkling. One is much bigger than the rest; I think it is a planet—Mars or Jupiter, maybe.

It smells like lilacs. I don't usually smell the lilacs at night unless I put my nose up real close to the blossoms. Their fragrance usually swarms the air when the sun is shining hot. But it is winter, so why am I smelling them?

Where am I? I cannot move. I am lying on the grass near the creek, I think. I must be by the creek. My shoulder hurts. Why can't I move? I am frozen. I feel cold now. The snowflakes are falling down on me, and I am only wearing my gown. One is on the tip of my nose, and it itches, and I can't get to it to scratch it. Oh dang, it tickles so bad I just want to itch it. I can feel it melting, and now the water droplet is rolling onto my cheek, and that is even more ticklish. For the love of the heavens, please let me itch my nose!

What's that? Something is on my belly. I feel it; it's moving. Oh my God! What is on my stomach? I can't move. What is it? It feels – it feels, like. It feels. It feels like a hand. I can feel the fingertips pushing in and around my belly button. The nails are sharp.

Who is this? Where am I? The fingers are crawling up my tummy – up to my sternum – it’s cupping my neck now – gently. I can see the thumb coming over my chin. I don’t know who this is, but please scratch my nose for me. Ouch. What is this person doing? Ouch – ouch. Stop that hurts. Ouch. Please stop.

I can see him. It is Alexandru. What is he doing to me? Why doesn’t he show his face ever? I know it is him from his long black hair. His chin is resting on my shoulder, I think. What is he doing? Is that his tongue? Oh, God. That feels so good – ouch.

What is he doing to me? I feel pressure building on my shoulder, suction pressure. It feels so good. Please don’t stop. More – harder.

I can feel my fingers now. I can move them slightly, and my arms are starting to free up as well.

The snow is falling heavy now, and I can move my neck slightly. I can see Alexandru’s back sprinkled with snow. Why do I smell lilacs? Is it him? No, it isn’t him. He smells like Father does after a shower.

What is he doing to me? I can move my arms up now. Should I push him off? No, I want this. I want him closer. Will he finally show me his face? Ouch.

I am no longer frozen. I don’t want him to know just yet. I want him to continue what he is doing to me. I want to do it to him too – I want to; I need to. I am going to do it. That’s it, here I go. Uh oh. He

stopped. He knows I can move. I better just go for it before I scare him off.

I could feel him begin to push away just as I moved my head up, but before he could move, I put my arms around his neck, pulled him to me, and bit his shoulder; I bit it hard, and blood instantly began to excrete from his skin. I started sucking on the wound just as he had been doing to me. I can taste his blood; it's warm and metallic. He stopped for a second, but then, when he felt the pressure of my mouth on him, he went back to putting his mouth on me. We are now embracing one another, firmly drinking each other's blood. Is this normal? Do Father and Mother drink the other's blood when they lay with each other? Is this normal? It tastes sweeter and sweeter with each sip.

I want him inside me.

I hadn't realized it, but we have begun floating in the air. We are about a tree's height, slowly spinning around. My dress is falling up and down as his back turns to the sky and then mine. Can we just take it off? I want his naked body against mine. I don't know if he is interested in that, though. It seems like he just wants to drain me of life. I better suck harder so that he doesn't steal all my life from me. Our blood is being transfused between our bodies. We are becoming one with each other. I can feel his soul intertwining with mine. Is this real? Am

I dreaming? I can see the creek where Betsy and I were going to clean the beaver's home from.

I remember now. I remember I slipped and fell and hit my head. Alexandru must have picked me up and brought me to the field. It is nighttime now. I can see Father and Mother in the distance riding along the creek in search of me. They are getting closer. Should I tell Alexandru? I don't want this to stop.

I am pressing my fingertips deep into his shoulder blades, almost massaging him. I can tell he likes it and wants me to suck harder on his neck. But I am sucking as hard as I can. My lips are going numb, though, and I am losing strength in them. Will he kiss me if I try? I cannot drink anymore; I am feeling full and nourished yet weak and drained from him depleting me. I am going for the kiss.

My hands are now on his cheekbones, pulling his mouth to mine. I can feel droplets of blood dripping from his mouth onto mine. It is too dark to make out his face, but I can see the iris of his eyes are a brilliant orangish color. His lips are now pressed against mine, and my tongue is slipping inside his mouth, rubbing up against his teeth. I half expected them to be sharp like daggers, but they appear quite normal. They are smooth, like a granite countertop slicked with oil. He tastes good. His and my blood is mixing

with our saliva as our tongues dance together in the caves of our breath.

I can see mother and father approaching closer now. I can't speak, but I can tell he can understand my thoughts as he looks into my eyes. He knows. He is moving me back to the ground, slowly and gently. My back is back on the ground now, and the snow is falling even more heavily. His arms are sliding out from under my back. I know he is about to leave. What is he doing now? He is pressing his thumb's nail deep into his index finger. Blood is dripping out of it. He is now putting it to my shoulder where he was drinking. I cannot move again; I am frozen. He is rubbing the blood into the punctures; it feels strange. It feels like my skin tightening up the same way it feels when I put my hair into too tight of a bun.

He is gone now. Where did he go? I didn't even notice him leave. I am so tired; I don't think I can keep my eyes open.]

[Where am I now? This does not look like Earth. I can see Earth. There is no air – no plant life either. I don't feel gravity pushing down on me. I feel free and weightless. Is this the moon? I think I am standing on the moon. Where did Alexandru go? My feet barely press into the dirt or sand or dust— whatever this is. The stars are so much brighter here.

The sun is eclipsed by the Earth. Amazing that it is at such a precise distance to do that. How did I get here? I was laying in the snow just a moment ago.

I can see myself laying in the snow as if I am floating above myself. Am I dead? Lilacs – I smell lilacs. I don't see my body anymore. I can't see my hands; I can feel my body moving, but I cannot see any part of it. I see Father now. He is picking me up and putting me on Stanley. Mother is crying. I don't feel anything. I don't feel sad for her. I don't feel anything at all. I feel free as everything is the way it should be. I can fly. The snowflakes are swirling around me as if I were shooting through a tornado made of soft white cherry blossoms. I can see the edge of the planet now, the North Pole and now the South Pole. I can see the oceans and all the continents. I am free.]

[It's daylight. I am in the meadow on the West side of our land. The meteorite is in the sky, but it is frozen still. It isn't a rock; it's something else. It's moving again. I can see where it is going. It's moving out far down the river, about ten miles out in an area far away from people. It's landing gently in the water. The river is rushing past the object until it sinks in underneath and out of sight. I can see the thing, but I cannot make out what it looks like or

what it is made of. It's like I know it is there, but I have no visual on it.

Something is coming out of the river. It must be some sort of a space wagon. I've read about these in the bible. "Chariots of fire" – they called them. What is that getting out of it? It's a blob of liquid metal – it looks like. It's oozing out onto the shore. Did it come out of the vessel, or is it the vessel? I can't tell, and the current is far too strong to go investigating. How am I seeing this from the meadow? Am I even still in the meadow? I can't see myself.]

[I am back in my bedroom now, but it is still snowing. The snow falls from the wood planks in my ceiling as if it is melting from the splinters. There is a dark shadow in the corner, but there is no light. "Is that you, Alexandru?" *Yes.* "Why are you in the corner? Your eyes are so bright. I can see you looking at me. Show yourself to me." *I cannot.* "Why?" *You are not ready to see me.* "Yes – yes, of course, I am." *No. You are not capable of seeing me.* "Not capable?"

The ceiling has turned from wood to night – speckled with stars. The snow is now falling out of each star, and the stars are swirling about, creating a whirlwind of snowflakes. The floor is flush with green grass that the snow does not ever touch. It seems to disappear before touching the blades.

Alexandru is coming towards me. I can see his eyes, but I cannot see him. I can feel his hands on my hips, but I cannot see him. I can feel his mouth on my shoulder, but I cannot see him. "Where are you?" *Here my little girl. I am always here.* "Ouch." *Do I hurt you?* "No. Please, don't stop."

He is drinking from me again. He is placing his hand on the back of my head. I can feel him pushing me towards his body. I cannot see. He is angling my head to his neck. He wants me to drink of his blood again. I want to taste him so.

I smell lilacs again. The snow is gone. The walls of my room have disappeared. There is nothing below my feet or above my head. I can feel Alexandru wrapped around me and me him, but I cannot see him. I am wrapping my legs around his waist. It looks like I am hugging an invisible tree. My nightgown is pulled up around my belly. I can feel him protruding towards me, but I still can't see him.

"Do you love me, Alexandru?" *Infinitely.* "I think I love you the same. Where are we?" *Together.* "What do you mean?"

He does not reply. Why doesn't he answer? He keeps drinking of my essence, continuing to urge me to drink from him. I squeeze my legs tighter around him, hoping for penetration. I then bite into the trapezius of his lower neck and taste the sweet

nectar held within his soul's vessel. We are now spinning out of control in empty space, and I still cannot see him. Mirrors appear around me in the void of space. I can see myself holding onto nothingness. As we spin, I can see Alexandru's eyes bounce about the reflection. I can feel him inside of me now. It feels perfect – meant to be. I cannot speak. I can't. Oh God.]

[I am lying in the snow. It is freezing. Where am I? How did I get here? Father, is that you? Where are you? I can hear you, but I cannot see anything. Are you alright? Why are you breathing so heavily? Mother, is Father OK? I am so cold – and hungry. I am starving; I need food.]

[The attic is warm, but there is snow at least a foot deep surrounding the house. Why am I so warm? I am naked; what happened to my nightgown? I see it in the corner, drenched with something. Is that blood? It must be. I was bleeding again. The attic is empty, except I see Great Grandpa's chest in the center all by itself. The pull-down cover is missing from the floor. There is no exit to this place.

I have been walking in circles around the attic for what feels like an eternity. I cannot find a way out. I may have to break the window and jump out.

I am standing at the window now staring out at the creek – cutting through the snow, weaving to the river. The current prevents it from freezing. I can see Daddy cleared the beaver’s dam. I see Alexandru riding along with it; his horse leaves footprints in the snow as it trots along the stream. He is looking for something. Is that why he is always riding along it? What is he looking for?

The attic is getting hotter now. I am putting my hands to the chimney, but there is no heat. The fire must have gone out. Why is it so warm? I want to put my gown back on, but it is dripping wet with blood as if the source of the blood is within the gown’s fabric. The more I try to twist it dry, the more the blood drenches it. I toss it to the corner and look back out the window.

Where did he go? Oh my! He is standing at the base of the house, looking up to me. He frightened me. How did he get here so fast? What is he looking at? What was he looking for?

It is too dark to make out his face, but I can see his eyes again twinkling between the strands of his hair.

He is floating up to me. I can see him in front of the glass of the window. Should I break it so he can come in? I cannot open it. The latch has disappeared, and it won’t budge.

He is putting his hand on the glass. His nails are short but sharp and pointy. They clink in succession across the glass as if he is implying impatience waiting for me to let him in. I bang my fist against the glass, hoping it will smash open, but it is like hitting a cement wall. It doesn't move or make a noise—it just stops my hand.

He is leaving now. "Don't leave me! Wait! I can break it open." I grab the chest and throw it at the window, but it disappears right before it meets the glass, reappearing back on the floor in the middle of the attic. What is in this chest? Where is the key to it?

I kneel down at the chest as if I am to begin prayer, searching for the key. Is it hidden somewhere in here or in or on the chest? What did Great Grandpa keep in here? Is what Alexandru looking for in here? Where did everything else go?

I am feeling cold now. I need something warm to wear. I am freezing. My hands are turning blue, and my arms are becoming stiff. I cannot move. My back feels as if it is resting on ice now.]

[I am lying in the snow. It is dark out. I feel drowsy, and my head hurts. Daddy, is that you? Why can't I speak? I can feel him picking me up and putting me on Stanley. We are now riding along the creek. I hear the water coming to a stop at the woodpile. It is

getting lower as we ride along. I hear Mother talking to Daddy. She is scared and worried. *“Don’t worry, Mother. I feel fine.”* She cannot hear me.

I can see myself on my bed. Mother and Father are watching over me. Mother is crying, and Father looks concerned. What happened to me? Why am I in bed?

“Don’t worry, Daddy. It will be OK, Mother. I am fine. I am right here with you.”

“Do you think she will be alright, Joe? I don’t know. Her body is far too cold for normal. I am surprised she is still breathing. I have seen this kind of freeze come over animals, and they never survive.” “Oh, Joseph – don’t say that. Don’t ever say that.”

“Mother, don’t worry, Mother. I am fine. I am right here. Don’t worry. Daddy, I am right here. It is OK. Don’t worry. Daddy, Mommy, I love you.”]

6 | A New Breath of Life

Clara wakes up, feeling top-notch and hungry—eager to eat food again. She hears her mother yell out, “Clara, Honey, are you up?” When she hears her, she slips her back up the mattress and rests it against the headboard. While shifting herself, her head taps the dreamcatcher she brought down from the attic. It was an exhausting night of deep dreaming for her, and the sound of her mother’s voice is like an unwelcome shot of adrenaline direct to the veins. She replies quietly while yawning, “Yes, Mother. I – am uhhhh-awhhh-wake.” “You want some breakfast?”

Clara pauses for a moment thinking, (I am hungry—starving, actually.) She then grabs the plate of buckle and takes a bite. The bread hits her mouth, and she feels the slight staleness of the outer edges poke at her inner cheeks. She shrugs her shoulders and keeps eating, skipping the milk as it had been sitting out all night. She gets out of bed and makes her way into the hall, then down the stairs to the kitchen. Lydia is ecstatic to see her eating again but doesn’t let Clara see her excitement. She asks calmly, “Can I make you some bacon and eggs?” “Yes, please; I am starving!” Lydia responds with a slight pep in her voice, “Great!” and smiles to herself while her back is turned to Clara. She then begins assembling food at the counter.

While Lydia gets the bacon sizzling in a large cast-iron pan, Clara sits at the kitchen table and makes a Journal entry.

Monday, December 15th, 1890

Journal,

I haven't looked in the mirror since I have been sick, and after that weird dream I had last night, I felt the need to inspect myself. I never thought about the color of my eyes before. They seem to have a slight hue of yellow growing within them. I didn't entirely recall my dreams last night, but I do remember seeing some brightly colored eyes someone or something had. Was this a depiction of me? Mother says dreams portray the truth of one's inner self. Father says dreams are nothing more than the mind disposing of useless waste, just as the body disposes of solid waste it does not need. They bicker about that. Mother is more of a spiritual kind of gal, and Father is a see-it-to-believe-it man. Anyways, I don't remember seeing yellow in my eyes before, but I guess I never thought to consider the color of one's eyes before. What was my dream about? I usually remember my dreams, but this one seems to illude my memory. Maybe if I stop trying to recall it, it will come to me. Something about it made me feel special, and I want to remember. I also wanted to pick back up on Great Grandpa's book last night,

but I fell asleep the moment my head hit the pillows. I still am not sure if it is Great Grandpa for certain. I am going to ask Mother what his full name was.

“Mom.” “Yes, Honey.” “What was Great Grandpa’s name?” “Nate or Nathaniel. We gave your middle name after his. Remember?” “I suppose. I didn’t remember for certain. What about grandma?” “That is Bawaajige. Great Indian name. Stands for dreams.” “Like the dream catcher?” “I suppose – maybe. I believe she did make that one above your bed. Just before...” “Just before what?” “Oh, nothing – never mind.”

Lydia sets a bowl containing two uncracked blueish-green eggs next to the range, then returns to tending the frying pan. She gently pushes the bacon slices with a fork to keep them from sticking to the pan. After, she takes one egg with one hand while tending the bacon with the other and cracks it, dropping it into the grease. She repeats with the second egg, placing the empty shells back into the bowl.

Clara watches her from behind, unintentionally learning her cooking techniques. Lessons she will someday think back to as an adult.

(I wonder if Mother knows about Great Grandpas handbook. I think she must because she knew about the Maskelmela myth story. Or maybe

she was told this story by her relatives or her mother. I'll wait to tell her about it until after I read it all. I bet what she doesn't want to talk about is in it.)

Continued- The snow is starting to come down even more now. I don't know if I'll be able to go anywhere far out on the land till springtime. I can tell Father will be a stickler about me out there by myself for a while, and the weather is going to make him even more strict about it. I overheard them again talking about having the Sandbower boys over for dinner soon. I suppose that will be interesting. I'd like to see how they've grown since I seen them last. I think Daddy wants me to like one of them, and I don't know if I do or will. I never thought of them in such a way. Of course, I was just a girl the last time they were here. Or was I at their place? Maybe it was both. I can't really remember.

"Here you go, honey, some *blood*, and eggs."
"Blood?" "Yes, bacon and eggs. As you requested."
(I thought she said blood.) "Thanks, Mom." "Want any toast and jam?" "Sure." "How bout some buckle instead. We need to eat it up today." "OK, that sounds good too." "Did you see the piece I left upon the nightstand?" "Yeah – had some when I woke up.

It was kinda stale." "Bet it would be – sit-in out all night." "Yep."

Clara smirks slightly while looking at her plate, watching as another smaller plate slides up next to the bacon and eggs, holding a chunk of the blueberry buckle. Then a glass of milk finds its place next to it.

"Make sure to drink up this milk; you need your strength for the upcoming months. I have a feeling it is going to get pretty cold this year." "You think?" "Yup. Whenever we have them nice summer-like days in the midst of fall, it always seems to get extra cold in the winter. You know, for..." "Yes, for each summer day of fall, a week of winter follows or something like that." "Indeed. Cold is on the move, and we are stuck in its path. We should take some of those old wardrobes we found up in the attic and make some extra quilts with them." "OK." "The Sandbowers are supposed to be coming by this week. I think Wednesday. Daddy road on up to their land to invite them over." "Does he want me to marry one of them?" Lydia giggles a little and says, "Oh Hun, don't worry about that. You are so young and have so many options. I think he just wants you to meet them. Maybe have some friends since they are close. A growing girl has to have friends. You'll be heading off to the schools soon." "I will be?" "You have to get a proper education

before it's too late. Me and Dad can only show you so much, and mostly about farm liv-in." "What school?" "The school up in Fort Pierre they are building. It won't be ready until you are about fifteen, I believe. You'll have to spend a few months out of the year up there with uncle Tommy." "I will. I don't like that. Why didn't you tell me about this? Is that why we went to see Uncle Tommy?" "Partly. Don't worry, sweetie, it will be a great time for you. You'll be able to meet a bunch of young girls to make friends with. And you'll get something me and your dad never got." "I suppose. I do like learning. I like the books uncle Tommy had." "Tom is a smart guy. He is going to be one of the teachers at the school." "What is school like?" "Not sure. I never had to go to one. Women don't generally get educations, Hun. Their job is to tend the farm and children. We want better opportunities for you." "Alright. I am nervous now." "Don't be. It isn't for a while, and you'll have a great time. I think Noah or Joshua is to be going to the school as well. I think Daddy is to make a trade or something so that one of them can stay at Tommy's a few months as well." "So they aren't coming just to meet me?" "Not altogether. Maybe you'll like one of them." "Maybe."

Clara takes the last gulp of milk and then puts her dishes up on the counter to be rinsed off. Then

asks, "What do we need to get done today?" "I suppose we ought make sure we got enough firewood for a while. Don't wanna get caught without it. We can then sit next to the fireplace and sew up them blankets. Daddy will be gone most of the day, and we are up to date on the chores we can do until the snow settles. Why don't you go on up to the attic and grab us the clothing from them crates? Or do you need my help to get up there?" "I think I can handle it." "Alright, be careful on the ladder and watch out for any loose wood or metal about." "OK, Mom."

Lydia tends to Clara's dishes, washing them as Clara heads up the stairs. She waits and listens for the ladder to be rested against the wall and the attic hatch to slam back on the floor. When she hears the appropriate sounds, she continues to clean the dishes but does so quietly to hear Clara's movements.

(OK, where are them crates again. Did Mother push them back somewhere? There they are right over by the window. I wonder if I can see Alexandru's place from there. I didn't get a good chance to look last time.)

Clara walks over to the windows. When she does so, her mom looks up to the ceiling, listening to her

footsteps travel down through the second-floor wall, dispersing into the first-floor ceiling.

(It sure does look beautiful outside. This is a great site. Why don't we come up here more often?) Just as Clara has thought about the location, she feels the attic's draft and shivers immensely, thinking: That's why. She stands at the window holding her arms and rubbing them to warm up and inspects the land, knowing she won't be able to last long. After a few seconds, she shivers and says out loud, "burrrrrrrr," then she kneels down and pops the loosely nailed lids off the crates. She grabs a nearby sack and stuffs all the fabrics in it. She notices that the locked chest is inside the crate underneath all the clothing as she pulls the fabric out.

