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Chapter 1 – Karuk

It had been a year since her mother’s death, and still SuSaan didn’t know the truth. Killed in a storm, that’s all her father had said. Yet even if she were to learn the truth now, she didn’t really care how her mother, Saatiiko, had died. All that mattered was that she was gone, and today’s Karuk ceremony made that departure permanent.

Shakers rattled. SuSaan’s father, Black Bear, stepped grim-faced into the circle and began the final dance of the sending-off. Others joined in—closest friends first, then those more distant.

SuSaan knew her father assumed she would dance too, to pay her respects to her mother’s departing spirit, but she only watched. Remaining still through this part of the ceremony would dishonor her mother’s memory. Yet that was the very thing which kept her from dancing. SuSaan loved her mother. It was her mother’s memory that she had learned to hate.

SuSaan felt a hand on her shoulder, and an elderly voice said, “Before you dance, I would like to speak with you.” It was Lugo, the village shaman. SuSaan nodded, and he continued. “I have a memory of your mother to share. When you were born, I saw the spark in your mother’s eyes. Over the seasons of your life, SuSaan, I saw that same spark—always when your mother looked at you. She loved you deeply, SuSaan. I know it’s hard to remember that after losing her, but I speak truth.”

SuSaan replied, “I know she loved me.” She peered down, and scratched the ground with her toes.

“What, SuSaan?” Lugo asked. SuSaan just shook her head.

Stroking SuSaan’s long dark hair, Lugo said, “You and your mother—”

In a flash, SuSaan grabbed Lugo’s hand and forced it away. She cried through clenched teeth, “I’m not her!”

Lugo made no reply or resistance. The wrinkles in his face, though, for an instant they seemed to streak with tears. The impression fled as soon as it came, but its passage quenched the burning in SuSaan’s heart.

“I’m sorry,” she said, voice weak with shame. She clasped Lugo’s hand between her own, and he nodded slowly, compassion shining in his eyes. SuSaan, too embarrassed at herself to say anything more, released him and walked into the circle. Though tears threatened to cloud her vision, she refused to let them flow as she danced for her mother.

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As the morning shadows shrank, the village gathered for a great meal, celebrating the end of the Karuk ceremony. Close friends and family had fasted since the previous night, but SuSaan’s father had told her she could only observe full ceremony after she became an adult—after her Taakaayp.

“It’s one moon phase away,” she replied.

“One moon or ten, you’re not of-age until your Taakaayp.”

“But I’m her daughter.”

“No arguments.”

Outwardly, SuSaan bowed to her father’s authority. But in secret, she decided to fast anyway. Not so much for her mother, but to prove she was more than people like her father believed.

Through the night she remained awake, listening to the Bird Singers, sometimes joining in softly to take her mind off the hunger. After the final dance at midmorning, it all came to an abrupt end with fires blazing, surrounded by feasting people.

SuSaan sat in solitude, content to consider the hum of conversation and the crack of burning wood. She sipped the last of the water from her olla. After so long without food, she had devoured everything she could get her hands on. Now, though, she felt ready to burst, and her stomach continued to cry out for water as though that would wash the food away.

SuSaan walked over to one of the fires and dipped her olla into a wide clay pot. As the olla filled, she saw her father’s scowling features and long nose silhouetted by the firelight. He spoke with Lugo, and their words drifted over to SuSaan with the heat of the flames.

“I’ve missed Saatiiko. It’s been so difficult. I still ask myself why I couldn’t have arrived sooner.”

“You know the futility of such a question,” Lugo replied.

“Yes... I mean, no. I might have saved her.”

“Or died trying. Then your daughter would have lost both parents.”

“I wonder if it would have been better that way. I have done poorly as mother and father both.”

“Few have walked in such shoes. Do not judge yourself harshly.”

“Now her Taakaayp approaches, and she’ll be a woman. Her mother and I wanted to give her a new name, but I have none for her yet—her mother was to choose it. I’m afraid I will shame Saatiiko’s memory if I have no name to give.”

“Ah, Black Bear, you worry overmuch. A full moon remains before the Taakaayp, and you will have a name for SuSaan by then.”

“Yes, I hope. There is so much life in her, I want to honor her with a great name.”

He paused, tilting his head in thought. “When I look at her, I often see her mother there. I sometimes think... I think of naming her Saatiiko after her mother.”

“I believe that decision would be unwise.”