(Did Mom tuck this in here on purpose? Maybe she didn't want Dad to see it. I wonder where the key is? Perhaps it has something to do with Grandpa's journal. I gotta get back to going through it.)

After Clara fills the sack with all the clothing, she leaves the lids on the floor with the half-bent nails sticking upward, leaving the boxes exposed. She walks over to the attic hatch and drops the bag of clothes down to the floor, letting it fly down past the ladder, plopping on the ground. She then begins to put her feet to the ladder when she thinks about the

lids and that they should be put back on the boxes, so the nails aren't sticking out. She heads back over to the window and grabs the lids, misjudging the placement of one of the bent nails, and scrapes her finger on it. She yelps, "OUCH," and drops the lid letting it fall on the open box. It tumbles off, prompting her to instinctively jump back so that the nails don't land on her half bare feet.

Lydia looks up to the ceiling, wondering what she is doing. She didn't hear her shout in pain, but she heard the lid drop and puts two and two together.

Clara looks at her finger and doesn't see anything but a slight scrape, then suddenly a couple tiny drops of blood start to squeeze out. When she sees the blood, an adrenaline rush comes over her. Her heart pounds, and her eyes grow big. She then sees something in the corner of her eye outside the window, and it is the neighbor sitting on his horse with his long black hair draped over his shoulders. His face is hidden under the shadow of his hat.

(It's him. What is he doing out there? He is on our land again. I better tell Daddy this time. Or maybe not. I don't think he is up to anything – probably just doesn't know the laws round here.)

Clara puts her finger in her mouth and begins sucking the blood up while staring off in a trance at the man. When she tastes the blood on her tongue,

his head angles up, and she sees the sun glimmer in his eyes. He is too far away for her to make out his face, but she can see his eyes flicker in the sun as if they were miniature mirrors. She watches him locked in a daze licking her finger like a frozen treat. At the same time, he looks up to her and gazes as if they were at opposite ends of a dinner table. He then pulls on the snaffle to guide the horse in another direction.

Clara watches as his horse trots off in the snow down the creek. She stands in front of the window, forgetting that she is freezing, wondering what he must be looking for.

After he becomes too small to follow with the naked eye, Clara slips her finger out of her mouth and inspects the wound, but it isn't there anymore. She brushes it off as too minor of a wound to begin with. She then picks the wood lids back up the floor to place them in the crates at an angle with the nails facing forward so anyone who goes at them will anticipate sharp objects. After, she goes back down the ladder, flips the attic door back over, and then heads downstairs to the living room where she and her mother will sew and knit next to a fire.

“Clara Hun, I’m gonna take a nap before we get started. All this snow has got me in a slumber. You can do the same if you like.” “OK, I think I will, or

maybe just read a little." "Good. Let me know what you read; I wanna read it next so we can talk about it. I probably don't remember much from when I first read them all those years ago. See- in school, they'll teach more than just how to read." "That sounds fun." "Alright, I'll let you know when I'm up." "OK, Mom."

Lydia goes off to her and Joseph's room while Clara drops the fabrics off in the living room. Clara then heads to her room.

When Clara gets back to her bedroom, she makes sure her windows are shut and latched so that they don't get open again, at least not easily. Once she is on her bed, she looks at the pile of books on the nightstand and decides whether or not she'd like to start a novel or continue reading her grandpa's journal or just take a nap.

(I think I'll start the Scarlet Letter. Mom said it was one of her favorites.)

It doesn't take but a few pages of reading, and Clara is passed out sleeping. An hour or so goes by, and she is awoken by the sound of a window slamming shut and then her Mothers firm voice, "Clara! Why on earth did you open this window?" "Huh, wha-what?"

Clara barely understands what is happening, still half asleep as her mother talks at her. "Clara! You cannot keep the window open in this kind of

weather. Look at all the snow that has blown in, and the hallway is freezing. It's gonna take half the day to warm the house back up."

Clara sits up on the bed, using her hands to push herself up. She then yawns and rubs her eyes, and says, "I didn't open the window. I made sure they were latched shut before I laid down." "Well, then, how did it get open? Had to be from the inside if you latched them." "I don't know. Maybe I slept walk." "Did you have any dreams?" "Not that I remember. I just came up here and started reading the *Scarlett Letter* and fell asleep." "This *Scarlett Letter*?" "Yeah." "How do you presume you were reading it and fell asleep if it's all the way over here on your dresser?" "I don't know, Mom. I don't know."

(Why is she so upset with me. I didn't open the window.)

"Honey, are you feeling OK?" "I feel fine, Mom." "You sure? You don't still feel feverish from being outside? Maybe you felt hot from still being sick, and you wanted some cold air?" "I don't think so. I feel great, actually." "Alright, well, we are gonna have to find a way to secure these windows from the outside so you can't get at them until spring." "OK, Mom." "Alright, well, why don't cha get on up and meet me in the living room. I'll get some snacks for us to munch on while we knit. You can tell me about the *Scarlett Letter*, and it looks like you have been

getting into grandpas diary there. How is it?" "You haven't read it?" "Not really; it was too painful for me as a kid when Mom died. I just didn't want to remember anything." "So far, I just read the first few pages. It doesn't seem like a journal as much as it is a book about the Ojibwe Tribe." "Oh, interesting. Maybe I will take a look when you are done. I remember your grandma telling me that he was writing a book about their history."

7 | Mother and Daughter

“Which of these colors you think would go together well?” “Hmmm. Not sure, maybe the yellow one with the blue flowers and the blue one to match the flowers.” “That’s a good idea. A square-on-square pattern?” “Yeah, that’s what I was thinking.” “Alright, let’s do that. You cut the blue one, and I’ll cut the yellow one.” “OK, how many inches?” “Put your hand up to mine.”

Clara puts the palm of her hand to her mother’s hand to see the size difference.

“Wow, Hun. Can’t believe your hands are as big as mine already. I’ve always had small hands, though. We can make the squares the lengths from our wrists to the tip of our middle fingers. The edgestitch can be a fingernail’s width – should match up good. We can put in a baste on a few to test it out – make sure our measurements line up.” “Want me to get some more firewood in?” “That sounds good. Make sure there is enough to last. Once we get going, we’ll probably not be paying attention. I’ve got some tea and more buckle here if you like.” “Sounds yum. When is Daddy gawn get back?” “Not sure, looking like the snow is coming back down pretty hard. I’d not be surprised if he ended up staying the night at their place. Said that might happen if it ended up storm-in.” “Has Daddy ever slept there before?” “Oh yeah, he and Scott go

far back. Were childhood friends." "They were?" "Yes, and he could have just as easily ended up with Scott's wife instead of me." "Oh, Mom. What do you mean?" "I guess I never told you how me and your father met." "No, I don't think you have." "Well, it was about fifteen years ago, about a year or so before I became pregnant. I was about fifteen years old at the time. Your father was working at the mines. Great-grandpa was part of starting them mines." "He was?" "After his wife died giving birth to Mom, he left the reservation and went back to his original quest. I think it's all in his journal." "I can't wait to get back to it." "Yes, should be interesting. Now, your father was at the mines when the Sioux tribe was try-in reclaim their land, which was stolen from them once gold was found. The whole state of South Dakota is filled with settlers now that came for that gold. Yer Daddy didn't like what was go-in on with all that, so he decided he wasn't gonna mine no more. But Scotty wasn't concerned all that much with the Indians. Joseph had collected enough gold on his own time to buy this land we live on. He thinks that there is gold on it somewhere too but hasn't had any time to go off look-in since we had to build the house and take care of you." "Daddy was a gold miner?" "He sure was. Not much of one though – just got a job ax pick-in, and then on his free time he'd roam the surrounding unclaimed

lands cricks for pieces of gold float-in about." "Neat. Can I look for gold in our creek?" "Maybe Daddy can show you how to do it this spring. I bet he'd like that. Anyhow, he and Scotty kind of went separate ways after that. Your father took off from the campsites and began looking for land; he'd camp out here and there, spending many cold nights alone. Then, one day he was hunting some game and came across my tribe. We weren't living in triangle teepees or nuth-in like that. It was more like a village of small homes but only consisting of members of our tribe. You have some aunts that still live there." "How come we never visit?" "I was telling you that the other day about the conflicts. Let's save that for another day." "Alright." "Now, your daddy was all dirty and smelly being out there all by himself for so long but when I saw him, I knew he was sent for me. I had been dreaming about him. I didn't fancy any of the natives I was raised around. Maybe it was because of my bloodline. I wasn't ever quite accepted in the tribe, being only part Ojibwe. When I saw him, I had to ride up to him and meet him. He was so funny at first, thought I didn't speak a lick of English. He was trying to ask for water in about a hundred different ways. I just kind of watched him while sitting up on my horse try-in not to laugh. It was like being at theatre. He danced about making different gestures, pouring fake water

into a tin cup and pretending to drink it and be hydrated." "I can't imagine." "Oh, your father was quite the silly one back then. Eventually, I couldn't hold my stern Indian face any longer, and I cracked up laughing, then I said, 'You would like some water, I gather?'" "What'd he say?" "He stopped and said, 'You speak English? Well, why'd ya make me act like a fool?' to which I responded, 'So you won't be embarrassed when around me when we have dinner later.' He then got kinda shy and blushed. I got off the horse and gave him some water, then we sat by his burnt-out campfire for a while talking about where he was coming from and where I come from. Let me see if them squares match up good."

Clara hands her mother a few of the fabric pieces she cut. Lydia then lines them up on the table between the two of them, stacking her cuts on top of Clara's to test for size while keeping the colors in order. She nods her head in agreement with the size of the cuts, and the two of them get back to snipping out squares while rocking gently in the chairs they are in.

"So, then what happened with you and Daddy?" "Well, he told me what was happening with the Sioux tribe, and I told him about similar situations with our tribe. I brought him back home with me. He wasn't invited in with open arms. The last time

a white man was brought in the reservation was when your great-grandpa married Bawaajige. I think they weren't surprised that her granddaughter would fancy a white man. But, they didn't show him much respect. I don't think he even noticed. I could tell he was smitten with me right away. He stayed with us for a week before he left. I think by that time, he was realizing that most of the men weren't welcoming to him. All the girls liked him, though." "Where did he go?" "He continued on to buy this land. It hadn't been claimed yet, and so he made an offer to the townsfolks drawing up the lands and got it with the gold he collected. He told me about it and where it was. I know he was explaining it to me so that I could find him if I truly wanted to—and I did. It wasn't but a day before I began making plans to leave the reservation and go look for him. My dad knew instantly what I was up to as well as mother. They didn't stand in my way though, they knew I would just go regardless. Mother knew love when she saw it, so for her, she was encouraging. I waited a few weeks to give him time to go to the city and get ownership before I went on out looking for him. I had such naive thoughts that I'd find him again camping and that we would embrace each other. But, I couldn't find him anywhere. I was positive I found the land, but he wasn't around." "So, what did you do?" "Well, I

kept on traveling around, but I had to be extra careful because it isn't safe for a young gal to be out on her own. I also knew that a few of my tribe had been following me, so I wasn't too scared to be out there. They respected my privacy but also stayed near for my safety. I was just about to give up on him when there he was traveling with a small group. I stayed back so he wouldn't see me and observed them for a few days. I could see him with a few other men and a woman. She was a pretty milky white-skinned girl with blonde hair and blue eyes dressed in fancy gowns—different each day. All the men, including your father, catered to her every need. I got mad just looking at her. I get mad thinking about it now after all these years. How silly." "Who was she?" "That was Jennifer or Jenny – Scott's wife." "Was Scott with them?" "No, I don't think so. Scott was still at the mines. Your Father has a bit of resentment towards him because he made so much more money at the mines than he did. But, if he hadn't the moral compass to leave, he'd never had been directed to me. Scott met up with Jenny in the cities, I believe, at some point. I couldn't stand to watch Joseph cater to this woman, so one day, I just road on up to their campsite. Just about spooked their horse carriage horses to death. Don't think their horses ever saw a horse like mine before. Poor Jenny thought they were under attack. I went on up

to Joseph, and tossed my canteen at him, said, 'Here's your water.' Then I started riding off. I didn't even look back. I was a scorn young girl with fantasies of love on my mind, and I felt hurt. Then, I heard him shouting out, 'Nidiya, Nidiya, wait.' While he galloped on his horse up to me." "Nidiya?" "That's my Ojibwe name for Lydia. Just easier for the white folk. He then said, 'Where are you going?' and I said, 'Back where men can be trusted.' He then said, 'Now wait a minute there, I wasn't sure I'd ever see you again. I waited at my land for a week, and you never showed up.' When he told me that, I stopped and was speechless, thinking I should have left the first night. We both got off the horses and walked up to each other. I was shy, but he wasn't—at least since none of my people were around. He then put his hand to my chin and lifted my head, and kissed me. It was very romantic. He left the other men and Jenny to head on their way and stayed with me. We traveled back to his-our land and made camp. We made love that night and every night thereafter." "I don't need to know much more about that." "Oh, don't be silly; it was like a book. We found each other without notice or expectation and fell in love, with only fate keeping us together. If one thing had gone differently, you wouldn't be here." "Maybe you should write that story." "Maybe. We could do it together after your

schooling.” “Oh, gee. I don’t know about all that. When did you and dad decide this for me?” “We had thoughts about it or you marrying up, but we don’t think that will happen soon, so we just think, with the everchanging world, that you need to be prepared to be best ready for the world. We won’t be here forever, you know.” “I know. I just hadn’t even really known what a school was until you mentioned it.” “I think you’ll have a great time. You’ll meet many new people, learn many new things. Do you really wanna spend the rest of your life on this farm with me and your dad?” “I don’t know. I never thought about it.” “It’s time for you to get to becoming a woman now that you are one.” “I suppose. But it sounds scary being up there all alone.” “There will be a lot of scary times in your life, Hun, but they will actually become memories you cherish. Life is filled with ups and downs, and the only thing you can do is learn to enjoy the ride.”

Clara stops talking to contemplate her future and what her mother means about the “ups and downs” of life. She takes a moment to drink some tea and take a bite of the buckle. Her mother turns to admire her daughter, feeling proud when she notices that the fabric pieces are dotted with blood spots.

“Hun, I think you pricked yourself. That looks like blood spots on your cloth.” “Huh? Oh, shoot. I didn’t even notice.”

Clara looks at her fingers for a poked wound but doesn't see anything. She inspects the dots of blood, and they are indeed fresh, but there is no sign of a poke or cut. She looks to where she scraped her finger on the nail earlier but doesn't see any aftermath of the wound, to begin with. She then looks to other areas of her body, seeing a smudge of blood on her dress but nothing on the skin.

"Weird, Mom. I don't see any cut anywhere."
"Maybe it's just the blueberries." "You think? That doesn't look like blueberry juice." "Probably just the color of the fabric altering it."

Clara thinks to herself, (How could that be from the blueberries? I only just took a bite, and they don't seem to be runny at all. The bread has soaked up the juice around the berry. Weird. It must have been just a small prick – too small to see, and my skin healed up real fast, like when I bite my lip, and it bleeds for a second and then stops real quick. Why is there so much blood all the time? Ever since I started cycling, it's blood-blood-blood. Stupid cows showing up bloodless, cutting myself, dreaming of it, mom serving me blood and eggs.)

"Mom." "Yes?" "Do you ever obsess about something?" "What do you mean?" "Like, does something get on your mind and you can't seem to think of nuth-in else, or like you see some-thin once you ain't ever seen then you see it all the time?" "Of

course. That is like Deja Vu and pattern recognition." "Deja boo? What's Deja boo." "Vu, Dy Jah Voo – V, like View but Boo." "De-Jah-Voo." "There ya go. Deja Vu is when something happens to you that you swear happened before, but you know that it actually didn't. One time I was in the kitchen looking out the window, and a deer strolled by; it was a mother deer. I had this strange sensation that this had happened before, but I couldn't remember when. Then, I felt like the buck was gonna come next, and he did! It was mysterious. How did I know the buck would be there? Daddy said it was nuth-in more than intuition based on knowledge. His argument does make sense. It was breeding season, so it would be common to see a doe with a buck at that time, but why did I have this overwhelming sensation that I had lived that moment before?" "I don't know. I don't think that has happened to me. I just keep thinking about the same thing a lot." "What's that?" "Oh, nothing." "Alright, well, when you are ready to talk about it, I am here." "OK, thanks, Mom."

The two of them go back to cutting up fabrics, having moved on from the blue and yellow to some other colors, realizing that the clothing they chose won't be enough for a single blanket. So, they decide without saying a word to make a colorful shambolic design.

BOOM! Stomp-Stomp-Stomp! “Wheww-E. It’s cold out there!”

“Looks like your father made it home. Hey, Hun! We are in here.” “You got a good fire going?” “Clara: why don’t you push them logs around so the air can get to the flames better. Daddies gonna wanna sit up next to it for a bit. After that, go put on some warm tea for him as well.” “OK, Mom.”

Clara goes on off to the kitchen, passing Joseph on his way to the fire. She greets him with a smile, saying, “Welcome home, Daddy.” But he just rushes on over to the fire without much acknowledgment. (He must be real cold.) she thinks.

After the tea is brought out, Lydia asks Clara to depart for a while so she and Joseph can talk in private.

“Clara, Hun. Why don’t you take a break and go on up and read or some-thing so me and Dad can talk for a bit.” “Alright, Mom. Want me to do some cutting upstairs?” “That’s alright; I wanna stay in sync with ya.” “OK.”

(I guess I will read some more of Grandpa’s diary. I wanna know more about Mom’s mom’s mom.)

Clara gets back into her bed, bundles up under the covers, and picks up where she left off in her great-grandfather’s journal.

Ojibwe History

The Ojibwe people first settled in the northern Americas some three or four hundred years ago, migrating from various parts of the country. They tell of their ancestors as visitors from the sky. Bawaajige's father and the tribe leader, Animkii, which translates to 'Thunder,' was named so after his great ancestor whose story tells, of that, as coming down from the clouds riding a bolt of lightning. They call him Waatese, which translates to 'There is lightning.' Waatese had manifested himself into existence so he could be with Animkii's far-great grandmother, Memengwaa. The Ojibwe say that the love Waatese had for Memengwaa was so powerful that, when they made love, they gave birth

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to a new universe, a universe that all Ojibwe and their descendants can live in after death—a sort of heaven for the natives, I gather. They call it 'Boonii' or 'Land from Flight.'

Each winter, on the first snowfall, Animkii tells the story of Waatese and Memengwaa.

Translation: "The divine man drove down from sky in a bolt of lightning thousands of moons ago.

It left trail of fire stretching one side of Earth to next. Our far-great grandmother, Memengwaa, saw him in the fire in sky and went looking for him. She found him after two days and a night's hike. He came knowing Memengwaa would seek for him. When she found him, he was weak and could not stand. He had never used his body before that day.

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To help give him life and energy, Memengwaa cut her hand and let him drink of her warm blood. The blood gave him life, and he was energized into existence. He then told Memengwaa that he came to physical earth to be with her. They made love, and the north star was born. Within the North Star is where our ancestors are and where we will be when we reach the end of our earthly journey.

Memengwaa became pregnant that night. She gave birth eight moons later and did not survive. She had a daughter Nindaanis—the mother of the Ojibwe people. Waatese's heart was broken when she passed. He left not to be seen again, leaving Nindaanis to be taken care of by Memengwaa's parents. The divine man said he would return when Memengwaa returns.

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Whenever we see a trail of fire in the sky after a new Ojibwe girl is born, it is Waatese returning in search of Memengwaa.”

After Animkii tells the tale, he cuts his hand in tradition and allows his blood to fill a dish. He then mixes it with water so everyone in the tribe can drink of his blood. The ceremony of the drinking of the blood is meant to pass the bloodline on to all Ojibwe people so they may be accepted into Boonii.

Some of the Ojibwe report having illness taken from them and wounds healed after drinking the blood of Animkii. I, too, have taken part in the ceremony, and something did feel different afterward. Perhaps it was just my mind being taken in like some sort of hypnosis, or maybe it was real.

10

The Ojibwe people settled in the Dakota territories and did not relocate. They do this so Waatese may always know where they are and when his Memengwaa returns, he will be able to find her. The Ojibwe tribes believe that she will be reincarnated after her spirit spends ten thousand cycles in the North Star. A lunar cycle that is not equal to Earth's. I am not sure if they believe it is

longer or shorter than a standard 365-day year or if they mean a day or a month.

11

(Is this one of those day jah boos Mom was talking about? I feel like I have read this before. And, again, with the blood. More blood. Why is there so much blood all of a sudden?)

“Clara, Hun, you can come on back down now.”

8 | Unexpected Visitors

"I never made it on up to Scott's place. I turned back when the snow started to pick up." "What took you so long to get back then?" "I thought I'd stop on by that Alexandru fellas place – see if I can't make his acquaintance." "Was he home?" "I'm not sure. I knocked on his door and heard some rust-lin round in there, but no one came to the door. Not sure if it was a cat or dog, maybe." "Have you seen him as Clara has – in the fields?" "No. Have you?" "No. I haven't." "Do you think she is making it up?" "I wouldn't think so. She is more alert to things outside of chores than we are, Joseph. Remember what it was like to be a child?" "I suppose. I don't ever go wonder-in off, and I don't much lookout into nuth-in-ness much more these days." "Me neither." "I did see some Indian folk camped out up the way. Not sure what they are do-in round these parts." "That might be my doing." "What do you mean?" "I didn't want to tell you cause I know how you feel about all that Native spirit stuff, but I was worried about Clara, so I sent a letter to Aunt Megis." "Is that what that rock was do-in out there?" "You saw that?" "Of course. How could I miss a rock sit-in on my railing? Thought it was Clara, but I should have guessed. Well, tell them come on up. No reason for them to sleep out in that snow all night." "Are you OK with that?" "Of

course, Hun. They may not like me much, but they are family. Go do the smoke signal thing or whatever from the chimney." "I don't think they'd see that. I'll just ride up there and get them." "No, let me do it. I am already wrapped up, and Stanley's just out front still." "Alright. I'll tell Clara."

Joseph leaves the house to tell Lydia's relatives to come on over and take up shelter with them while Lydia yells up to Clara to come on back down.

"Hey, sweetie. Guess what?" "What?" "We have some unexpected visitors that are going to be staying with us." "Really?"

(We've never had any visitors spend the night before.)

"Who is it?" "Well, I think it is my cousin Megis. Not sure who she is with. I sent her a letter not too long ago, and she has come to visit. I think she wants to meet you." "She does?" "Who wouldn't; you are very special." "I am?" "Of course, silly." "OK. When are they getting here?" "Daddy went to go get them. They are camped down the road somewhere." "Why would they set up camp out there in this weather?" "They are people of the land—somewhat, I guess. Maybe not so much these days, but they understand the land and weather better than most. But, really because of your father. They all had a problem, as I told you earlier." "So, I am

finally going to meet my Indian relatives?" "Some of them, yes." "Megis – she is your cousin." "Yes. We grew up together. I miss her. It's OK, though; she got married and wouldn't have been available much anyway." "Neat! I'm excited!" "They'll probably take an hour or so in this snow to get back here. Why don't we get some dinner going, and I'll show you how to make menwaagamig." "What's menwaagamig." "It's a classic Ojibwe drink. We are going to put my twist on it for a winter treat. We'll need some of the dried berries from the cellar and some honey to make it. Can you run on down there and grab some of the dried berries – they are in a mason jar." "I know where. I've seen them before. And honey?" "I've got some honey already. Some rum too. There is another mason Jar down there filled with a clear liquid." "That's rum? What's rum?" "It's a liquor drink made from sugar. Goes good with wintery drinks." "Can I try some?" "I suppose you may have a small glass of it. Might help you with them dreams you have-in. That or make them worse." "Worse? I don't want worse dreams." "Oh, I mean, more intense is all. Only one way to find out." "I guess. OK, I'll go grab everything." "Thanks."

(The cellar. The cellar. I am scared of the cellar. I don't like it. It's colder than heck down there too.)

Clara heads out past the living room to an oddly put hallway where it leads to the cellar hatch. The design is not dissimilar from the attic hatch; only it is meant to be open from the top. She doesn't go down there often and only has been down there with her parents in the past.

When she gets down the hall to the door, she opens it and gently rests it back against the hallway wall. Unlike the attic door, it doesn't slam flat onto the floor, but rather, it rests angled against the wall. The stairway becomes present. She then remembers that it is dark and will need a lantern, so she turns back to go get one and sees Lydia coming down the hall with it knowing what she is needing. Clara thanks her, takes the lantern, and then makes her way down into the cellar. She takes slow steps and is cautious about her surroundings. She then hears her mom yell out to her, instructing her on where the two jars will be. Clara knows where she is referring to and makes her way to the area, slowly anticipating objects she cannot see on the floor. Something about the cellar is intriguing her, and she wishes she had more light. She thinks that maybe it is because she is more mature now or that she has some sort of clairvoyant premonition about the room and its belongings. As she ponders, she feels the rushing cold spread across her skin and decides to skedaddle along. She knows where the jars are

and quickly gets to them. She then holds the lantern upwards to them to make sure she has the right ones. She tucks one under her arm and holds the other, then scurries back to the stairs hoping she doesn't jab a toe, and she doesn't. She gets back upstairs to the kitchen then heads to the fire to warm up.

“Cold down there, ain't it?”

Clara can barely talk, shivering hard. She is colder than she thought once she got back upstairs into the warmth. “Ye-ye-ye-ye-yes-s-s-s-s. It's-s-s-s co-co-co-cah-cah-cah-col-dah-dah-dah-dah.”

After Clara warms up by the fire for a few minutes, she joins her mother in the kitchen.

“Alright, so first thing we are going to do is take them berries and let them soak in some water – get them hydrated up a bit. May have to simmer them a little to speed up the process. We wanna mix up the honey real good with the water first so that the berries will suck some of that sweetness up inside them. You don't wanna use too much water else; it will dilute the honey too much. Maybe about half and half between the two. I like to do a cup of the berries and then a fourth cup of honey with a fourth cup of water. I usually let them sit out all night, but we can put either some real hot water on them or simmer them, but you'll run the risk of burning the

honey that way and losing too much moisture. Gotta be careful. I think these berries will be fine with just some hot water." "I remember this. You made it last winter. I remember the leftover berry water. I never tried it, though." "Yes, that was a cold night too. Why don't you get some water boil-in. I need a cloth to sift out the berry flesh. I think I'll just go grab one of them old pieces of fabric from the attic – should work nicely. It'll stain it something permanent, though. We can dry it off and sew it on up in our quilt. Be a good way of keeping a memory." "OK, Mom."

Clara grabs a small pot hanging from a hook on the kitchen wall, pours some water in it, and gets the burner going on the top of the stove. Lydia is back in the kitchen now, measuring out the berries while Clara gets the water boiling.

"Probably take about fifteen minutes for the berries to soak up good. Then, we'll smash the heck out of them with this here toddy stick." "What's a toddy stick?" "It's a tool for mix-in drinks up. Cocktail drinks mostly, but it's good really for anything needs a good smash-in." "Can I do it?" "Sure, Hun. Normally, this drink is served over ice, but since it's cold out, we will make the syrup and then mix it up with some hot water and hot rum. A real nice winter treat that brings in the flavors of the summer harvests. One of my fondest memories as a

child is making this with my mother after a day of picking wild berries." "I wish I could have met grandma." "Me too, Hun. You will. She has only left this world." "You believe we'll see her again?" "Of course. This life may be short, but it isn't all we have." "How do you know that for sure?" "No one said anything is for sure. Though, I'd be shocked if it was all there is. Life is eternal in all aspects, from the small to the big and every-thin between and outside. So, why wouldn't we be?" "Not sure. Haven't thought much on it myself. Daddy doesn't seem too much of a thinker on it either." "Don't let your daddy fool yah. He may be all talk when it comes to defying spiritual existence and nature harmonization, but when you really get to know him, you'll know that he does indeed believe more than what's up in front of his face. He was raised in a catholic environment. They literally beat their beliefs into him." "Like they hurt him?" "Oh yes, very much. One wrong implication from the look of an eye to a simple word and down came the ruler, slapping his hand or the palm of a nun's hand across the face." "That's terrible." "I know, Hun. Greed will make people do crazy things, and crazy people believe in anything people with money have to say." "The world is scary." "It is. That's why we live out here away from all that. Though, some of the neighbor folk tend to swing in that direction, so one

has to be careful even round here.” “Is pastor Dave like that?” “He seems like a level-headed fella, and I don’t wanna encourage any bad thoughts about them kinds of people or discourage their own personal beliefs. If it helps them sleep at night, I have no problems, but if it interferes or affects another’s life without their consent, then I have a problem.” “I like Pastor Dave. How old is he?” “I think he’s somewhere around twenty-two or so, give or take.” “We should have him over for dinner sometime.” “Oh, you like him like that.”

Clara blushes while looking into the bowl of now soaking berries and then looks up to her mother to see her grinning in an unthreatening way as to say: go on.

“He is so nice and hansom. Is he even allowed to be with a woman?” “Well, he certainly ain’t allowed to be with a man.” “What does that mean?” “Oh, you’ll get that when you are older. I think he is able to, but I don’t think he’d want to.” “He doesn’t like me?” “No, I don’t think he is interested in any girl, is all.” “Oh.” “Will find you a nice man, Hun. Maybe you’ll meet a nice boy off at school in a few years.” “If I meet someone sooner, do I still have to go to school?” “Well, that’s kind of up to you, sweetie. School isn’t a traditional thing for young ladies. It is a new commodity coming round towns. I think it is important for you to go. The future is changing

before it even happens, and you'll wanna be best prepared for it with or without a man."

"OK, them berries look nice and softened up now. How hot is the water?" "Seems about room temperature now." "Go on ahead and smash everything up. Pulverize it as fine as you can. Don't splash anything out, though. The juice will stain anything it touches." "It looks like blood." "I suppose it does. A bit chunky, but the color is red enough."

Lydia dips her finger in the sauce and tastes it. She then says: Needs more honey.

"Keep muddling that up but add a dab more honey. Next, we will strain it through the cloth to get out all the seeds. We may need to mix it up with the rum first. There isn't much liquid – might lose half the syrup in the cloth if we don't dilute it."

Lydia grabs a glass pitcher from a cupboard and then a large bowl. She carries them over by Clara, pours rum and the berry mixture into the pitcher, and pours the mason jar of rum in. She mixes it up and then instructs Clara to hold the cloth that is resting in the bowl so that it is tucked into the bowl with the edges hanging over the sides so that Clara can keep the edges from falling into the bowl. She then pours the liquid into the cloth. Clara folds the edges over to create what looks like an upside down balloon. Lydia tells her to up the four corners of the

cloth into a knot. She slips the toddy stick under the knot and places it carefully into the pitcher to let all the liquid drain into it. After a few minutes, they press the remaining liquid out, squeezing each last drop. Once cleansed, Lydia rinses the cloth in the sink and hangs it to dry.

“That’ll make a nice off-balance edition to our quilt.” “Yes. The blood-spattered square of Memengwaa.” “Memengwaa? Where did you learn that name?” “That is the name of the drink? No, the drink is menwaagamig. Memengwaa is the mother of the mother of my – our people.” “I saw it in grandpa’s journal. I just thought it was a coincidence.” “He wrote about that in the journal?” “He wrote about the history of the Ojibwe for a bit. I haven’t read much yet.” “Now, I’d really like to read it.” “OK. I will get it for you.” “No – no. You finish it, then I will. Then we can talk about it. We can start a new tradition of discussing books we read together.” “That sounds nice.”

“Alrighty. They are come-in on up Lydia. Should be here shortly. Said they needed to clean up camp, and then they’d be on over.” “Oh, great. I haven’t seen them in so long. Who is all out there?” “I didn’t see Megis, just some young fella. Told him tell them all come on over, get warm. He said, OK, let us gather everything or some-thin like that. Spoke

kinda funny.” “That must be Mitig. Mitig means tree. He was given that name because he was round as a tree trunk and didn’t make much noise as a baby. Like a tree sit-in quiet like outside all by itself.” “How old is he?” “You would be interested in him, Hun. He isn’t quite along to that.” “Huh?” “I mean, he has other duties in life than to have a family. In our tribe, each person has a role to play. He isn’t meant to be a father or a lover. He may want it, but it isn’t likely to happen due to his condition.” “I see; poor thing.” “Maybe. Ojibwe are proud to play the role they are meant to play. We don’t try to will our wants into existence.” “What is your role in the tribe?” “Guess my role is not to be in the tribe.”

A few light taps hit the front door. Lydia gets a big grin on her face and tells Clara to mix the rum mixture back in the saucepan to a suitable heat for drinking while she tends to the guests. Clara would have liked to join her in greeting them, but she is a bit shy and was happy to continue the task at hand to avoid any awkward situations. As she stirs up the mixture, she can hear bags dropping on the floor and unfamiliar language and slang being spoken. After a few minutes go by, she hears her mother say: She is in the kitchen making us Mama’s old berry drink.

While standing at the stove, Clara stops stirring the berry juice, then watches the surface tension for signs of boiling. As she stands there zoning out, a woman about the same age as her mother but completely dark-skinned in comparison walks into the kitchen.

“This is Clara. Clara, this is Megis.” “Hi.”

Unexpectedly, Megis walks up to Clara and stares right at her without saying a word. Clara just stands there looking back at her, not knowing what is happening. Then, Megis grabs her and hugs her. She tells her: You are very special, my dear. More special than you know. I have brought you a gift.

Clara looks at her mother and sees her smiling with joy, a joy that expresses the sight of someone happy to see someone they haven't seen in a long time. She then feels something cold enter the palm of her hand while she feels something warm embrace its back. “This is for you, my dear; it will keep you safe.” Clara looks in her hand to see what appears to be an arrowhead made of gold.

“What is this for?” “It will guide you in the night and protect you from terror. It has been in our family's possession for many generations waiting for you.” “For me?” “Don't go fill-in her head with that nonsense now.” Says Joseph as he walks into the kitchen.

“Would you like a drink, Hun?” “I’ll just pour myself some brandy.” “Joseph never did care much for the fruity drinks.”

“They should set up by the fireplace for the night, don’t yah think, Joseph?” “Fine by me. I’m gonna just head on to bed if that’s alright. Been a long day.” “Sure thing, Hun. I’m sure I’m gonna be up for a bit.”

Clara, Megis, and Lydia all make their way to the kitchen table to drink and talk. Lydia pours Clara a small teacup filled with the drink and tops off a few larger mugs for her and Megis. She tells Clara to take it easy on her first drink. The three of them sit down, and Clara asks where everyone else is. Megis replies, “A few stayed out to camp.” “Why?” “They wouldn’t feel right taking up residence with a stranger.” “But, we are family?” Lydia interrupts and says, “I’ll explain to you later, Clara.” “OK, Mom.”

Clara listens to them gossip and observes their mannerisms. She looks off into the living room to see Mitig just standing by the fire. He looks at Clara out of the corner of his eyes without Clara noticing. Then the feeling of the alcohol soaks up inside her stomach, and it makes her feel strange – it wasn’t what she expected. It is hard for her to pay attention to her Mother and Megis talk because of the slang

and mixed Ojibwe with English talk, so she decides to leave to go to bed. Lydia and Megis tell her goodnight, then go back to chatting about a variety of topics.

Clara gets back to her bed and rests the golden arrowhead atop her great-grandfather's journal. After a moment, she lays down on the bed, feeling the effects of the liquor take a firmer hold of her head.

9 | A Night to Remember

It only took about thirty seconds for Clara to fall asleep after laying down. She didn't even get under the covers or remove her dress. About an hour passed by, then she woke up. When she wakes, she isn't in her bedroom.

(Where am I? Am I dreaming?) "No. You are not dreaming." (Who are you?) "My name is Waatese. I have waited a long time for you." (You have?) "Yes."

The person speaks in a language Clara cannot understand, yet she comprehends each word being spoken.

(Did you come with Megis?) "No." (Where am I?) "With me, in the stars." (How come I cannot speak?) "You have no mouth."

Clara realizes that she cannot see nor can she feel her body. She just knows this entity is within her presence, and it can communicate with her.

Her eyes open, and she is back in her room. Her clothes are still on, and she is on top of the blankets. The alcohol has worn off some. She gets off the bed and changes into her nightgown, and then gets back on the bed, under the blankets. The arrowhead grabs her attention, so she goes to grab it, but it sticks to the journal like a magnet bringing both the arrowhead and the journal onto her bed. The metal sticks firmly to the book. Clara has to slide it along

the cover until it gets to the edge to get it to disconnect.

(What the heck is this thing stuck to?)

She flips through all the pages looking for some metal that would cause the object to adhere to it as if it were a magnet but finds nothing.

(The book's cover seems to be made of leather bonded onto a thin piece of wood. Strange. It seems to stick stronger towards the center of the cover than the rest of it. Maybe there is something inside? I'll check it out in the morning – I am too tired to think right now.)

Clara sets the book back on the nightstand, leaving the arrowhead stuck to it, and starts to fall back asleep.

(The sky. I was in the sky. Where in the sky? I was on something. I felt nothing and couldn't see, but I could see still somehow.) "You are still in the sky." (I can see you.) "What do you see?" (I see time. You are time. You have been here forever drifting.) "Time has no boundaries to love." (Love? What love?) "My love for you." (Your love for me? Who am I to you?) "Everything." (Where are we?) "High up." (Can I see?) "You are not ready."

[“Where am I? Where was I?” (I am back at the table with Mother and Megis. They are talking in Ojibwe. I don't understand their words, but I know what

they are saying. They are talking about me. Megis has come to see if the myth is true, and I am the golden one. Mother – Mother. She cannot hear me. She does not know I am here. Megis is looking at me, grinning as she talks to Mother. She knows I am here. She nodded when I thought that. She does know I am here, but Mother does not. She nods again. Am I here? Where am I? I am not sitting nor standing. I cannot see my hands or feet. I am just here. Mother is saying she is worried that I will disappear. Where would I go?]

Clara wakes up and is still on top of her blankets in her dress. She realizes it has only been a moment since she laid down, and not as much time has passed as she thought. She sits up, and a shockwave is sent to the core of her spine when she sees Mitig is standing at the foot of her bed watching her. She tries to scream but cannot open her mouth. She then wakes again and is on her blankets, but this time she is completely naked.

(How did I become nude? I think someone is in here with me. I cannot see anyone, but I feel something putting pressure at the foot of the bed. I feel my legs being pushed apart. What is happening?)

Clara jumps out of bed and then wakes up to find herself lying on the bed, still wearing her clothes

while still on top of the blankets. She looks at the arrowhead still stuck to the journal on the nightstand as if she never touched it. She takes a few breaths and remembers she had drunk the rum before she had gone to bed.

(It must be that drink Mother gave me. She did warn me about the dreams.)

After a few minutes, Clara calms down and then decides to take her dress off and sleep without any clothing on. The alcohol going through her is causing her body to heat up, so she lays on the bed with the covers bunched up to the side so that she is bare.

(I feel like opening a window; it is so hot in here. Mother would be upset if I did. I guess I will just lay here. I can't believe how hot I am. Now I know why Daddy drinks more in the winter; must keep him warm all night. I wonder what Alexandru is doing tonight?)

Her eyelids close back shut, and she drifts off back asleep and then wakes right back up to find herself outside by the creek in the middle of summer. She is unaware that she is dreaming and just goes about her mindless day-to-day frolicking. She walks around in the grassy fields enjoying the breeze and the sun shining down.

After some exploring of the wildflowers, she heads towards a favorite tree that produces the best

shade and comfort when the sun passes at high noon. A book resting by the tree grabs her attention as if it is there waiting for her. The book has no writing on it or in it; it is blank. She sits down and begins reading the empty pages. She sits at the tree examining each page, flipping to the next, becoming entrenched within the story that does not exist. Before she knows it, the sun has begun to go down, and she is still reading the blank pages. When it becomes too difficult for her to see the words that aren't there, she closes the book shut and looks up to the stars.

[(I wonder if there are other people living out there or what a tree might look like on another planet. I wish I could visit an alien planet. Maybe I am from an alien world, and I just don't know it. Perhaps I am the alien, and someone else wants to meet me? I'd better get back home now. Where is Betsy? There she is, off drinking water at the creek. She chose a good spot. I can see the sliver of a moon reflecting in it just below her. Beautiful. Ouch. What is this?)]

A sudden pinch is felt at the chest. Clara looks down to see a golden arrow attached to a thin stick of wood popping out of her chest, right through her heart. With each pump of the heart, a stream of blood shoots out. The first pump splatters across Betsy's face. The second into the creek. The third

drips out with a weak squirt due to the loss of pressure. Clara puts her hands up to the arrow plunged into her and feels the part nearest the skin. She then falls to her knees forward into the creek. Just as the life leaves her body, she blinks and finds herself back in her bed. Her heart races. She sits up. She looks at her chest but cannot see as it is dark in her room. She can feel that the arrow is not there, but the wound is, and her hands are slipping across her bare chest, lubricated with what she assumes is blood. She intends to get out of bed and make her way to the hall where there is light, but she cannot move. She then smells something familiar. It is the smell of Alexandru. She can sense he is in the room with her. She feels him above her. His tongue is dragging across her belly, licking up the blood.

Knock-knock-knock

Some rattling is heard at the door while Clara is in a frozen state of bloody foreplay. Then the door opens, and light seeps in. Clara, I thought you might want a glass of water.