SuSaan didn’t hear Lugo’s response. She was taking a drink from her olla when her father spoke of the Taakaayp naming. “No!” she tried to scream, but inhaled water instead. It shot pain down her throat and sent her into an uncontrollable hacking. In her fit, she cast her olla to the ground. It landed on a rock and exploded. The fire mixed with the sunlight and reflected off the water and clay shards, creating a yellow blanket over SuSaan’s form.

Lugo and Black Bear saw SuSaan gagging. Black Bear thought she was choking and ran over, but she pushed him away.

SuSaan coughed wildly and doubled over onto her hands and knees, mouth open, spit and water dribbling into the dirt as she gasped for air between convulsions. Each breath rasped in her throat and worsened her condition. *It’s never going to end*, she thought. Only when she sucked slowly could she get small bits of air into her lungs. Concentrating on the small breaths, her coughing began to subside until, suddenly, it was over.

She pushed herself up from the ground. Seeing her father’s concern, all the tension went out of her and she fell into his arms.

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Black Bear handed SuSaan an olla of warm sage tea. “This should soothe the burning in your throat. Sip it,” he said.

She followed his instructions, taking a careful mouthful.

“How long were you standing there?” Black Bear asked, wondering if SuSaan had heard his conversation with Lugo.

“Not long,” she whispered, her voice too painful to use.

“Were you listening?”

SuSaan shook her head slowly, staring at the tea-filled olla. “No,” she replied. “I was just getting some water.” She searched her father’s features for a sign that he believed the lie.

“It’s already been a hard day,” he said. “I planned to tell you something about your mother, but... I’m loathe to do so. Too much for one day.”

SuSaan was only half listening, relieved that her father had not seen through her deception. She sighed heavily.

Black Bear misinterpreted her reaction. “You agree?” he asked with a chuckle. “Tomorrow’s a new day. A new season for us. Let’s start it off right. Do you think you can trap a rabbit?” SuSaan nodded in surprise. “Then you do that tomorrow, and I’ll cook it for the two of us. Would you like that?”

SuSaan’s eyes widened. Rabbit was her favorite meal. It was one her father always insisted on cooking, even when her mother was alive. Her voice recovered instantly. “I’d like that very much.”

“Good,” her father replied. He reached out to her, arms wide, and SuSaan stood, entering his hug. He squeezed her with the strength of the black bear, his namesake.

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SuSaan awoke to the warmth of desert in the air. She dressed quickly and hurried out of the wickiup. Embers still smoldered in fire rings around the village, filling the morning with the smell of smoke. Dry wind gusted between the wickiups, mixing with the smoky scent and bringing the scorch of the desert floor from the east. Overhead, tree branches danced with the wind’s strength as it headed across the mountains and out to the distance sea.

An updraft caught SuSaan’s hair and lifted it toward the sky, leaving strands dancing in the energy of its passage. SuSaan inhaled the desert wind. It made her giddy with excitement, and it erased much of the pain from yesterday’s Karuk ceremony.

Black Bear’s head poked out of the wickiup. He raised his hand to shield his face from the heat and said, “Still plan to trap on a day like this?”

“Of course,” SuSaan replied. “I’d never miss out on cooked rabbit.”

“Well, don’t get your hopes up,” Black Bear said, standing beside his daughter. “You probably won’t be seeing too many mountain rabbits in this heat.”

SuSaan laughed.

“What?” he asked. SuSaan’s only reply was to duck inside. When she reappeared she held a double necked traveling olla, several lengths of mescal rope, and an arrowweed net wrapped around a handful of bread taken from cool storage at the rear of their wickiup.

Seeing her supplies, Black Bear asked, “Know something I don’t?”

SuSaan ignored the question and began stretching her leg muscles.

“Come now, I won’t tell anyone.”

“Okay,” she said, pausing in her exercise. “I have a secret place. A nice, cool spring. It’s about a half-day’s walk to the north.”

“A half day? Doesn’t leave much of a chance to catch a rabbit and make it back for dinner.”

“I won’t be walking.”

Concern washed over Black Bear’s features. “You plan to run that far on a day like this? I would rather—”

“Father,” SuSaan interrupted. “You’ve seen me run.”

“Yes, but only as a sprinter.”

“I can run distance too, don’t worry.”

“How about taking someone with you?”

“I don’t think so.”

“It’s just your...”

SuSaan took a quick breath, anticipating another unwanted comparison. Black Bear caught the action. His thick lips frowned deeply as he regarded his daughter. A sudden resolution came over him, and he bent into the wickiup, producing another olla.