“Mom, is that you?” “Yes, Hun. I brought you some water. I thought you might be thirsty.” “Thanks. Yes, I am.” “Here you go.” “Thanks.” “Are you planning on sleeping in your clothes tonight?” “Oh. I thought I changed.”

Lydia walks over to the dresser, gets Clara's nightgown out, and rests it on the bed.

"Here. Have a good night's rest. Tomorrow you can get more acquainted with Megis and the others—if they will come over, that is." "OK, Mom. Goodnight."

Lydia leaves and shuts the door quietly, but the light doesn't go away. The room seems to get brighter and brighter until it is so bright that nothing can be seen. Clara lays in bed, looking through the back of her eyelids, wondering why things seem to be getting brighter. The brightness becomes so intense that it hurts to keep her eyes shut, so she opens them with frustration, looking to blame her mother for the undesired spectrums of light.

Her eyelids shoot to the back of her head, and her eyes come into focus, and she sees everything as clear as day even though it is pitch dark outside and inside her room. They hadn't any sort of light source other than candles and fireplaces, so Clara's confusion of the light source was puzzling her as she lay there.

(That is strange. It is almost like it is daylight outside, and the moon is like the sun, but it isn't bright and twinkly like it. It's just there. It isn't what is making everything so bright. What is making everything so bright? I can see everything. The

windows aren't open this time. I can see outside like it is daylight. Is this some trick Mother's relatives are playing? It really looks like it's daylight outside, only the source of light is mostly white instead of clear-like. Is that from the snow? No, that wouldn't do it because it would be like that during the day as well. Wouldn't it?)

Clara has gotten out of bed and is standing at the window observing the nightlife as if it were daytime. She sees a ring-tailed cat hanging in a tree near her window. This is an animal she had never seen before. As she stands, she realizes she is unrobed and naked, but she doesn't remember removing her gown. She looks to the floor to see her white nightgown piled up at her feet. She thinks to herself that it must have slipped off. Then, she sees a blueish black spot on the dress, pooling up. Drops of the liquid are falling from her onto the dress. Without question, she realizes what the liquid is and that the color is different due to the current source of light her eyes are interpreting.

(I'm bleeding again.)

She puts her hand between her legs to feel for blood but doesn't feel anything other than her dry labia.

(Weird.)

She then looks down, and more drops fall to her dress and the surrounding floor splattering as they

hit the wood. Upon looking back up, she notices a reflection in the mirror, and it startles her. She feels frozen and cannot move. She sees Alexandru standing behind her with his mouth gripped onto her neck. His jaw has split open like a ripped tin can, with his jagged metallic teeth aligned in a row sunk deep into her flesh. She isn't scared by the situation; it makes her feel comfortable. She closes her eyes and rests her naked body back against his, then puts her hands up behind her head to embrace his, putting more force onto his cranium, pressing the teeth deeper into her flesh. She moans with delight and then feels his hands come around her waist onto her belly. One of his hands moves down between her legs. He begins to massage her now slick labia as he siphons the blood from her jugular.

After a few minutes go by and Clara is on the tip of climax, Alexandru's mouth zips back up, and his teeth retreat into his skin. When each hollowed tooth retracts from Clara's flesh, her skin pulls back together, sealing up like a fork being removed from thick pudding. She then turns around to face him. He stands still with his head angled downward and his hair in front of his face, hiding it. This time Clara can see him. He is about a foot taller than her. She lifts her hands up to his cheeks to push his hair out of the way, exposing his face.

“You are beautiful, Alexandru. Why couldn’t I see you before?” (Because you were blind.)

Clara doesn’t hesitate to continue groping on him. The intense pleasures make her impatient eager to finalize unfamiliar sensations.

The two embrace and begin kissing and biting into the other’s tongue and lips. Blood excretes slightly, but the skin heals just as fast as it is broken. The blood smears around their mouths as the flesh rips and heals, and their skin absorbs it. Clara gets a rush from the metallic flavor and bites hard, nearly tearing part of Alexandru’s lip off. She sucks on it gently while it closes back up, and she gazes into his smooth metal glazed eyes. A subtle reflection of her now wholly orangish iris’ is present, reflecting off his solid metal eyes.

They continue kissing and feeling each other’s bodies. Clara has the thought, (Please pick me up and take me to the bed.) Without hesitation, he does.

(You can read my mind?) (Yes. And you me. We are connected – eternally connected.)

Clara doesn’t think another word. She lets him carry her to the bed floating through the air. He lays her down, and then they make love in silence for hours until Clara wakes up to see she is alone, and the sun is coming up. A great sense of sadness overcomes her, thinking what she had just experienced was nothing more than a dream. She

quickly turns to her nightstand to grab a handheld mirror. The mirror is resting under a few items that move around, making it difficult to grip it. Once gripped, the mirror then makes its way in front of her face. She looks to see if the iris' of her eyes had indeed changed. Her eyes are kept shut while she holds the mirror. She then opens them slowly to see that the iris' are definitely, now, a full shade of yellowish amber.

(My God. Have my eyes always been this color? I never noticed them. They are almost glowing; they are so bright. They look like miniature suns or golden moons, rather. I remember Megis talking about them in my dream. I could understand everything she was saying. It was as if I knew Ojibwe, and I was at the table even though I was up here. I think she knew it too. Mother says her, or rather our people, have special skills. Daddy always said it's just hooey made-up nonsense, but Mother is quite adamant – when he isn't around – that it isn't and never was. What am I going to tell them about this? They are going to notice them. Daddy will probably think some-thins wrong with me and want me to see the priest or doctor or some-thin.)

10 | Amber Eyes

“She has them.” “Yes, last night they were only a hue of orange tints, but now they have become the eyes of the sky.” “Are the myths true?” “They don’t make such stories up. Maybe exaggerate but not fabricate.” “What will happen?” “Don’t know. Never seen them before. No one has since some three or five hundred years back. Has she been different since the change?” “Nothing more than just teenage issues any normal girl goes through.” “Watch her closely. At night – the most.” “She has been opening her window at night. In the midst of snowstorms too. She says she wasn’t responsible for doing it. I don’t know if she is lying or was sleepwalking.” “That is not good. The elders speak of the visitor coming at night during the change. She is to become pregnant now. He seeks her virgin blood for new life.” “That’s all made up. I stopped believing that garbage when I was a little girl and saw the truth of the world.” “No, you only abandoned the truth because it was too hard to accept.”

Joseph stands off by the window listening to Lydia and Megis talk without engaging. Migit sits by the fire, watching the flames dance about.

A few minutes earlier...

Clara had only come downstairs for a moment to grab some food and then went back up to bed with the excuse of needing to finish the *Scarlett Letter* as she is too engaged to walk away from the book. She tried to hide her face and eyes with her hair thinking that her parents would know what she had been doing all night if they see her face.

They didn't suspect she had lost her virginity, but they did see her eyes. The brightness of them nearly blazed through the threads of her hair like dull laser beams.

Present time

"Now, how in the hell did her eyes change color like that." Asked Joseph after standing quietly for some time." "She has gone through the change, Joe. She carries the blood of the ancient one." "That's all nonsense. She must have some disease or something. I'm taking her up to the doctor's first thing. I've seen sick people get yellow eyes before." "Not like this, Joseph. That isn't sickness. That is a full-on transition of color embedded into her iris." "Still can't be some star creature's blood. That's just hooey. Is this why you all came down here? To have some ceremonial gathering about my daughter?" "No, Joseph. We have no control over what is to come. Neither do you." "Lydia- I don't want this hocus pocus in my house."

Joseph walks off out of the house, heads to the barn to do some work, and clear his frustrated mind, leaving Lydia and Megis to talk.

“What do we do now?” “Nothing we can do. Just have to wait and see what happens.” “What happened to the other girls that this happened to?” “They became pregnant and either died or disappeared.” “Oh, God. I remember these horror stories as a child, trying to convince little girls to become pregnant before their first cycling so to avoid attracting the Maskelmela when they first bleed.” “I don’t believe they are horror stories, Nidiya. Only misunderstood truth of our history. It is said that the one with the eyes from the sky will be the mother of the new kingdom and that it is a great honor to have been her mother.” “Then why do all the girls try to get pregnant and avoid this?” “I think it is because they all have died or vanished in the night. It used to be coveted, but now it is feared. Watch for her bleeding. If she doesn’t bleed, she has become pregnant.” “How is that possible?” “How indeed. Watch for the bleed. We must leave now.” “Will you tell the elders?” “There are no elders. Your great grandfather was the last. The tribe waits for you to bear a son or for Clara to birth a son, for he is the rightful leader of the Ojibwe people if he is born. I will return come snowmelt to see what has become of Clara.”

Clara's Room

(Did last night actually happen?)

Clara investigates her room for evidence of the dream or non-dreams she had. The windows are locked without evidence of being open. She still has her gown on and doesn't see blood on it. She looks to her mattress for signs of blood but doesn't see much evidence other than some dried droplets that could have been from anything. She remembers the floor by the window and the drops hitting it. She goes to inspect.

(Oh my. Did last night really happen? There is blood here. I see the droplets, and they are still somewhat wet. I do feel different today. I feel strange, like something has changed. Why did mother's relatives come here? Did they come to study me? This is all strange, and even more bizarre is great grandpa's diary telling me these things. Where is that book? I thought I had it on my nightstand. Mother must have taken it. Here it is on the floor. It must have gotten knocked off in the night. I couldn't have been dreaming. Did Alexandru and I do what we did? I do feel a bit sore between the legs. I remember feeling a pinch when he went inside me. It was a good kind of pain. I didn't want it to end.)

After fantasizing for a bit, Clara starts reading.

Thirteen & Drinking Blood: Ancient Love

First Born

Nindaanis, Daughter of Memengwaa and Waatese, was the first purebred born of the Ojibwe people. She was considered sacred for carrying the blood of Waatese. Only those descended directly from Memengwaa and Waatese can be tribe leaders. Their blood must be used for the ceremonies. (Bawaajige is a far descendent—only a son or grandson of hers can become tribe leader.)

When she was at the age of twelve, she disappeared into the woods and did not return until the following winter. When she returned, she was pregnant, and her eyes had changed color, turning from dark brown to a crisp orange. The elders described it as the color of untainted amber.

It is said Nindaanis mated with a wolf starting the second lineage of the Ojibwe people. And the wolf was another descendent of Waatese that came after he disappeared. I am still unsure of what they are referring to when they speak of the Maskelmela and Waatese. Waatese required blood, and so did the Maskelmela, and they both are said to be from the stars. When they continue on, furthering the stories, it appears that the Maskelmela are descendants of Waatese and wolves he mated within the wild after leaving when Memengwaa passed. That or they are relatives of his. The translation is not exact. In my opinion, these are all made-up stories based on some misunderstood or altered history.

The thought has occurred that Nindaanis mated with her father and that her father is the so-called

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Maskelmela or is the father of the blood-drinking creature(s). A story of incest is what it comes off as. Not entirely uncommon. I have heard other stories of brothers and sisters mating, trying to give birth to Memengwaa's spirit. They thought their child's bloodline would be purer coming from two descendants of Waatese. The Ojibwe believe Memengwaa's reincarnated spirit will be born with the orange or amber eyes.

Every so often, an Ojibwe girl is born with these eyes. I have yet to see one, but I have learned from elders that they know of at least two Ojibwe women who bore the 'eyes from the skies' as they referred to the phenomenon. But Waatese never returned for them. Personally, I think that they saw a wild wolf with these color eyes. Then one of the Ojibwe girls

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born with a similar tint. They then felt that they were descended from the wolves, starting the folk tales. Contrarily: I have never met a human with such eyes in all my travels, nor have I heard any legends of such eyes. If the myth is true, these people must truly descend from an external life force, not of this earth.

From deciphering the ancient hieroglyphs on nearby boulders, I learned that the beast descendants come for the younger women once they first come of age, attracted by the scent of their bleeding. Some young Ojibwe women try to become pregnant before their first cycle to avoid attracting the Maskelmela. A practice that is quickly becoming outdated as women prefer not to give birth at such a young age due to complications often leading to death.

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Legends tell of some young girls that had been seduced in the night just as they first came of age, leaving the reservations only to return pregnant without memory of how they became with child or they have been found in the wilderness drained of their blood.

The creature has haunted the Ojibwe people for hundreds of years while also being the center of their worship. I still think these are fabricated stories. Perhaps they are told to ensure breeding continues, that or the stories are passed on due to plain old superstitious thinking. I am not sure. Regardless, the stories are entirely true to them.

Animkii wanted Bawaajige and I to start birthing immediately in hopes for a son to take his place as tribe leader.

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Ancestry

Sacred object from the sky

The Ojibwe people perform annual rituals each fall, worshipping a sacred object from the sky.

The elders keep a few pieces of this metallic-like stone, a stone that is said to be part of the lightning bolt of which carried Waatase to this Earth's surface. I managed to obtain a small piece of it. It was given up freely by the tribal elders in hopes of helping carry on their tradition

with future generations and because I am assumed to be the father of the next tribe leader. However, I think they wished for me to carry on the story because Bawaajige is said to be the descendent of Nindaanis. The material provides truthful evidence to their tails.

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I have done some minor experiments on it. Still, I am no scientist, so I sent a note to a childhood friend of mine that went on to study the sciences at the university. He wished for me to send a sample of the material, but there is so little, I could not risk losing it in parcel. I am also not sure if the elders would approve of me sharing this information. He sent me details on how to perform basics studies, and what I found was most intriguing.

Here is the list of instructions sent, followed by the findings I made:

First: Test the object for magnetic properties

Second: Measure the object's density by placing it in

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water and measuring the water's displacement.

Note- Density is mass divided by volume. You will need to estimate the mass. You can make this calculation by weighing the object and then dividing it by 9.81 meters per second per second – only after converting the weight to Newtons. You can compare the object's density to other known densities to get an idea of what the object may be comprised of. Based on the story behind the stone, I conjecture it is nothing more than a meteorite that fell from the sky and that its properties will not be of any significance outside of the norm.

Third: Place the object or a minor scraping of the material into an acidic substance such as vinegar or

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juice from tomato or spicy pepper. (Citrus – If available in your region – it would be most effective.) This will also help you learn of the materials makings. You may find that it dissolves in the acid, which could mean it is made up of a metal such as Zinc or Magnesium. If it does not dissolve speedily, it would likely be comprised of iron, a primary component of meteorites.

Result: No reactions. I couldn't get even the slightest of a scrape of the material to break free,

so I rested part of it in a shallow dish of vinegar. It did not lose any of its mass.

Note- If it is a meteorite, it will likely be magnetic. You can test for magnetism by seeing if iron or steel

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is attracted to it. There are other metals, but these should be the most easily accessible to you. The following will not be attracted to a magnet: Copper, Gold, Silver, and Lead. Again, there are more options, but these should be easily accessible.

Summary: Most interesting- The object had no magnetic attraction. However, I had a small piece of silver and gold sent to me from some different mines just out of curiosity. The silver had no attraction, but the gold stuck to the meteorite like a magnet. A property that seems to defy all we know about metals. I decided not to send my findings to my colleague as I am unsure of its repercussions on the Ojibwe people. I am now convinced of the significance of this material and the story behind it.

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The other experiments had no significant results. There was no reaction to any acidic substance. The density is similar to that of a mixture of various metals found here on Earth. But why does gold stick to it in the same fashion as a magnet?

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Maskelmela /ma'sk'mālə/

Creature of The Stars

The entity finds its way through the night by the scent of blood. The elders fear two things during a woman's cycling: bears and Maskelmela. Blood attracts the creatures though there is still confusion on whether the beast of the skies is something they fear or something they worship.

Before Waatese left after Memengwaa's death, he required fresh blood to stay alive, and after the death of Memengwaa, Waatese refused to drink. Some of the pre-Waatese Ojibwe ancestors offered themselves in sacrifice, knowing human blood is the purest of all blood, providing the best energy source for Waatese. Still, he was heartbroken and would

not drink. He became tired and eventually could not move. His body began to shrivel and dry up like dried fruit. After months of grieving from the loss of his wife, two young men took him into the woods, never to be seen again.

The last thing Waatese said to the tribe is that he would return someday after a great sleep – in search of Memengwaa's reincarnated soul.

The Ojibwe people say that Waatese told them she would return after 200 births of her daughter's daughters, and he would return for her. They would know who she is because her eyes would be gold like her great grandmothers, and her blood will have mixed with the pale-skinned settlers' blood. (I gather

that the previous Ojibwe with these eyes were not
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combined with other bloodlines, and Waatese did not return for them. This must be why they want their daughters to wed settlers.)

Origins: (I am still unsure if Waatese is a Maskelmela or if this mythological beast is something else.) It is said that the Maskelmela first arrived some 2,000 or so years ago. The Maskelmela was searching for a source of life to

live off of. Its planet of origin had died off and the species left to the stars to find a new home. Before they departed, they had to alter their genetics to survive the long travels in the depths of space. They infused themselves with technology from their planet. It was supposed to offer eternal life, but it backfired on them, and the technology—some sort of type of

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them, and the technology—some sort of type of metallic intelligence—fused with their biological genetics and can only keep them alive if it receives fresh blood. The blood needs to be similar for them to live well, so they need human blood. Even though they are from a different planet, they are or were the same at one point. The Maskelmela told the ancient elders of the tribe that the natives were not initially from this planet but had been placed here at some point in the distant past. When I asked the elders where they think they are from, they said they didn't know nor did the Maskelmela—just that they knew they weren't originally from Earth.

The Maskelmela, whom I assume is a reference of a single individual, implying that Waatese is the Maskelmela. That or Waatese's wolf-bred offspring

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are the Maskelmela. It is not clear. It may be a translation issue, or more than one of these extraterrestrial creatures might have been around during the time the myths began being told—if they are myths, that is.. This metal object is making me rethink the stories. Again, my research suggests that Waatese is the Maskelmela or that Waatese is responsible for the Maskelmela, as previously mentioned when he ventured into the woods. Recall the girl who reemerged with the orange eyes after mating with the wolf—as the legend goes.

When sacrifices were made for him to drink blood, they had to behead and remove the heart and spine of each offer immediately after death. For if the blood of Waatese mixed with the blood of the

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sacrifice, it would mend within the spinal system and transform the native into something unholy. According to the elders, whatever technology was embedded into Waatese's blood could transfer into another's bloodstream, turning them into something similar to Waatese's people. I don't think it was a physical transformation but rather an internal one. I gather that Waatese looks the

same as any human except for minor facial features and muscle tones.

The tales remind me of stories I heard coming from Eastern Europe about a blood-drinking creature of the night. If one were bitten by it and survived, they would be cursed as those who drank their blood. Nofertu or something similar, it was called.

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After Waatese left into the woods with the two young men, there was no strange activity for 100-years. Then suddenly, animals began showing up drained of blood. Each one always had a strip of six puncture wounds along its neck. The elders investigated, making conclusions that there must be a connection between Maskelmela and the bloodless animals. They have many myths of men turning into savage beasts such as wolves or bears and then seeking man's blood or whatever animal is nearby. Some of the elders theorize that Waatese must have become starved and drank the blood of the two young men, leaving them to die and did not sever the spine, head, and heart which led to them mutating and interbreeding the alien blood with native women. The young girls still fear this story, leading them to

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try and become pregnant on the cusp of maturity so to avoid the Maskelmela from singling them out when they first bleed.

It again becomes unclear if Waatese is The Maskelmela animal or if this transforming beast of the woods is The Maskelmela—some offspring of Waatese's that has transformed and mutated over the years, developing a taste for the first drops of blood a young girl produces. I read something about blood in the water and how sharks can smell it from a great distance; I imagine this would be a similar hunting tactic for this land creature.

Not all of the young women experienced encounters with the Maskelmela or whatever is out there. Only a few made the claims, and the stories are quite old. It has apparently been a thousand years

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since a young girl had an encounter. She said he would come to her in her dreams and taste her blood but only during her menstrual cycles. This went on for months before they finally mated. Before they would have coitus, the Maskelmela creature would visit her in the night for many cycles, building up life and energy. He would absorb the life essences from the release of her

biological materials, materials meant for creating life. Once it gained enough strength, it would take the young girl, and no one would hear from her again. This fear of being taken is what I gather started the tradition of early pregnancies.

There are some more recent stories of natives seeing children with golden eyes in the woods that bared a resemblance to her features. This was

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the last known encounter with the assumed descendants of Waatese.

At first, these stories came off to me as exaggerated encounters with wildlife. However, this material they gave me gives some truth to the historical events. And why a young girl would be allowed to become pregnant on the cusp of her maturity is a bizarre tradition as well. I thought the men all wanted to find an excuse to have relations with these young ladies. However, it isn't the men that pass the stories on as heavily as the mothers of the young girls do, encouraging them to find a man before they mature. Even after a thousand years of no events, it is a tradition the Ojibwe people take very seriously along with some other related tribes.

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Thirteen & Drinking Blood: Ancient Love

11 | Winter's End

7:00 am

(I wonder what to do today)

8:00 am

(Mother and Father must be sleeping in. they usually are up and about at this time. Maybe they are making love again. They tend to do that more in the wintertime. I think it's because it's cold and they like to be close to each other to stay warm at night. The rubbing up against the other must activate the desires. I wish I had someone to keep me warm. It is cold. A nice warm body pressed against mine would be nice. I wonder what Thomas looks like without his clothes. He had a nice figure. I'd like to feel his skin against mine. Wait. Am I attracted to Thomas? What about Alexandru? Alex isn't even real as far as I know – just some hormonal dreams I barely remember about the man next door, which turns out isn't even the person I was seeing. I call him Alexandru because that's the neighbor's name, but he isn't the neighbor, it turns out. The fella that moved in is some acquaintance of Pastor Dave's. A relative from another country, I believe. I heard Daddy say they call him Alexis. I haven't even seen or dreamt about him forever; I don't' recall much about them. The winter has gone by so fast. It is cold still, but I can tell that spring is around the corner.

Certain birds always show up just before the snow melts. I only saw Thomas the one time, really. When he came over for dinner. Yea. It was nice. They all didn't say too much. He talked a lot about his work on the farm, I guess. He didn't really show me much attention. I wonder if he has a girl in mind already. His brothers are kind of odd. They don't seem to be matured like Thomas. I could tell Noah liked me. He kept looking at me and smiling.

Maybe I'll go pay a visit to Pastor Dave. Wonder what his winter was like. He stopped by right around Christmas time. I gave him some blueberry jam on a biscuit. It wasn't all that great, but it was the last of the preserves. I don't know if he liked it or not. I don't know if he liked me or not. I mean, he is always nice to me and everything, but I don't get a sense that he is interested in me in a relationship way. I think Mother was trying to tell me he doesn't like girls – instead boys or men. I heard her and daddy talking about him trying to find forgiveness for his sins, and that's why he became a pastor and moved out here in the middle of nowhere. Trying to escape something. What's wrong with him liking guys? I guess it would be hard for them to have intercourse – well, impossible, but if they like the other's company, why not. It'd be like two brothers living together. Probably work better than a man-

woman relationship in most cases. I guess most people don't understand that kind of a relationship, so it scares them. Mother says people fear that of which they don't understand. Says it's rooted in laziness. They just don't want to take the time to become educated, so they blame others to avoid it. Skate-coat-in, she calls it. No, I think she says goat. Scapegoat-in it. Scape-goat. Wonder why that is the name for it. Scape must be for escape, and goat – must be something with their behavior. I'll have to look it up next time I have the dictionary out. Oh wait, I bet it has to do with that old biblical story about a goat sent into the wilderness after the Jewish chief priest had symbolically laid the sins of the people upon it. Everything is always about that dumb old book. That book is a scapegoat. People always using it to do wrong and then blaming their choices on it as if it were instructions. If you ask me, it's just a bunch of manipulative, junk greedy old men put together to keep order and keep their pockets fat with gold. Them stories don't even make sense anyhow. God wouldn't travel in a chariot, and God wouldn't ask a father to kill his son. If I am nearly fourteen and I have evolved enough to see the wrongness of everything in that book, how evolved would an eternal-being be then? It certainly would be more evolved than me and be able to see the faults in such acts. Why would anyone go

Thirteen & Drinking Blood: Ancient Love

through such troubles to create life only to damn it to eternal suffering? Sounds kind of sick and demented. Something someone that is sick and demented would think up to begin with. Besides, that old bibles been chopped up and rewritten so many times; who knows if any of it is true or translated properly. Daddy quotes it a lot, but he also says: It's a tool for the rich to keep the poor, poor. Still, there is some good knowledge to be learned from it.)

9:00 am

(Yep, they are going at it. I know that sound. Where is my pillow? I don't want to hear this. Wedged under my blanket. I must have been holding it all night. It's kind of wet. What was I dreaming?)

9:03 am

(Yikes. They are really going at it.)

10:00 am

(I can't wait for this cold outside to be over with. I think there is only a few weeks left of this erratic weather. Last week it was almost like summer outside, and now the snow is falling like it is Christmas day. It won't stay on the ground long. I remember this a few years back happening. It

snowed nearly up to my knees overnight. Then, the snow started melting right when the sun came up. By the middle of the day, the whole plot of land looked like a lake. It froze that night, and for a few hours, we had a sheet of ice covering everything. Daddy had to leave all the cattle locked up in the barn all day so they wouldn't slip on the ice or sink into the ground. I think that may happen again tonight. Things tend to repeat themselves around here. I don't remember all that much growing up. I really only remember last year. What did I do all my childhood? The mind is strange. I'd swear the first twelve years of my life didn't happen. I only have some minor flashbacks of situations I don't remember.)

9:45 am

(They must be finished now. Mother is calling me for breakfast. Daddy is probably hungry from all that work he just did. I wonder if they know I can hear them. They must know. Guess they don't care. I wouldn't want someone listening in on me doing something like that. I guess it's romantic in a way. Still icky. Is she going to make a big breakfast? Oh God, I see a correlation between breakfast and their acts. I don't think I'll ever look at biscuits and gravy the same now. I never thought about that before. It's always a big breakfast, and it is later than usual. It

Thirteen & Drinking Blood: Ancient Love

must be near ten O'clock now. The sun is starting to creep in under the door. It's always about ten this time of year when it does that. They must have had a late night or long morning. Guess I know I'll be eating good whenever I hear that rust-lin-round.)

10:05 am

(They do look adorable. I hope that the one I end up with loves me as much as Daddy loves Mother.)

10:10 am

(I was expecting biscuits and gravy, but Mother got out the waffle iron. She only does that on real special occasions. She must have had a real good night. I love waffles. Now, I am excited for breakfast. I wonder if it is a special occasion? I don't think anything is going on. She just must have a craving for them or some-thin.)

11:05 am

(Mother said for me to go ahead and take the day off. She had gotten some books sometime when father was out somewhere. Won't tell me where – just that she came across them. They look like books meant to prep me for that school. Mother said it is the first school of Fort Pierre. That it is a very special thing. I don't know if I want to go. On the other hand, I am get-in tired of this ranch. Only last year,

I didn't want to leave it. I guess being stuck up inside all winter has given me the cabin fever. The winter went by so fast. Feels like just yesterday I was having dinner with the Sandbowers, and Christmas was afoot. I really don't remember anything that happened since then. I need to read through my journal. I don't know where it is. Don't I usually keep it on my nightstand? I don't remember seeing it there. Mother is telling me she wants me to help her with some stuff after all. I knew she'd change her mind once the day got going. It's fine, though; these books look boring. Some English lessons and music book. These are definitely meant for schooling.)

4:00 pm

(The snow has almost all melted again. It's just like last year. It's like that *déjà vu* Mother told me about. It really feels like this has happened before. I remember Daddy out there just as he is today, bringing in all the cattle so they won't be stuck in the melting snow tonight when it freezes, and they won't sink in the ground when it melts. He was wearing the same long-sleeved red shirt too. Weird.)

5:00 pm

(Dinner. Dinner. I swear we had this dinner too last year. Beef roast, potatoes, and carrots Mother dug up from under the melted snow. She even made

ground cherry scones. Them ground cherries freeze good. It must be a tradition or coincidence. Still, I feel like I am living the same day.)

5:30 pm

(It wasn't strange at all. Eating the same dish and listening to the same conversation we had some time last year, or was it an earlier year? I don't recall. The time has kind of lost me. I've been stuck in this stupid house for months, barely making it out past the cattle house a few times. I wanna take Betsy out and ride. It's too dangerous, but I am getting antsy. I haven't even seen another kid since the Sandbowers came. Maybe I should write to them. The mail fella still comes through on occasion. I am going to do that today. Write to the three of them – see which one responds. Maybe I could mate with them. Maybe Noah will grow handsome. Mother said boys age better than girls. Men are like red wines; she says they get better with age, whereas women are like white wines – they gotta be used up before they go bad. I think she feels that way cause she can't have more kids. I'd like to think women get better with age. I haven't met many women or men for that matter, so I don't know. I heard Daddy saying there is something wrong with Noah. I didn't notice anything. Seemed pretty normal to me. I think parents see kids differently, though. I think if

they don't act or behave the way they think they should, they condemn them. That whole misunderstanding deal. I am going to write to them.)

Dearest Thomas,

My apologies for the late letter. It was a dash seeing you at dinner all those months ago. The winter has been harsh this year and not much forgiving. How has your winter been? I suppose you have had a lot of duties, having been made the eldest of your siblings. I wish I had brothers and or sisters. It gets quite dull here all by my lonesome. Mother and Father seem to find themselves occupied most of the time. I'm sorry if I was not too talkative on your last visit. My mind was wandering at the time. Did you go to school? Mother wants me to go to school the summer before I turn 15. I suppose you didn't because there wasn't any schools nearby. Have you found a lady yet? I am so looking forward to my wedding. What all do you like to do for fun? Do your parents keep you busy with chores all day, or do you have hobbies? I look forward to seeing you and your brothers again. Maybe we can visit you for dinner sometime. I'd like that. I have only been off our land once to go to Fort Pierre. Have you been

there? I am sure you have been, being as experienced as you are. I don't recall your age. I think you are or were 18 at the time? When is your birthday? Mine is November 11th. Mother says I am a Scorpio. Something to do with astrology. She says I should marry a Taurus, Cancer, or Virgo. Whatever that means. Do you know anything about astrology? What would (did) you study in school if you go or went? Do you plan to stay on the farm or get a farm nearby?

I look forward to hearing from you. Please tell me everything about yourself. Tell me your dreams and aspirations. Your goals and ambitions. Your desires and fantasies. I want to know it all.

Yours Truly, Clara

My Dear Joshua,

I hope your winter has been fun or at least busy. I apologize for the late response. To be honest, the past months have been kind of a blur. I don't recall much. Does that happen to you during the winter months? It gets dark so early, and there isn't much to do other than prepare for summer farm work. I

think my father said that one of you will be attending school along with me. I think either you or Noah, maybe. I cannot recall your ages exactly. I am fourteen later this year. Do you plan to marry soon? What kind of future do you think about for yourself?

I look forward to hearing from you. Please tell me everything about yourself. Tell me your dreams and aspirations. Your goals and ambitions. Your desires and fantasies. I want to know it all.

Yours Truly, Clara

Mr. Noah,

Hello Noah. It was so lovely to meet you. I was so curious about what it was you were playing with at the dinner table. You seemed so intrigued with that little gadget. I was hoping you'd show me what it was and what it does before you left, but it seemed to have disappeared somewhere along the line. Maybe next time I see you, you can explain it to me?

I hope your winter has gone well. I was wondering if and or when you will be attending the Fort Pierre

school. I am unsure about the age requirements of this process – if there are any at all.

I look forward to hearing from you. Please tell me everything about yourself. Tell me your dreams and aspirations. Your goals and ambitions. Your desires and fantasies. I want to know it all.

Yours Truly, Clara

8:00 pm

(Short but sweet. Hopefully sweet. I think I like them all. I don't really remember them, but I think I have grown to like them now and any of the three could be a good suiter for me. It has been a while since I thought about finding a man. This winter has just been like being in a cage for me. Locked up inside most of the time – too cold to go outside. Poor Betsy is stuck in the stall most of the time due to the heavy winds and snow. She will be happy to get out and ride soon. Hopefully, next week when the ground dries. If this snow is like last year at this time, it is the last, and the freedom of spring is around the corner. One of my favorite things to do in spring is hunt them mushrooms. The morels will be popping up just after the snow melts and the sun returns for a longer day. I should get back to writing

in my journal. Where is that thing anyways. It's so odd how a habit can be broken without notice and even forgotten as if it never were a habit.)

9:30 pm

(Hmmm. It looks as though the snow may be coming for a second round tonight. I wonder if I can open my window yet. Mother had nailed it shut some time ago. I don't know why for sure. She seemed to be concerned that I was going to open it in the night. I don't know why I would do such a thing. I asked her if I could open it a few weeks back, and she got upset with me. I don't understand why. It gets so hot in here when they have the fire going all night. They are lucky down on the first floor. They have each other to keep warm, and all the heat rises up here—pools up in my room and all. Probably even hotter in the attic—if it reaches it. Seems like it's closed off. Maybe it's cooler up there. I'm gonna sneak up there later when they fall asleep and see if it is. Maybe I could sleep up there instead. It's nearly the size of the whole second floor without any walls—just needs some floorboards replaced.)

11:00 pm

(I think Mom and Dad fell asleep a few hours ago. I heard them russ-lin round again and then Daddy snoring. Mother usually falls asleep after reading for

a bit. I gotta be extra careful not to hit the floorboards that squeak and to set the ladder gently against the wall. I can stick a thick sweater over the top of it, so when it hits the wall, the fabric will dampen the sound and stabilize it, so it doesn't wiggle while I am going up it. Daddy drank some of his brown drink. It'd take a herd of cattle to wake him after that and a good rump-in with Mama. Mom, on the other hand, has some sort of superpower about me do-in stuff, so I got be careful – extra careful.)

11:04 pm

(OK, let's do this. I got the sweater. I put on my wool socks. Oh yeah, gonna need a candle. Tied up my dress good so it won't snag easy. Kinda cold on my bottom. Now, be careful with each step. Look down the stairway to make sure Mom's candle is blown out. Yep- no flickering at the door. She is asleep. OK, grabbing the ladder. Sliding the sweater over the top. Gently resting it – gently now. Gently. OK, it is against the wall. One of these steps was kind of loose. Yes, here it is, step 4. Skip that step. Oh, I should get another sweater for the door, so it can rest down on it. Better yet – a pillow would be a better cushion for it. It is heavy – I don't think a sweater or even a towel would do the trick.)

11:09 pm

(I'm in. Careful – careful – careful. Don't want to slip or hit noth-in.)

11:10 pm

(It is much colder up here. Not as bad as the cellar, but it is cold. Too cold to sleep up here. I need the heat from the fireplace, but I also want the cold from outside to mix in with it. I love being under a bunch of covers with that wind coming in. And the sound of the wind blowing across the land whistling in the night is so soothing. Why did I come up here again? I don't know. The window, I want to look out the window again. I remember something about this window and looking out at the creek and seeing the neighbor. There are grandpas crates. The lids are off on the ground. I – I – yes, I remember putting them back inside. Why are they out again? My journal. What's my journal doing up here and grandpa's journal too. How did they get up here? Did Mom bring them up here? Has she been reading my journal? She wouldn't do that. I'm positive she wouldn't do that. Her Ojibwe stuff. She always says bad karma comes from invading another's privacy—the temptation should be avoided at all costs. Was it Daddy? No. he'd have a nervous breakdown if he knew anything I was thinking. He'd rather just pretend I am five years old for the

rest of his life. When was the last time I wrote in it anyway?)

12/31/90 It is New Year's Eve today. The beginning of the nearing end of the century.

(Why did I stop writing in the journal on that day?)

The Sandbowers were over earlier to celebrate. That Noah is mysterious. Always had something in his hands I couldn't make out. Whatever it was would appear and disappear without notice. Joshua sure kept trying to talk to me. He was trying to touch my hands and shoulders all the time—wouldn't leave me be. Mother said he had a case of the love nerves making him act a fool. Thomas was quiet most of the time—didn't have much interest in me. Mother and Father talked for hours with their mom and dad about old mining stories. It was boring. After a while, I got the three boys to play a game with me. We took turns on checkers, and then all played Parcheesi. Noah won every game, every time. The other boys said they don't care much for board games. I see why. Noah has some sort of magical talent for the stuff.

(That's kind of boring. What else did I write? Here is the last page I wrote on.)

1/5/91 Last night ...

(Huh. I stopped after a few words. I wonder why I did that? There isn't much else in here. Some pages have been ripped out too. Gosh, it's been nearly three months since I have written. And Grandpa's journal. I remember something about this arrow stuck to the cover. Yes, stuck to the cover is that trinket, and it's still here tucked in where I found it. Did I try to open the chest? Where is that chest? I don't see it in these crates. Oh, here it is, on the side. It hasn't been opened yet. I wonder where the key is. Maybe it is in the last place one would look. I read something about that. The most common place to find a key for a lock is close to the lock. Yep, right under on the bottom. There is a little cutout where the key is tucked in. Let's unlock it and see what's inside.)

11:30 pm

(The big mystery. What could it be? Slowly opening. Slowly. Hmm. Looks like another diary of great grandpa's. Some of Bawaajige's stuff too. Maybe some jewelry? Some sort of necklace with feathers all tied up to it. Another arrowhead. This one doesn't look like it's made of metal. Some sort of a map. Wait, this isn't grandpa's stuff – this is Dad's

stuff. This is a gold mine map he must of drawn up. I recognize our land from the view out the attic window. Is this his diary? No, it is still great grandpas, and this must be Bawaajige's necklace and jewelry. Did Mom put this all in here or Dad?)

9/6/48, Personal Journal: I am worried about Bawaajige – something strange is going on with her as of late. She is coming close to birthing our child, and the elders are praying for a boy. She says it is a girl. How she knows this is beyond me, but I believe her. They have held multiple ceremonies since her claim to try and alter the birth to a male. I overheard her father say to another elder that she will most certainly die at birth if she is to have a female child. Something has not been made entirely clear to me about the birthing practices of the natives. I have been snooping about the camps trying to listen in on the elder's conversations to learn more, but they are not that talkative about such things. I may need to be direct. I am worried about my wife now. The stories were not that significant to me until I experimented on the metal and learned more about the deaths. It didn't occur to me that none of the women I was first presented with upon arrival have mothers, including Bawaajige. Only the male elders remain outside of families that are not of high order

within the tribe. It seems that all the elders have some relation, and from what I gather, their wives all passed when giving birth to daughters. None of them had a male son, and no male had been born since the elders. Perhaps this is why they wanted their daughters to mate with a non-Ojibwe so that the blood may bring a boy into this world. I am worried now. If I lose Bawaajige, I don't know what I will do. I love her so very much.

9/8/48, Personal Journal: Bawaajige's belly is swollen like a big melon. It is clear that our child is coming. She must have become pregnant the first night we spent together, but the time doesn't align to 9-months as closely as her pregnancy looks. It makes me wonder if she had laid with someone else prior to me. I don't think so; she would have told me. Perhaps our blood mixture is just moving things along faster than usual. She looks so rare in her pregnant state. I find myself wanting to be with her more and more as her belly grows. She likes that I am constantly pressing against her in the night and wanting to sneak off during the day. The others know what we are doing and smile when we return.

9/9/48, Last night, I swear there was someone else in the tent with us. I kept hearing voices, and I'd wake up, but nothing would be there. Bawaajige was

Thirteen & Drinking Blood: Ancient Love

sleeping each time, but I thought I heard her moaning. I may have been dreaming, but one time, when I woke in the night, I saw a dark figure dart out of the tent. I got up to inspect, but when I went outside, nothing was present but the moonlight.

12:35 am

(I think I hear Mother. Did she hear me? Be quite. Be still.)

12:45 am

(She was just run-in out to the outhouse. I'm tired. Time to get back to bed.)

12 | The Cave

4/5/91 The snow is finally melting, and the sun is feeling warm again. It was a short winter with spurts of coldish hell I thought would never end.

It's a strange thing to put on my summer dresses and have them not fit right anymore. Over winter, my chest must have filled out well. Hard to notice such things when they are attached to you. I got a glimpse in the mirror this morning and saw the fullness of them. They look nice. I like my new look. I haven't written for months. Ever since that strange night, Mom's cousin visited. I hadn't even thought about writing until today. I had also forgotten about Grandpa's journal, which I found back up in the attic for some reason. Also had my journal up there too. I just saw them again today when I went for this dress. That strange goldish arrowhead is still stuck to grandpas handbook. He had another journal I found in that locked chest. I thought I dreamt that or maybe just forgot about all that. Not sure.

Spring has just begun. Dad said I could take the day off and enjoy the warming air. I saw some deer walking on our land. I think it was the same or one of the same I saw last year. They were walking along the creek, stopping to take some sips. The stream is real neat this time of year; little chunks of ice float on in from the river and knock around. Sometimes some fish get trapped, and I can just pop them out.

I can see the beavers are getting back at their home again. I'll have to tell Dad about it. I think he is forgetting about last fall and starting to think of me in a more mature fashion now that I am a woman. He seems a bit timid around me as of late. Like, he is less argumentized with me as if I have some power over him now. Mother did tell me of the powers of a woman's chest, but I thought that was only towards a potential mate, not my father. Maybe it is just uncomfortable for him to see his daughter as a woman now. Maybe I remind him of a young version of Mom. That must be strange. I think I'll go for a long walk now and inspect the baren land covered by green sprouts. I'd like to see if I can find where that space rock landed last year now that the snow is gone.