“Take this,” he said. “You’ll need the extra water. And don’t rush. I promise to cook the rabbit no matter how dark the sky is when you return.”

“Okay,” SuSaan said. She cast the ollas around opposite shoulders by their deer-leather straps, and lashed the rope and netting to her back. She stepped to her father to kiss him. Though he was tall, even for a Kwaaymii, she already had nearly the same height, and needed only to raise herself slightly to reach his cheek.

“Good bye, father,” she said. “Have everything prepared because I’ll be carrying a rabbit when you see me next.”

“Just be careful,” her father said as she departed.

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Morning was still young when SuSaan reached the spring. Using the loping jog of Kwaaymii distance runners, and with the strength of the desert wind around her, her journey passed quickly.

To cool down, she paced around the small pool. It sparkled like crystal, and though nearly two arm-lengths deep, SuSaan could see the rocky bottom clearly. Trees and boulders surrounded the spring, birds sang from the trees and animals rustled through the bushes. Rabbits were silent creatures, but SuSaan knew there were some nearby—she had been here before.

SuSaan found an overhanging branch and set the trap. Laying the net on the ground, she covered it with pine needles. She held up a piece of bread, letting the breeze blow over it and carry its scent into the bushes. She placed the bread in the center of the net, tied four thin strands of string to each corner, and after throwing the mescal rope over the branch, she lashed all four strands to its end. Completing her task, she said to any listening rabbits, “Enter my trap and I will thank the Great Spirit.”

The other end of rope was long, and she unreeled it to a nearby clearing. She sat and leaned against the rock, the mescal rope near her hand. Relaxing, SuSaan thought about the day she found the spring. She had stumbled across it while running in the forest. Her throat parched with thirst and she was turning back to the village when she broke through the trees and nearly fell into the pool.

A favorable discovery on such a frustrating day. SuSaan’s memories drifted to the misfortunes that had sent her fleeing into the forest on that dark morning.

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“Straight Branch is weaving baskets today,” Black Bear had said as he greeted the morning. “You should go watch.”

“But father,” SuSaan replied. “I planned to run in the forest.”

“I’m sorry SuSaan, you can’t. We’re having the spring gathering today. And before that starts, you have a good opportunity to learn some basketry.”

“I hate basket making!” she cried.

Anger touched Black Bear’s voice. “Now that your mother is gone, you will need to take some of her duties.”

“I know. But weaving?”

“Your mother enjoyed weaving. You’ll learn to as well.”

“But she knew I hated it. She let me run instead of watching. She always did!”

“No more words. I have spoken, daughter. Go to Straight Branch and learn.”

SuSaan walked to Straight Branch's wickiup. When she arrived, Straight Branch greeted her. "SuSaan!" She said. "You've come to watch me? What an honor. Your mother was one of the best weavers in the village. I hope the same for you."

SuSaan scowled.

Missing SuSaan's expression, Straight Branch waved her to a seat amongst a group of other young women. Before everyone's eyes, the elder constructed a basket with several feathers entwined in the shape of a Kwaaymii bird. She then produced another feather and said, "Would anyone like to help me with this? Some of you seemed to be watching quite closely."

SuSaan froze. She knew exactly who Straight Branch was thinking of.

"SuSaan. How about you?" Before SuSaan could even shake her head, Straight Branch pushed the feather into her hand and gave her the basket. Any one of the women would have produced a weave as bold as Straight Branch. SuSaan, however, broke the shaft of the feather as she tried to fit it into the basket.

"Hmm... umm," Straight Branch mumbled as she examined SuSaan's handiwork. "It seems that you have some practice before you match your mother's skill." SuSaan would have replied, but a cry from the center of the village interrupted.

Straight Branch clapped her hands and said, "Gathering begins." She studied the young women briefly and continued, "It seems we have a nice group here. Maybe before we join our families, we can do a bit of gathering on our own. Let's leave the saawii acorns until later and go get our pick of the berries—before everyone else beats us to them."

Taking a basket, SuSaan struck off alone to idle in the forest. At first, she shuffled through pine needles and kicked stones between the trees. She soon grew bored and began following the breeze as it wove its way through the pines. It lead her from bush to bush, and she chose her berries carefully, picking only the best and explaining her intent to each one, "I sure enjoy you berries. I hope you will feed and please me with your sweetness." But as she went along, she felt less and less thankful until she was simply plucking the fruit and dropping it into her basket without a word. When she could fit no more, SuSaan wandered to Straight Branch's wickiup.