Later that evening

4/5/91 cont. I just had dinner with Mom and Dad. Mom used up the last of the blueberries for a dessert I've never had. It was some kind of dairy-based dessert she made with the milk. She called it a cheesecake and then topped it with the blueberries sugared into a sauce. Boy, was it good! I think I have a new favorite dessert now.

I was out by along the north side of our plot today, and I noticed an entrance or hole near some boulders that I hadn't ever noticed before. It was interesting. I think maybe it was caused by that thing that came from the sky. I don't know. Now that I think of it, maybe that space rock was a bit farther out, far out on the neighbor's property. I am gonna ride on out their with Betsy tomorrow if I can. I don't think the neighbor will mind if I am on his land. We still haven't met the man. And I haven't seen him since before Christmas – if that even was him. My memory is a bit foggy on whether or not who or what I was seeing was a dream. Anywho, it looks like some sort of entrance to a cave or something. I didn't wanna get my dress dirty, so I didn't try to go in. I would have had to slide on down some mud, and who knows how deep it is. Maybe I can get some rope and check it out. I better talk with Dad first. I don't want what happened last year to happen again.

I pulled grandpas diary back out to read. This arrowhead is interesting. I am not sure if it is gold or not. I didn't think gold had a magnetic attraction to anything, and I still don't know if there is metal in this book either. But the arrowhead seems to slide right back to the center of the cover each time I pull it away. There must be something embedded in the

cover because it doesn't stick to the back of the book. I'm gonna get something to cut it open. Will Mom get upset if I do that? She wanted to read it. I bet she has forgotten about it. It's been months since we even talked about it. Something seems odd about this. I feel that *déjà vu* again like I've done this before. Anyway, Mom has been kind of off on talking since Megis came. She doesn't seem to want to discuss anything from her past anymore. Maybe Dad just told her not to cause he doesn't like that stuff. I'm gonna cut it now. I've got my seam ripper. I think it will slice easily through the binding of the book, and I can look underneath with little damage. One second.

I have found it. There is a key inside the book. A strange-looking key. Why is this gold attracted to it? The key nearly shot out of my hand, flying towards the arrowhead, and they slapped together. Is it the key for that old trunk up in the attic? It can't be. That trunk could be popped open with a little force if someone wanted to get inside. Besides, we already got everything out of it. Oh yea, didn't I cut this trinket out last year? Maybe I dreamt it. Wouldn't be a point in hiding this key this way. Is this even a key? Now that I look at it closer, it looks like a key, but it also looks like some sort of religious relic, almost like a cross. Hmmm. I wonder if I should

show Mom it. Where did the winter go? I can barely remember it. And why didn't I write anything in my journal until now? Something is a miss. I am having memories of being up in the attic looking in my great-grandpas chest and this weird little thing in the book. If I already cut open the book, how did it get sealed back up? I do remember this thing now.

4/6/91 I am out here again by this cave-looking entrance. I didn't wear anything special, and I brought some rope. I am not going to go in it – I am just going to do some light inspection. I have to be extra careful so I don't get hurt again. Mom and Dad think I am just walking. They wouldn't like that I am out here alone inspecting a cavity. The weather is real nice today. Soft spring day with fresh grass blades popping up all over. They are probably too busy to even notice I am gone. I'm surprised Dad wasn't filling my day with chores. Seems like they aren't giving me all that much work as they did last year.

It doesn't seem deep. I tied a rock to the rope and tossed it in a few times. The first few drops were about 5ft on average with a soft landing. A few other drops were the same height but with some clinks. I think it may be safe to go in and check it out, but I want to have proper lighting first, and I wanna tie

myself up with a rope to a tree before I go in. Should I tell Dad first? I think I should, but he might just bury it up. Probably ain't nothing special bout it, but it's interesting enough. I just saw something sparkle in there. The sun came through just right, and there was some sort of a sparkle or glimmering reflection maybe. Maybe it was gold. Mother did say that Daddy thought this land was filled with gold somewhere. Maybe we found it. Maybe we can make a fortune! Maybe that is what the neighbor was looking for on our land. Is that why Daddy was so concerned about him being on our ground? Now should I tell Dad about this? I think I wanna just inspect it myself first. Tomorrow, I'll come back with a lantern and more rope. I'll leave this rope here so Daddy doesn't see me with too much stuff tomorrow.

4/12/91 It has been days since I've been back out to this cave. Mom and Dad had me working on a million things. I swear they knew or know I am up to something.

I don't think I found this cave by accident. After going back through my dresser, where the journals were all kept before being moved to the attic, I found this map. I had forgotten about this map. It was up in grandpas chest, and right on it is a

marking of what looks like this cave. I didn't notice it before, but this trinket inside the book is etched right on the map. This map must have also belonged to great-grandpa as well as Dad.

I am back out here now with the rope and a lantern. I wanna get in there and take a look. I am sitting against the tree I intend to tie myself to while inspecting the entrance. The void is just about a hair too small for me to get inside, so I am gonna have to dig back some of the earth. I am gonna make sure I am tied up good just in case the ground gives out on me. I think I'd be able to climb on back up if that happened.

(I think this is a piece of gold stuck up in this wall. That sparkle I seen earlier. What was that? Sounded like some-thin rust-lin round in here. I can't hardly see much of anything with this lantern. I best twist the wick up a bit – get a bigger flame go-in. Wow. This isn't a cave at all; it is some sort of a tunnel system. I guess it was a cave to start, but then someone got tunnel-in in here. Probably look-in for gold. This is gold. It looks like gold. They must have found what they are look-in for then. But why would it all still be here? Wouldn't they have mined it out? I wonder if Daddy knows about this. We could be rich. I left the map upon the grass. I'll check

it later. Should I go deeper? It's kinda scary in here. Probably bats what I'm hear-in. I heard it again. It felt like it just flew past me. That seemed bigger than a small ole bat, though. I gotta get out of here. I've got the heebie-jeebies. I don't think I am gonna be able to carry up the lantern too. Maybe I can toss it up—the ceilings just an inch or so above my head. I might break it, though. I'll just blow it out and leave it here.

Oh my. I just saw something just as the flame went out. It looked like a face right in front of mine. I can barely see anything. The hole up there aint let-in much light in at all. I feel something. Oh my. What is that? I feel something on my waist. It's sliding up my back. I can hear breathing. I can't move. I am scared stiff. Shhh. Don't move. Maybe it will go away, whatever it is. Oh my. Oh my. I can't take it. I am gonna pull myself up this rope and get outta here.)

Cont. I don't know what the heck is down in that cave, but I am not going down there again. Something was in there touching and smelling me. It was as tall as me—I think. I don't know what it was, but it scared me half to death. I gotta tell Daddy about the cave. I hear them calling me for dinner.

Clara sits on the grass finishing the writing in her Journal. She flips back through again to double-check the dates and relearns that she has not written anything in months. She then lifts her head to look into the cave's entrance and sees glowing orange eyes staring at her. She is frightened at first but then has a flashback that she can't quite recall. The eyes blink shut and do not return. She gets up and walks away, and turns back with one last glance but sees an empty cave.

Cont. I decided not to tell them about the cave. They seemed a bit preoccupied with something, and after last year with the creek incident, I don't wanna stress them. I remember smelling something in the cave. It smelt familiar, but it didn't hit me until dinner. I can't quite get a figure of it, but it is definitely something familiar, almost like the smell of blood yet sweet like a flower—lilacs. Like when certain types of mushrooms smell of roses. When was the last time I bled? I don't remember bleeding for a long time. I don't really remember much of anything for a while now. If someone asked me what happened over winter going into spring, I don't think I'd have much to say. It's like I lost 3-months of my life. I am having some sort of amnesia.

13 | A Night to Forget

[“Hello. Where have you been?” “Here with you. Always here with you.” “I think I knew that. I can sense you are here even when I don’t know where I am. Have you been here the whole time?” “Always. Waiting—always waiting.” “How long have you been waiting for?” “Beyond eternity, it feels. You have returned to me. Will you stay with me?” “I will never leave.” “Do you promise?” “My dear, we are evermore. I left you a gift. Come find me.”]

“Clara, you want some pancakes for breakfast?”

(Huh? What?)

“Uh. Yea that sounds fine.” “Clara, you gotta help me out get-in them stakes pulled from the ground today. Those dang knots you tied up last year are a pain in the rear.” “OK, I’m up. I’m up.”

(Gosh. What should I wear today? Nothing is fitting anymore. Mom and I gotta sew up some more clothes. I am growing too fast. I think she said she’s got some of her old stuff up in the attic from before she was pregnant with me. How did this get here? It looks like that chunk of gold stuck in the cave’s wall. I can sense something about it. I feel drawn to it.)

Clara yawns while pushing herself up and swinging her feet off her bed. She then stands upon the

wooden floor of her bedroom and feels a cold gust across her legs, noticing the nightgown she is wearing is about a foot higher up her shins than what she recalls. She then slowly moves her hand to a piece of raw gold resting on her dresser. Her movements are hesitant as if the metal rock might burn or shock her upon touching it. There are blatant facial expressions of confusion pasted across her face about how it may have gotten there. She tries to recall if she had taken it from the cave or if she had seen it on the dresser the night before. Regardless, something about it tells her to pick it up as if she were a hungry dog sitting in front of a meat-swathed bone.

After a few seconds of hesitating, her fingers move towards the piece of unworked gold. She notices cavities and miniature craters surrounding the surface. It looks to her as if it had just been pulled from the rocky wall of the cave. Her fingers inch closer. Just as they are about to make contact, the gold begins to rattle and shake slightly. She thinks that maybe she should stop, but at the same time, something about the sensation of being close to the metal feels very natural. So, she gets even closer, and then the individual atoms of the gold begin to separate and swirl together in a double helix fashion away from the table into the palm of her hand. Simultaneously, the electrons break apart

from each nucleus, creating a whirlwind of electrified dust. The electron dust remains in the helix form as it whips about a beam of gold nuclei. The event looks like a strand of DNA encasing a quasar that connects her hand to the dissipating chunk of gold.

The helix spins slowly as her palm is held half-open in front of it. The particles then crawl up and across her fingertips, then her hand. For a moment, it looks as if she is wearing a solid gold glove. And a short moment later, the liquidized gold disappears into her skin. When the particles are fully absorbed, she feels oddly nourished. It is as if she has had her first authentic meal in weeks after going through a food drought.

Clara becomes dazed with a dull look on her face and thinks to herself as she stands in front of her nightstand, (Did that just happen? What just happened?) She then looks down on her nightstand to see her reflection in a handheld mirror, resting next to the vanished gold. Something starts to tickle in her face. She watches as her eyes become glossed by a mercury-looking metal. It then isolates into the pupil while turning gold. Then the gold atoms spread to the iris, turning them back to a high orange amber color they once were. When this happens, she recalls the past months that seemingly never happened. The flashback of memories sends

her flying back and onto the floor. When she hits the floor, she remembers seeing Pastor Dave between her legs in his half-robed Geneva gown spotted with blood. A second flash comes, and she sees him holding a blood-soaked infant child made of shiny, smooth metal. The child has no eyes or mouth—just a smooth head and a body. Along with Pastor Dave, she can see her native relatives, mother, and father standing about her birthing as the child lays still in his hands, seemingly lifeless.

Clara falls in and out of consciousness, hearing faint chants as she comes to and goes back out of it. She is wearing her grandmother's necklace, and she blinks slightly to see her aunt Megis bring down the gold arrow into the chest of the metallic infant. The eyes open when she does this, and the mouth splits apart like a ripped aluminum can, exposing six hypodermic-like teeth that move in and out of the torn jaw. They then sink back in, and the mouth seams back together, refusing to create a smooth finish with no opening.

At the time—after the child came to life—the events put Clara into a state of shock, and she wakes up months later laying on her floor just after absorbing the gold. She recalls everything: her dreams, the mysterious neighbor, their intertwining in the sky, grandpa's journal, and all other preceding events that transpired up until she found

the gold nugget on her nightstand. Alexandru returned for her, giving her the medicine she needed for memory restoration. She then opens her eyes a few seconds after having her flashback looking up to the ceiling. The situation causes her eyes to open wide in shock, and she feels her stomach. There is a long scar across the base of her belly that she hadn't noticed. She says quietly to herself, "This did happen. Alexandru, where are you?." "*Here.*"

Along the months, she had been in a daily state of forgetfulness, not recalling much of what happened each day prior. Her relatives had put an old Ojibwe spell on her to keep her from remembering. They did not anticipate the creature of the stars would return after impregnating Clara, but Clara is *the one*, and he must have her.

The night of Clara's last journal entry, they came to her and extracted her blood-thirsty alien child. Their goal was to prevent Clara's death from occurring. Megis and Mitig never left the land when they said they did. They waited and observed the events taking place. Megis knew what was happening despite Clara's parent's disbelief, so they set up camp on the winter nights waiting for the creature to return. Their myths or prophecies say that he

would return as he has to be with his long-lost love, the reincarnation of Memengwaa. But, they are skeptical of his true purpose, so they planned to prevent the child from being naturally birthed, which also should prevent Clara from passing during birth.

When Megis visited Clara in her dreams, she watched Alexandru make her pregnant with his blood as the two bit and drank from the other. His reproductive material is not transferred by traditional lovemaking but rather through his metallic blood. The blood carries a tiny organism made of a particular type of gold mined from another planet that brings a rare particle known as a transient-nano-quantum-particle or tranoquant. This metal can exist simultaneously in the past, present, and future. It is fueled by raw gold for stability and fresh blood for functionality.

["Darling, come to me. You'll know where I am now." "I do. I can sense you. I can feel you. What about my family?" "I am your family." "But my mother and father?" "Come to me, my darling. I am waiting." "I know what you want. I don't know if I can leave them." "You must come to me. We must be together. Find me."]

Clara continues to lay on the floor, transcending to her past body and then back to her present body. In the midst of the internal time travel, she communicates with Alexandru.

[(I can see you. I can finally see you. You are so beautiful. Where have you been?) “Waiting.” (I can hear you now. Why is that?) “You are ready.” (I am?) “Yes. I have finally found you, Memengwaa. It has been thousands of years since you left me.” (But I am Clara?) “Yes, but you are also my love.” (How can that be?) “Our spirits are multi-duel existing. We can become more than one person while retaining our former selves. Worry not about your parents for you can visit them anytime you wish.”]

Alexandru takes Clara from her sleep, where he speaks to her and carries her into the sky. Her eyes open, and she sees his eyes still smoothed over by rippling liquid metal, only this time he blinks, and his eyes become like hers once were, except with a far deeper golden ring about the pupil.

She is finally able to see him clearly, but she cannot describe what she is seeing. Then, suddenly an urge comes over her, and she knows what to do without thinking.

Her mouth moves to his shoulder and bites into his skin. While her teeth are piercing into his flesh, he takes her arm and pushes a thin nail that pokes out of his finger into it. It is a solid gold spike that

he manifested from his body's material. He pushes it into her and forces it inside a vein. Her skin heals up as it enters into her. Once it is in the vein, it separates and melds with her DNA.

The two float above the atmosphere in the moonlit sky as they feast on the other. The experience is like a drug for the two of them – they never want it to end.

In the middle of the overwhelmingly intoxicating event, Clara can hear her mother yelling to her to get ready. Something clicks, and she can be in the sky with Alexandru and see her ceiling as she lay on her bedroom floor.

“Clara, are you coming or what? We got a lot to get done today.”

In an attempt to speak while her mouth is latched to Alexandru's shoulder, Clara mumbles and drools slightly. She removes her mouth from Alexandru and asks if she can go back to her mother. He looks into her eyes, and she his, and he says, “*Find me.*” Then she blinks, and she is back on her floor alert. She yells out to her mother, “*Coming.*”

Clara gets up off the floor and wipes her mouth with the back of her hand. She thinks she is wiping slobber off her chin, but when she looks at the back of her hand, it is covered in blood. At the same time, she feels warm wetness between her legs—she is

cycling again. She yells to her mom that she needs to clean up and will be a little longer.

About a half-hour goes by, and she has readied herself. Then, Clara heads down to breakfast. After she eats, she and Lydia remove the stakes from the ground, unfastening each overdone not that Clara had made the prior year. It takes them half the day to complete the task.

While they work, Lydia doesn't notice Clara's eyes have returned to the Amber color because she is too busy looking towards the ground, and the sun keeps shining behind Clara's head, making it difficult to see.

Once all the stakes had been removed, Lydia tells Clara she can take the rest of the day off because she could tell she was cramping and noticed droplets of blood on her clothes. They then complete the task, stacking all the stakes neatly in the barn, and then Clara leaves to go back to bed in hopes of returning to the hallucinogenic-like state she was in earlier.

As the day went on, she began to think that she was just dreaming. Her thoughts confused her, playing tricks on her mind. She is starting to wonder if she is crazy or imagining things or if her dreams are just that real. In her need to discover the truth, she returns to finish her great-great-grandfather's journal.

14 | Final Entry

The Maskmela People

A few months have gone by since I last queried on the bloodthirsty animal. I had to spend months working on the native tongue with Bawaajige to get the full spectrum. She is near 6-months pregnant now, so she is left off other duties and can devote more time to helping me learn the language. The stories have become clearer to me since we started. Some of the natives talk about the stories as though the Maskmela is some sort of magic. But Bawaajige's father told me—in great detail—the truth of the story's origins.

Bawaajige's father divulged to me that the Maskmela are an extraterrestrial race of highly advanced technological beings. They resided on a planet in a nearby solar system that had come to its end. They needed to either find a way to survive without its resources or find a new world with the same or similar resources.

Before they came to Earth, the Maskmela had only a hundred of their planet's years left of resources—about 150 Earth years. They gathered their top scientists and astronomers to try and find a way to continue their race. They had known about Earth for some time. They didn't consider it a feasible option due to the distance it would take to

travel. But when they were facing doom, they found a way to use interstellar gates for such a voyage.

One of their most intelligent scientists worked on an invisible—or something so small that it cannot be seen with the naked eye—technology. A technology that was infused with their genomes to prolong life for deep space travel. The technology also permitted the body to absorb energy from the sun the same as a plant would. This would allow for the body to function without solid food or water. Since the material was apparently metallic-based, it did not require water or substance for survival. The energy from the sun and other types of light rays in space sufficed.

They went to work mining some metal with unique properties from the core of their planet to use with the almost invisible machines that transformed them. Unfortunately, there was an unforeseen side effect of the intertwining of the technology with their genetics. Waatase was a volunteer for the experiment and had been embedded with the material. The substance was supposed to transform him into an immortal metal-humanoid. This transformation was meant to allow him to survive the mission to seed the blue planet with his race, taking a select few along with him that had also undergone the conversion. They would pilot a craft holding a large group of their people

contained within a confined ecosystem in the core of their vessel.

They built a vast craft nearly the size of our moon to host the crew and some volunteers to start the new Earth-bound race. The passengers could then actively breed and grow their species as they traveled a very long distance to Earth. By the time they reached the planet, they would have a small civilization ready to populate their new home.

Waatese and his crew's mission was to pilot the craft while the others lived within the vessel's core as they would have on their home planet. They were separated from the piloting crew as the crew—at that time—required a different atmosphere to keep their metallic bodies energized, an atmosphere that would have been lethal to the organic ones. The people being raised were brought up in a slowly changing environment that would eventually mimic Earth's. This gave them and the newborns ample time to adjust in preparation for their relocation.

The Elders say that somewhere along the travels, an unpredicted mutation occurred within the transformed ones. Their blood could no longer use the rays from stars and other intergalactic streams of energy for survival. The extended darkness in the long travel created a sort of allergy to the light. Waatese described to the elders of a hunger that

overcame him that he couldn't understand. It began to drive him and his crew mad. They began starving so horribly that they broke into the isolated realm for the organics and demanded food. But when they ate, the food was instantly rejected from their bodies. They hadn't stomachs anymore.

The piloting crew became angry and confused, not able to control themselves. In the process, they killed a few organics that tried to get them out of the contained ecosystem without the ability to restrain themselves. It was as if they lost their minds—sending them into a state of madness—until they got what they needed.

The crew had been traveling for many-many years. So many years that the population within the vessel had grown from ten to three hundred people. The grandparents of the race that originated from their home planet had died off. The people within had come to believe that their home within the vessel was their original home. They had forgotten where they came from and that they were within a spacecraft destined for a new planet. They had an only slight knowledge of the crew, coming to believe that they were their gods of some sort or creators.

The people of the craft were humble, knowing nothing but peace and bliss. The ecosystem was designed to provide the perfect environment. They

knew no sickness or pain. Their technology was far advanced so that any physical damages to their bodies could be healed within moments, and no alien lifeforms could introduce disease. It was an authentic Garden of Eden for the alien people. That was until the crew went mad with hunger.

Waatase described the confusion after killing one person—people who knew not what murder was or even hatred towards another—as a traumatic experience. He had devoted his life and all his love to keep his race alive, and now he had become the cause of their extinction.

Waatese had slaughtered a young man that was trying to push him out of their enclosed world. He did it without intention—instinctively.

As the young man lay lifeless, Waatese's own flesh could sense the blood within his dying body. He felt his skin pulling towards the wounds. Some droplets of blood had splashed Waatese's arms; then, his skin began siphoning it up. He looked to his blood-covered arms, watching it vanish. Once the blood was absorbed into his skin, he instantly felt better.

The mixture of the blood within his body cured his madness, leaving him to see what he had done. He screamed and cried in pain—red tears rolling down his metal cheekbones. The organics saw him and froze, not knowing what was happening. They

watched as his skin went from metallic gray to a lively beige and his eyes turned from a rippling liquid metal to vibrant orangish color. He morphed into the most beautiful man they had ever seen. Had they not seen him for what he truly is, they may have thought him a god.

Waatase hadn't known that his skin had turned to such an ugly tone as he had been in a sort of trance while piloting the craft for so many years. After the blood began distributing through his body, he watched his arms transform from a soft metal texture to a human's regular skin color and tone. This frightened the people, and they tried to attack him and kill him, but then his crew members—driven mad with hunger—saw the solution and protected him, killing off a few of the braver ones, feasting on their blood.

During this attack, a transformation occurred in their smooth metal faces. The material used to transform their inner workings for deep space travel gave them the ability to mutate their bodies to better extract the blood.

They came back to sanity once they had full bellies of blood. As they became coherent, they realized what they had done just as Waatase did. The people watched them kill and drink from their relatives, spilling blood and dropping corpses in the middle of their Garden of Eden. They could tell they

did not want to hurt them and that their actions were not in their control. Waatese was the strongest of the crew. He said to them, "We must be destroyed before we destroy our family."

The crew, with all their integrity, agreed. While they were temporarily sane, they voluntarily discharged themselves from the craft to prevent any more killings, becoming frozen instantly in space, floating away into vast nothingness. Waatese volunteered to stay behind, locked beyond their grasp so he could teach them how to navigate the craft to Earth without putting them in danger.

Waatese explained their origins as it had been hundreds of years since they first left their home planet. He kept himself locked outside of the inner realm as he taught them, making it clear that they would need to train the offspring for hundreds of more years to make it to the blue planet third from their central sun.

There was an issue. The race had not any knowledge of science or even of how to write. This was supposed to be taught to them by the elders. The technology was inputted into the realm to learn from as they would have on their home planet. But, the people had abandoned their ancestor's beliefs generations ago. According to the elders, they came to believe their history to be a fallacy. The people hadn't even really known they were on a spacecraft,

nor did they fully understand the crew piloting it. When Waatese attempted to teach them, he understood it wouldn't be possible. Upon realizing this, he tricked them into letting him out once his hunger returned.

Being the only one left that could live through the travels, he became God to the people, demanding a regular sacrifice for his services. Over time he took on wives attempting to mate with them, but they never became pregnant. When he exchanged his metallic-based DNA with the women, he learned that his blood could turn them into something similar to him. But their lust for blood was far greater than his, so he had to end his attempts at a family quickly.

In his time alone, he did experiments on himself to try and reverse the unforeseen transformation but was unsuccessful. He discovered that the miniature robots embedded into his body—the invisible tech his people invented from the home planet's core—mated with his blood and produced new blood that required blood to survive, just as an animal needs other life to survive. It then mutated his whole body into a sort of organic-metallic lifeform.

It was hard to accept for many years, but the annoying hunger was too powerful for him to resist the consumption of blood. Over time, he became accustomed to his hunger and the sacrifices. It also

became accustomed to the people. They came to believe the sacrifices were necessary to have a quality life. Young boys and girls were trained to believe that it is a great honor to sacrifice themselves to their God and that if they didn't, it would mean certain death for everyone or at least starvation and suffering. The children fought amongst each other to be the next sacrifice believing they would have an eternal afterlife and be cherished forever amongst their people for their willingness to die.

Little did they know, they were simply being raised like cattle for slaughter. In some sense, their sacrifice did prolong the life of their race since the blood was the only thing to keep Waatase alive, and only he could navigate the ship to Earth.

Eventually, they made it to Earth, but the people had stopped breeding along the way. They again had forgotten the purpose of their mission being kept within the spacecraft, isolated from the universe for so long. They only came to hate Waatase for killing their children, not understanding that it wasn't his fault, and his sacrifice was just as important as theirs—if they wanted to survive.

Waatase's hunger grew strong again, and since there were no more child sacrifices, he had to re-enter the realm for food. An urge he could not control, and he couldn't kill himself because if he

did, it would mean certain death for his people as they could not manage the vessel without him. He would find out later that he couldn't kill himself if he tried. When he learned this, he wondered what happened to his counterparts after they discharged themselves in space.

Waatese managed to pick off a person every so often until the people began to fight back. It became a game of stalemate as they refused to breed, and he needed to get them to Earth. He couldn't kill all of them, so he struck a deal. He said, "Give me eight of you, and I will make them numb to life so they will not feel pain, nor will they know what is happening, and I will feed off you in your sleeplike state. I will not bother you further, and you can return to your life. We are close enough for them to survive the journey as I keep them on life support replenishing their blood."

The people knew they could not fight him, and they did not understand that they were inside a vessel. Generations upon generations had passed since he and his crew members made their first kills. So, eight brave people offered themselves as a sacrifice to Waatese to feed on.

At this time, the craft was nearing Earth's Sun's location in the stars, and Waatase could bring the vessel closer to Earth. But when it came time to prepare the people for their new home, he made a

shocking discovery: One of his victims, that he drank blood from had begun to change. His blood mixed with hers one way or another. She had only just become a woman, and her eggs were ovulating when he started drinking of her unconscious body. The metallic blood of Waatase carried a seed with it, impregnating the girl. He then learned that he could breed but only with a particular blood type that could mend with his, and only once she was with his blood could she become pregnant. She also absorbed the technology without turning into the metallic beast he is—without fresh blood. She could also drink blood to survive as well as eat solid food and drink water. She was a hybrid of sorts.

She was the first to give birth in over a decade and the only one to mate with Waatase successfully, and she was a virgin before and after the conception. Throughout the pregnancy and change, she remained in the unconscious state Waatase put her in. He would sometimes give her blood and other times substance. Eventually, a female child was born, and she was born without a thirst for blood. Waatase could not care for the girl and pilot the craft, so he put her in the closed realm with the organics. They were to raise her as the daughter of their God. Still, her desire for blood became overwhelming when she came of age and began to menstruate.

When Waatase positioned the craft in Earth's lunar orbit—according to legend, this is where our Earth's moon came from—and entered the realm for the first time in hundreds of years, inside, there was nothing but overgrown forests and foliage. The child had killed off all the people and then any of the animals within. Eventually, she began to starve. Her skin shriveled up into a sparkling crystal-like metal, shrink-wrapping her bones. Her appearance was that of a skeleton made of solid crystal frozen in time.

The blood of his people was good, but when he arrived on Earth, the iron-laced human blood was far more nutritious, making him even more powerful.

Waatase investigated the realm until he discovered the truth and came upon the crystal child resting on a ceremonial monolith built by the people to present the sacrifices to Waatase. Waatase would not let it rain. Or he wouldn't allow the ship's artificial sun to shine if they didn't comply with his need for blood, so they made a sacrificial site to make the process seem more natural. This is where the girl stayed, hoping that the peoples' God (Waatese) would return for her as she starved.

He found hieroglyphs on caves nearby that told the story of the child's wrath and their attempts to kill her, but her strength was that of a hundred

thousand people. They had no choice but to offer themselves to her one-by-one until there were no more Maskelmela people left. I call the alien race the Maskelmela people, but I don't think that was their labeling. I think Maskelmela was a derivation of Ojibwe words. (I believe miskwi translates to blood, and miijim is food. The one that needs blood for food in some fashion.)

Waatase realized that this must be his daughter in some sense and, without thinking, sliced his wrist with his sharp thumbnail pumping blood out onto the frozen crystal girl. The blood spilled in her jaw and dripped into her mouth and along her cheeks. She did not come to life, but her skin began to bubble up, absorbing the nutrients.

He took her back to the cabin and fed her blood from his victims he had kept on life support for so many years. She eventually began reforming and turning into a regular-looking humanoid. But this time, she had grown to appear about 10-years younger than Waatase, who had an age resemblance of around 28 human years. He had stopped aging after transforming, and the blood kept him young.

As the girl began coming to life, her beauty was intoxicating to Waatase, but he hadn't a sexual desire for her as he could tell; she was his daughter. The more she came back to, the more she resembled him. He also remembered the poor girl he drank

from, who was her mother. She didn't survive the birthing of the girl. (A correlation to the Ojibwe woman all dying at birth or within some time of giving birth to a girl – I assume)

As they neared Earth, she came to life and, without question, knew of their relation. She knew this because she did not sense him as a source of food. When her eyes first opened, and she began to move, she popped from the bed she lay on to the bodies on life support and began to drink as if she had never drunk before. Waatase had to restrain her as the bodies were the only source of life left on the vessel for them to feed on. He was stronger than her because he was healthy, but he could tell her strength would be far greater than his once she regained her health.

There was a communication barrier between them, but they quickly realized they could speak to one another through thought—not using words. A talent, Waatase didn't know he had developed. He read her mind and saw the horror she put their people through, and she read his mind and saw the pain he felt from this. Within minutes, the two of them knew everything about the other from past to present.

After going through his thousands of years of history and their planetary origins, she instantly became a different person.

They stayed in silence for days pondering the other's mind. They felt a sense of security with each other that she had never felt, and Waatase had not felt since he was mated on his home planet.

He named her Nishi. One of the elders told me that Nishi is "kill" in Ojibwe and "lost love" in the alien language. It must be where the word came from after learning of her.

They had made it to Earth by this time and positioned their craft as the moon (as the legend goes). Waatase rode a sky horse to the Americas and settled in the northern region. The Ojibwe elders say he chose this area to take residence because of the absence of society. It was his intention to try and live off of animals while he studied himself in hopes of reversing what had happened to him.

There appear to be two stories depending on who I am speaking with. 1) Waatase came from the stars to be with Memengwaa, and 2) Waatase comes across Memengwaa and then mates with her, starting the Ojibwe people. There is a lot of confusion about the historical truth. It doesn't surprise me, considering they haven't any written documentation other than cave drawings and rock carvings. The truth may never be told.

I didn't get much of anything out of anyone on the final whereabouts of Nishi—Waatese's daughter.

Thirteen & Drinking Blood: Ancient Love

Some say she stayed within the moon to keep an eye on Earth, and others say Memengwaa is Nishi and that Waatese married his daughter. Again, the truth is a mystery, but it is undoubtedly true in some sense after all that I have seen here.

Nathaniel James Clark

15 | Return to the Cave

After Clara finishes reading the last part of her grandfather's handbook, she darts out of the house to find the one that speaks to her in her mind without words. When Lydia and Joseph hear her rapid footsteps and the front door slam shut, they both stop what they are doing and follow her out of the house to see where she is going. They instantly know where she is heading when they see her running in the direction of the underground cave systems. They then both look at each other and can tell what the other is thinking—(The Ojibwe spell has been broken.)

Joseph is well aware of the tunnels filled with gold, as well as is Lydia. The two of them never wanted anyone to find out because it could ruin the peacefulness of their lives. Throughout their time on the farm – only on occasion – if absolutely needed – would any gold be lifted and sold.

When Lydia's relatives were at their farm, they told them that this might happen if the Maskelmela returned to claim Clara. They explained to them the need to prepare to fight it – that Clara would not be able to resist the pleasures and seductions of the creature. They were left with instructions on how to kill a Maskelmela if they happened to find themselves confronting one.

Megis explained, “The creature lives on blood and gold, so it becomes allergic to any organic materials that are not predominantly metallic in nature, so guns would not be effective in harming it. You must plunge something nonmetallic into its body if you wish to injure it. The ancestors say it has no heart, so the weapon used must penetrate the head to successfully destroy it. A sharp wood stick would work well. Something long. If the beast gets too close, you may fall under its spell and have no hope of walking away alive. Also, it doesn’t come out in the daylight because it cannot see—it only sees properly in the absence of sunlight. It is likely hiding in something that shades it from the daylight nearby, such as a basement cellar or cave system. Be very careful – the creature can trick you into thinking it looks like something it is not. Maybe a wolf, or possibly a familiar man. You will be able to tell it is the Maskelmela if you see solid silvery or golden metal eyes.”

When Joseph and Lydia heard Megis say this, they both knew that the creature must be living in their secret gold mine since it consumes gold and is a dark underground cave system. It is the perfect place for something to hide and make its way about the property unseen. The two had a moment of clarity, understanding why Clara kept seeing who

she thought was the neighbor popping up all over the property.

Knowing that Clara's Alexandru is likely to be hiding within the caves, the two decide to go out after her. But before they venture out, they inspect Clara's room for evidence to make sure that is where she is heading. They are not worried about her arriving at the cave before them as Clara is on foot, and they will be riding the horses.

Joseph takes on Clara's dresser and sifts through her garments. He quickly finds Nathaniel's journal and sees a void cavity in the cover where an item had been removed. It was resting under Clara's diary. He then sets them atop the dresser and keeps probing while Lydia looks in the nightstand. The nightstand is found empty, so Lydia then looks under the bed. She sees nothing but the wood planks soaked with dried blood. She then lifts up the mattress and finds a piece of paper. She calls out to Joseph, "I found something." "What?" "It is your old map of the land. She has marked the cave system on it." "That's it then. That's where she is heading." "What did you find?" "Just an old journal and her diary. Nothing much of it." "Alright, let's get a move on. Get out there and find her." "We need some weapons, as Megis said. Something wooden." "The stakes." "Stakes?" "Yes, the stakes we pulled out today." "Do you think they are long enough?"

“We can fasten them to some shovel shafts; just break off the blade.” “Okay. Let’s hurry then.”

Joseph and Lydia quickly break some shovels and fasten the wooden stakes to the ends. They then get on their horses and gallop off to the cave entrance. The two look like two unarmored knights jousting without opponents as they ride through the muddy meadow that has just started sprouting tiny green blades of grass. They realize that Clara is moving much faster than they thought as they ride. The two did not calculate the speed of Clara’s ability to run due to her mutating genetics, so they are far behind her as she bolts through the land at animalistic speeds.

As Lydia and Joseph race to get to Clara before she gets to the cave, Clara is already standing at the entrance. She is staring into the darkness seeing two small golden rings hovering in the center of the blacked-out cave.

(“You have found me.” “I have.” “Come.”)

The eyes disappear, and without a thought, Clara heads to the cave and slips herself inside. When she gets in, the darkness becomes light. She is a hybrid now, so her eyes can adjust to sunlight or darkness. When the darkness becomes light, she sees the lantern she left behind and the full stretching of the tunnel system. All around the walls

curving up to the ceiling are spots of sparkling gold shimmering down the endless tunnels. It is a moment of awe for her.

She looks everywhere but cannot see the entity that drew her to the cave. So, she begins to venture through the tunnels. As she walks down the gold-laced channels, the gold atoms of the outermost surfaces break off and float to her body.

The event of the electrons again breaking off and swirling about causes the tunnel to light up just enough for Joseph and Lydia to see it from a distance. When the two get near the tunnel, the sun is almost gone, so it is a shock when they see a glowing cavity stuck within the soil. They think of it as a gift, and when they get close, they hop off their horses and don't bother tying them up. Each quickly run to the cave entrance and slide in, making sure to bring their spears. The light is fast fading away as it moves deeper into one of the tunnels.

Lydia noticed their lantern sitting near the entrance as the light completely disappeared.

"Look, Joseph, she must have been here before. This is our lantern from the cellar. It hasn't been used today."

Joseph picks up the lantern and lights it. The small flame acts as a spotlight in the pitch-black darkness of the cave. When their eyes focus, they see the curved walls of the cave, which now look as

though someone painted the walls gold. The metal had melted as Clara walked through and plastered the cave walls smooth.

“Let’s go, Honey. We have to get to her before she gets to the Mask; think.”

Lydia replies with a startle in her voice, “Mmm-hmmm.”

“Don’t worry, Honey, it’s all going to be okay.”

Joseph and Lydia continue to search for Clara, slowly maneuvering through the dugout passageways. They make a wrong turn and hit a dead end. So, they head back and make better efforts to track Clara’s footprints. They had lost track of them because they transformed into something else. Each continued step confused the two of them.

Lydia says to Joseph, “Look, Joseph. Look at how this footprint is different than the last step. What is happening to our daughter?” “It must just be something else stepping into it.” “No. Look at it. It changes slightly with each step. She is transforming into something. Megis never said any of this.” “Let’s just keep moving, Hun.” “Joseph, I’m scared.” “Me too – Me too.”

A few hundred feet down the channel Lydia and Joseph are traveling is a golden-laced Clara that has nearly doubled in size. Her body now looks like a full-grown humanoid female but with alien

attributes. Her flesh is embodied by liquidized gold. She looks like a solid gold statue only when her legs, arms, fingers, or any part of her body brush up against another part; it is the same feeling and sound as soft skin touching soft skin. She is unaware of the change that she has undergone.

("You are getting close." "I can feel you. I feel stronger, and my mind is more clear." "You have eaten well." "Keep walking; you are almost here.")

The transformed Clara makes her way to the voice source to find she has hit a dead end.

("Where are you?" "Here." "Where?" "I don't see you.")

She inspects the dead-end of the tunnel and notices that this area has no gold in it and the wall is soft soil. She decides that something must be behind the wall. She lifts her arms up to start digging and then notices the change she has undergone.

(Oh my god. What has happened to me?)

Before she starts to dig, she examines her body and starts to have a moment of fear and anxiety about what has happened to her. When this happens, she is suddenly taken from her body in the metaphysical form—pulled right through her chest. She floats, partially invisible. She looks at herself and sees her normal-looking milky white human body. She then examines her new body, seeing a

golden woman that looks half-human, half-alien, standing nearly eight feet tall.

In her metaphysical form, she is visited by Alexandru but realizes that this is Waatese. He talks to her again in her head without words and explains the trinket she found in the book is a key to unlock a sarcophagus he is held within behind the soil-built wall. He embraces her body, and the two become one in this form. The sensation of his touch to hers is so powerful that nothing in her life mattered any more than freeing him so the two of them could be together.

Lydia and Joseph are now coming near Clara's location. They can hear rustling as she scrapes away soil uncovering an ancient tomb. They both slow down, trying to prolong what they are scared to discover about their daughter.

They creep a few steps closer and closer. The tunnel is now being lit up by the breaking electrons trying to find their way to Clara's body, so they set the lantern down and prepare themselves for battle, hoisting their spears and bending their knees to help enforce a thrust.

Then, they peek around the corner to see the newly formed Clara as they reach the dead-end tunnel. Neither can say a word; they are speechless at the sight of the tall golden alien beauty. Her

clothes stretched and ripped off during the transformation, exposing her naked body.

They don't know what to do, so they watch as she brushes dirt off an old wooden door. Joseph notices she has some sort of a trinket in her hand, and he sees that it is the same shape as a small carved-out area on the door. He thinks he should try and stop her, but he is concerned that this thing is no longer his daughter. The mere size of her is intimidating. He thinks that it may be best for him and Lydia to just leave for the safety of their own lives. By the looks of Clara, there is no turning back.

Whether or not they wish to move forward or go backward, they are both frozen with fear as they watch Clara unlock this door.

Clara places the object embedded into the book into the slot. Still, it sticks to her hand, attracted magnetically to the gold in her body. She puts it back in the slot and then keeps her hand connected to it so that she can turn her palm to unlock the door. Once the door is unlocked, a shift in the air is felt throughout the town. A subatomic flow of waves rattled the core of every atom within a hundred miles.

She pulls the door open. A blueish light seeps in through the cracks as the door separates from the frame. The shining light almost blinds her and her

parents when she opens it completely. Once their eyes adjust, Clara walks inside the tomb and sees a strange-looking coffin of solid quartz crystal. She goes in closer and disappears from sight. Joseph and Lydia then follow her, creeping in from around the corner to get closer and examine what she is doing.

Clara continues to walk about the tomb, exploring the surrounding cave drawings of a glass human feeding on the blood of the natives, slaughtering and killing everyone it encounters. Then, she turns and looks at the coffin. It is glowing a brilliant silver blue from the inside. She thinks to herself that this must be Alexandru, and she must free him. Joseph and Lydia had made their way to the entrance by this time. They were peeking through the door, observing their naked gold daughter cavorting about the tomb observing the surroundings. They then watch her move to the crystal coffin and kneel down. She puts her hands on the lid and starts to slide it off.

Joseph and Lydia don't know what to do, so they just watch as Clara removes the lid of the sarcophagus. They watch Clara's alien hands push it slowly off, exposing brighter and brighter light as it opens each inch further. Out of nowhere, from behind Joseph and Lydia, a voice is heard yelling, "Clara – Stop!" Joseph and Lydia just about faint,

being shocked. They turn to see Megis standing behind them. Clara hears her too and turns her head to see the three standing at the tomb's entrance. She says, "Mom – Dad."

Megis pushes Lydia and Joseph apart and runs past them to Clara, yelling, keep that lid shut – pull it back now, but it is too late. While Clara had her hands on the lid, the golden-blood particles were being sucked out of her through the crystal into the entity inside. She had returned to her normal self. When she noticed that her skin and hands were back to normal, the lid blasted off into the air, and something flew so fast out of it no one could see it. Then, the cave went utterly dark except for a glowing blue blur that crawled across the cave's ceiling so fast it was out of the tomb and crawling down the tunnels out of sight, leaving them stuck in the dark. Clara instantly knew this creature; it was Nishi Waatese's crystal skeleton daughter.

The lantern Joseph had is about twenty feet away, flickering in the distance. He gets up off the ground and heads to go get it. He walks carefully, scraping his hands across the cave walls for guidance. He then gets to it and picks it up. When he picks it up, he raises it to his head's height and is scared half to death to see a metallic man-beast with a half-human part wolf jaw. He sees the line of six teeth running down one side of the jaw and knows

instantly that this was the beast responsible for draining his cattle of blood. Its eyes glowed with golden iris and silver pupils. He falls back on his butt and screams, “Lydia- get the spears quick. It’s here in front of me.”

Before they have a chance to help him, the wolf-like mouth only containing one row of six hypodermic teeth sinks its mouth on the side of Joseph’s rib cage and begins to siphon him of his blood. While he is attacked, the lantern lays on its side, flickering light so Lydia, Megis, and Clara can see the creature intermittently biting onto him. Megis does not hesitate; she grabs the spear and plunges it right into the head of the beast. It screams in agony, and the tip of the spear breaks off in its skull—after Megis forcefully snapped the stick. The creature then takes off running, disappearing into the cave.

Lydia runs to Joseph in a frantic panic, “Joseph, are you alright. Joseph. Oh my god. Joseph, you are bleeding everywhere.”

Lydia and Megis put their hands to Joseph’s side to try and stop the bleeding. Megis turns and yells out to Clara to come help, but when she turns around, Clara is gone. Lydia turns too when Megis stops mid-sentence to see that her daughter is gone. She shouts out, trying to get a response from Clara, but she gets nothing.

("My darling. Come to me." "Where are you?" "Go further through the tomb.")

As Megis and Lydia were tending to Joseph, Clara worked her way further into the tomb. She comes across another coffin, but this one is made of wood. The lid was only resting on it with a wedge in fit.

("You have found me.")

She cannot resist finding the one she loves so dearly and repeating the nights of passion they had together, so she pops the lid off and finds a shriveled-up mummy. The leathery skin is speckled with what looks like tiny diamonds.

("I need blood, my darling." "How do I give it to you?" "Your father." "No. I can't" "It's the only way. He is already dying." "I can't." "You must. You have unleashed my daughter Nishi, and I am the only one that can stop her now." "Why didn't you tell me about her?" "I hadn't known she was here." "How are you talking with me if you are dead?" "I am not dead. We visit another world where we are free. I live in that world. I have had to wait for you to return to me there for longer than I know. This world is like a mirror image of yours, but

it is empty – I am the only one in it until you arrive. I only led you to my vessel that can bring me to you physically. Please, I need blood.”)

Megis knows without seeing where Clara is. She is one of the chosen ones sworn to protect the tomb. The Maskelmela beast was also trapped within the cave system to keep anyone from finding the tomb. Still, Clara carries the ancient genes of Memengwaa, who is born of Nishi, and all Ojibwe are born of Waatese and Memengwaa’s daughter, who is the daughter of his own daughter. This bloodline is not considered food to the Maskelmela, nor is it a threat, so it never bothered Clara, her Mother, or Megis. On the other hand, Joseph is not carrying the sacred blood, so he comes off as food to the Maskelmela.

Megis has the same interdimensional powers as Clara, only on an observing scale. She cannot enter the world Waatese is bound to. She knows that the only way to stop Nishi is to awaken Waatese, and he needs non-Ojibwe blood to do so. So, she convinces Lydia to help her get Joseph up and carry him to Waatese. Within a few minutes, they are nearing Clara, who is kneeling naked in the dirt next to the mummified remains of Waatese.

“Quick, we need to get Joseph to the coffin.”
“What, why?” “Just trust me, Nidiya. We do have not much time. Clara, move back.”

Clara pushes herself back, feeling pebbles and rocks scrape against her bare bottom, feet, and hands, not noticing the pain much. Lydia and Megis hoist Joseph up over the coffin. He is nearly passing out from the loss of blood, but they get him to understand to stand up. Then he collapses over the open casket, and blood begins pouring out of the wound on his side onto Waatese's body.

Lydia is in a state of shock and cannot say anything. She is so worried that Joseph will die and that this corpse will kill them. Megis is not concerned; she only knows that Waatese will not stop until he has his Memengwaa back. She knows the stories of her ancestors trying to destroy him, but it proved impossible. The metallic substance from his home planet is impenetrable and impervious to all earthly chemicals. He had voluntarily allowed himself to be drained of blood so the people of earth could live, but he said he would return when Memengwaa does.

Megis and her predecessors had been instructed to allow him life again if the time comes that Memengwaa does indeed return. She understands that Clara is the reincarnation of Memengwaa, so she has come to help reunite them. The proficy says that only when Waatese and Memengwaa are reunited can they destroy the crystal, Nishi.

16 | Memengwaa

When Waatese first arrived on Earth, he and Nishi dominated the lands. They used their moon-based technology to fly continent to continent, ruling the people of Earth, feasting on the blood of the primitive people. At first, they did not partake in relations with each other being father and daughter, but after hundreds of years passed, and their attempts to mate with humans failed, they fell in love with each other, forgetting the true nature of their blood relationship. They became bonded as man and woman, husband and wife, king and queen, god and goddess.

After thousands of years of feeding on the humans and absorbing gold, it became unentertaining and difficult. People began living in caves in fear of them, and gold was scarce and difficult to mine, even with their alien technology. So, they began educating the humans, teaching them how to build and write. For thousands of years, they did this all over the globe building the Egyptian empire, Mayan civilization, and all other non-technological civilizations for electricity was forbidden. If humans can harness electrons, it would be the only threat.

Waatese and Nishi had thirteen children throughout their rain. Each child is born with a crystal skeleton passed on by their mother, Nishi.

They each lived for hundreds of years, but they died one after another, leaving Waatese and Nishi to be the only ones left. They knew that the Earth-bound gold was not strong enough to create a child that could live eternally with them. Nishi wept after each death, and Waatese grew angry.

Life on Earth was not worth living without family, so Waatese took his craft and returned to the moon to retrieve the vessel's core, which was made of their home planet's transient nano quantum particles. He would not be able to leave this planet ever again if he destroyed the moon's core, but he and Nishi wanted a child that could live forever with them.

He brought the core back to Earth, forgetting any possibilities of leaving, and he and Nishi began to try to become pregnant again. Eventually, they were successful, and they fed the child their home planet's gold.

There was a problem- the child was born human. The child was Memengwaa. The birthing also took the life of Nishi, and she began to wither. No matter how much blood she drank, she could not stay healthy. Eventually, she began to revert to her hardened crystal state.

Waatese had roamed the Earth in search of substance for Nishi as she raised Memengwaa, and when he returned, she was becoming of age, and

Nishi was nearly gone. Waatese fell in love with Memengwaa and spent the most incredible months of his life with her. Before her womanhood, he took her and put a child in her belly. Nishi had already become frozen in time, and no human blood could bring her back. Waatese knew that the ship's core could get her back, but when he came home to find Memengwaa's beauty, he chose to let Nishi go. He placed Nishi in the tomb and scattered the gold about the cave system so if he ever wanted to see her again. He was not aware that the ancient Ojibwe had placed him with her upon the dehydrating of his body.

He chose the Dakota regions because the Americas were populated with people he and Nishi had not disturbed with their rulings. He and Memengwaa then spent the next 9-months living in peace with the surrounding lands; he taught her everything he learned about Earth and the land and introduced her to the local natives that would be the ones to adopt Nindaanis, their daughter and the mother of the Ojibwe people. Nindaanis was able to mate with humans successfully, unlike Waatese and Nishi.

When Memengwaa died giving birth to Nindaanis, Waatese went mad with sadness, starving himself to an unconscious state. He explained to the pre-Ojibwe natives of his origins

and purpose. Nothing mattered to him any more than being with Memengwaa, so he said we would remove his blood-thirsty life from Earth and only return if Memengwaa does.

He showed them the whereabouts of Nishi within the cave system and explained that she should never be released for her thirst for blood is far greater than his and that she would likely destroy everyone if she were to be reactivated by the alien gold laced with tranoquarts. They took him and put him to rest with her after he became unconscious. They then began a linking pack to protect and prevent the awakening of Nishi.

Once Waatese was gone, the natives took Nindaanis and debated killing her to prevent the bloodline, but the elders advised against it, warning of the repercussions. They explained that even though they are food to these creatures, they are still lifeforms that do not deserve to suffer. It was not their fault they became the way they did and that within time and evolution of Humankind, their problem could be reversed, and their knowledge could ultimately save everyone.

Nindaanis grew up a normal humanoid with only moderate abilities. The human blood Waatese and Memengwaa fed on created a platform of breeding mostly humanoid genetics. When Nindaanis came of age, she mated with multiple

natives to help create a diverse bloodline of Ojibwe. She was instructed to do so, so that it would help to bring her mother's blood back faster and to keep from too much inbreeding.

Nindaanis lived a long healthy life and then passed on, leaving many children and grandchildren to grow the Ojibwe tribes. The Ojibwe people passed on the stories for hundreds of years in preparation for the return of Memengwaa.

While Nishi was unconscious, she was still aware of all that was happening. She knew she needed the alien gold and blood of Memengwaa to come back to life, so she waited and plotted to feed on Clara. Waatese only knew that Clara's energy was Memengwaa and was unaware of Nishi's plans; else, he'd not have guided Clara through the tunnels of gold.

Megis was aware of this and wanted to set it forth. Megis was the one that placed the gold on Clara's nightstand and helped guide her to the key within her grandfather's journal. Megis had been trained and prepared for this day since birth. Lydia was unaware of this secret society of Maskelmela protectors as she is not a purebred Ojibwe, so she was left in the dark.

Now, Waatese is to be reawakened and united with Clara so that they can destroy Nishi.

17 | Peace at Last

Blood continues to drip out of Joseph onto Waatese until each drop is few and far between. Lydia stands off to the side in the dimly lit cave weeping for her husband. Megis prepares for anything, grabbing the other homemade spear and taking a stance. Clara finds an ancient Sioux robe discarded by the ones that built the tomb. It is just big enough to cover her naked body right to the base of her buttock. It is rough and itchy, but she doesn't notice it being in a mild state of a shock coming out of her golden trance. The four remain in silence as Joseph nears death and Waatese nears life.

Lydia takes the lantern and holds it above the coffin. When the light shines over the bodies, she sees Joseph's blood pooling up in the way liquid does in an antigravity state. It moves all over Waatese's body. Some of the blood had been absorbed, and the rest encases his corpse. After a few seconds, all of the blood seeps into his skin. When it fully dissipates, Waatese's renewed body appears to them.

Megis walks up closer to the coffin to stand next to Lydia to see a strikingly beautiful young man looking to be around the age of fifteen. He looks to Megis like some of her nephews from the tribe. The boy lies still in a comatose state. When Clara sees the expressions on Megis and her Mother's face, she

pushes herself up off the dirt ground and walks up to see him. For her, it is love at first sight. She instantly understood that this was the face she couldn't see in her dreams. (He needs the gold.) She thought, so she went over to the outer edge of the tomb and plucked a chunk out of the wall. She then walks it to him and lays it on his chest.

“What are you doing, Clara?” “He needs the gold, Mother.” “Why?” “It is the structure of his genetics from his home planet. The material that makes him up is based on the subatomic structure of the gold's particles. It is a source of fuel.” “How do you know this?” “He told me.” “Then why does he need blood?” “When he was embedded with his planet's technology—for deep space travel—a mutation occurred within his genetics so that the technology within developed a requirement for blood after it drained him of his DNA. It is a fuel source for the source of fuel that gives him eternal life. It also allows him to live simultaneously in the past, present, and future amid other-dimensional space. His planet was dying tens of thousands of years ago, and he had to transform his body to be able to travel to our planet.”

Megis says to Lydia, “She is right.”

By the time Clara rested the gold on Waatese's chest, Megis and Lydia had pulled Joseph off the coffin and rested him on the floor. The three then

watched the solid gold melt into a pool of liquid metal and repeat the pattern the blood had made.

The gold submerges his body and then gets sucked into each individual atom reforming his internal structure. While this happens, his eyes open, and they are the same solid. However, Clara remembers seeing the first night he came to her still liquid-like mercury-laced eyes. Then, the metal straightens out and fades away to reveal a brilliant iris of pure gold with platinum pupils.

A movement starts across his body. Fingers and toes twitch slightly. His shoulders flinch, and his back arches. The three-step back and Megis again prepares for the worst. Just as Megis props the spear for an attack, she stops in her tracks when she hears Waatese speak to her in her head without words. She drops the spear to the ground, realizing that this creature is no threat, and even if it were, she'd have no chance trying to fight it.

All along, Clara can overhear all that Waatese says to Megis. She patiently awaits Alexandru to fully come to, and he does. He rises upward, lifting his back from the coffin, then props himself up and steps out onto the floor. During this movement, the cave lit up like sunlight from the breaking down of the gold atoms all throughout his body. He shimmers and sparkles like diamonds as he maneuvers his way to Clara.

Clara stands half a foot shorter than Waatese, and she stands with a look of innocence—a look only a teenage girl in love is capable of portraying. When he reaches her, he looks deep into her eyes. He says to her in an ancient Ojibwe language Megis and Lydia barely understand, “Finally- Peace at Last.” He then precedes to kiss Clara gently on the lips.

After removing his mouth from hers, he softly puts his hand to hers and walks her to Joseph. He then kneels next to his dying body and looks at Clara, and says to her telepathically, (“He needs blood.”) Clara does not resist Waatese’s motives as he pulls her wrist above Joseph’s wound. Megis and Lydia observe a sharp needle that emerges from Waatese’s thumb in the still brightly lit cave. It is thin and hypodermic yet sharp along the sides. He uses the blade portion of the metallic thorn to slice deep into Clara’s skin, exposing her flesh. Blood then begins pouring out of her onto Joseph’s wound. Clara feels nauseous from the event, falling to her knees. Lydia shouts out, “What are you doing!” and makes an attempt to go to stop him, but Megis puts her arm in front of her and stops her.

Then Lydia watches as Clara’s wound heals miraculously in front of them. Then Clara collapses and falls to the ground. The blood that spilled out on Joseph carries a golden hue and pools onto him,

similar to how his blood did Waatese. It then is absorbed by his wound, and the six holes punctured in his chest heals up behind it. Lydia then understands what Waatese was doing and feels relieved now, knowing that he saved Joseph's life.

Meanwhile, Waatese had moved to Clara's unconscious body. He puts his hand under her neck and lifts her head to his chest. He takes the same tiny blade and makes a small incision on his chest. He then invades her consciousness to awaken her from her sleep and informs her to drink. She hears him and presses her lips to the blood leaking out of the wound like a broken faucet with a drip. She slurps it up and then sucks on the wound filling her belly with her father's blood until his wound heals and disappears.

Joseph comes to see this and attempts to get up, but he is too weak to do so. Megis understands all that is happening and asks in as old of a dialect as she can to Waatese, "Nishi?"

When Megis says this to Waatese, everything stops frozen in time. A small drop of blood fell from Clara's lip and now remains hung in the air. Waatese searches the minds of the four of them to learn the history of Earth since he has disappeared. They stay in this frozen state for an unknown amount of time until Waatese has fully educated himself, learning their language as well. Once

finished, the drop of blood continues to the floor, hitting the dust and rolling in it. He then speaks in English to them.

“I’m afraid it may be too late. If she has consumed the gold from my home planet, her strength outweighs mine.” “What will she do?” Asks Megis. “I’m unsure. She has intermittent urges that she cannot control, which is why I let her go—for the sake of your race. She is your true mother, the mother of your people and Memengwaa’s mother.”

Although Clara has strong feelings for Alexandru, she does not recollect being his long-lost Memengwaa, so she is now unsure how to feel about the situation. Waatese can sense this, so he takes Clara’s consciousness with him on a journey to the past for her to relive the nine months of passion they had together before the birth of Nindaanis. When she returns, she fully understands who she is. The particles deep within her atomic structures carry the history like an unplugged hard drive that had been reactivated and extracted. Her whole world is toppled as she regains her past self. The emotional connection with her parents is severed when she regains this living memory. Lydia and Megis feel this deep within and experience pain, knowing that the Clara they love is not really Clara. Still, Memengwaa loves them, knowing that

they are really her beyond-great-grandchildren. A reverse of parenthood between them while retaining the same love for each other—a bond that cannot be broken in either direction.

Joseph would have been unaware of what was transpiring amid the group had he not been given a pure form of gold-laced Ojibwe blood. It gives him a temporary seventh sense for the events taking place. It calms him and reassures him.

The five of them are all now in sync with one and other, and they all know they must find Nishi before she escapes the tunnel system. Waatese can sense she is still within the caves. She is confused like an infant with advanced intelligence being born into the world – able to comprehend but unable to understand.

Megis picks up the broken shovel with the stake tied to it, but Waatese says, “That won’t be necessary. The only way is for me to find her in another world.” Clara asks, “Can she be stopped?” and Waatese responds with a calmness in his voice, “Do you want to stop her?” Clara understands what he means by this as Nishi is her true mother. Megis then says, “She will consume all that has become of us if we don’t.” Waatese responds, “She will not take the lives of any being that carries her blood. The population on this planet has grown immensely since her disappearance. I don’t think she could

make a real dent in it if she tried. I as well require human blood for life. Do you wish to destroy me? You couldn't if you tried. I've tried. It is the core of my planet. The material is everlasting as it transmits energy in all-time directions from beginning to end. Like a wolf in the wild takes life and spares a life, so must we."

At this time, Waatese goes into a meditative trance pivoting his mind into a cross-dimensional world where he and Nishi once roamed. When he arrives in this paradise of isolation between them, he sees a child made of crystal sitting on a large boulder staring off into an endless ocean that transcends across the whole universe without end. He approaches her and sits next to her. He remembers the two of them spending months in meditation at this location.

Nishi turns to him in her crystal-child state and asks, "Why did you leave me?"

"You were out of control, and the food source was diminishing." "I thought you loved me." "We'd be frozen on this planet forever had we not given the humans time to grow." "You love Memengwaa." "I do." "I don't want to exist without love." "Where are you?" "I don't know." "We need to find you and help you." "You will let me freeze again." "No. We can live together. Memengwaa has returned. Do you remember your daughter?" "I

do." "She has returned and is like us now. We can all be together—eternally. There is enough blood and gold on this planet to last us until their race advances enough for us to find a new planet." "Will you love me as you once did?" "I will always love you as I once did." "But Memengwaa." "She is my love too. She is your love and your daughter. You love her in one way, and I love her in another. Together we are a family. You must come to us." "I am scared you will try to hurt me." "Nishi- We couldn't hurt you if we wanted to. You are the strongest of us and have been reinvigorated with our home planet's golden core. It will be thousands of years before you will lose strength, and the metal of the moon-ships core will last you forever."

Lydia, Megis, Joseph, and Memengwaa observe Waatese in his trance. Then his eyes open, and from around the corner walks in Nishi, a now tall and slender Native American woman standing naked in the glowing tomb. Her long black hair drapes over her chest, flowing to her waist. She had found the Maskelmela beast within the cave and consumed it, giving her back her human form, ending the hybrid animal mutation.

Waatese says to Memengwaa, "Memengwaa, this is your mother Nishi. Mother of all Ojibwe and my daughter. Together we are a family."

Thirteen & Drinking Blood: Ancient Love

Joseph is confused by the relationship, not knowing the entire history. Megis and Lydia understand as they had been taught of the past. Megis more so than Lydia, but Lydia can now fill in the blanks withheld from her teachings. It is a family reunion for them, and they form a bond without hesitation.

Created by Author Jonathan David

To live in the moment is to seek the past...