Straight Branch was there with several of the others who had returned before SuSaan. She looked into the basket and gasped. "SuSaan, where do you find such huge berries?"

"Oh, around." SuSaan replied. "Some here, some there. I don't know."

A few of the young women came near when they heard Straight Branch's question. Some groped for the basket, and Straight Branch handed it off for them to see.

Exclamations arose from their midst, as their fullest basket had only half the berries of SuSaan's.

The eldest of the group—well past Taakaayp—had been particularly unsuccessful at gathering, and she interrupted with a sharp edge in her voice. “How did you know where to pick them?”

“I just sort of let the wind lead me.”

The woman laughed. “You pretend so we will believe you found these on your own! Maybe you followed me, or Straight Branch.”

“No!” SuSaan replied. “I... I went with the wind.”

The woman laughed again. “Claiming to be a shaman? Too proud to say who truly guided you to these berries!”

SuSaan grabbed the basket from the woman. She made to throw the berries into her face, but Straight Branch placed a restraining grip on SuSaan's arm. SuSaan moved to pull away, but the grip tightened. Straight Branch's cheeks burned and she said, “Stop. Do not dishonor yourself—or your mother's spirit—like this.”

SuSaan's face flushed. She wanted to rip her arm away, but bowed her head in defeat instead.

Straight Branch released her, and SuSaan, without a word, left the basket and headed into the forest. When she was sure none of the gatherers watched, she sprinted away from the village.

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A pricking in her neck brought SuSaan out of her memories. She refocused her eyes and searched the trap. Nothing. The bread remained undisturbed. She glanced toward the pool and there at the waters edge sat a rabbit staring at her, its nose twitching in curiosity.

SuSaan sighed. “You silly thing. The trap's over there. Have a drink and run along.” The rabbit continued twitching. She shook her head and laid against the rock. Closing her eyes, she sighed again and let her thoughts wander freely.

SuSaan had forgotten her lack of sleep during the previous day's Karuk ceremony. It came back to her as she relaxed, and she drifted off.

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As she slept, the hot wind wafted across the spring and stirred SuSaan into a vivid dream. In it, she found herself amidst a desert village which was shadowed by the fading light of evening. She wandered amongst the dry palm wickiups, poking her head inside some of them, searching. What she was looking for, she wasn't sure, but she knew it was something important.

A man stepped from behind a structure, and she thought that he might be able to help. She came up to him and saw that he was cradling a child, nestling it against his chest and whispering in its ear. He resembled the typical Kwaaymii—long hair, high forehead, dark features—but a blemish stained his cheek. A birthmark, SuSaan guessed, yet she thought that it added to his beauty.

She was about to ask her question, but was stopped as a tear streaked down the man's reddened skin and spattered on the child's forehead. The baby lay limp, a lifeless shell in the man's arms. His whispers, his tears plead for the child to return from the spirit world and walk again with the living.

SuSaan reached out to offer sympathy, but a figure jumped between them. She had never seen the like of him before. His hair was arrow straight and short cropped, his skin was olive colored, and his nose was flat and wide. In one hand, he held a torch. Reaching up with his free hand, he swung his stubby arm and clubbed SuSaan aside.

From the ground she rolled over to see the tainted-faced man's mouth open as though screaming, but no sound escaped. His hands were empty now, and he reached out to strangle the torch bearer. As he made contact, the wickiup behind the two figures exploded into flame, and they were engulfed.

Throughout the village, wickiups burned and olive-skinned figures darted about with their torches. The smoke surrounded and choked SuSaan. She crawled away, thinking not of the scorching heat, but that she was still lost, and she would never find what she sought.

Her arm splashed into a pool. The water was warm, and she scooped it to her face to clear her sight. Slurping in a mouthful to wash away the soot, she tasted a mineral flavor and retched.

She turned aside to spit the sourness out. The taste was gone instantly, and she was beside the mountain spring once again. The water trickled as she gazed into the pool.

Beneath the surface was the outline of a bird, the shape of a hawk, but larger than even the tallest Kwaaymii. It took form and rose from the pool and up over SuSaan. Its head was blue as the sky, and its stomach bore all the colors of a rainbow, radiating from neck to tail. The bird's great wings spread with a red like blood, streaked with cactus green, and in them it held two moons.

Now SuSaan would find her answer, now she would know what she sought, for the majestic bird was here to tell her. She was listening, but when its beak opened, it screeched with a voice that pierced the forest. SuSaan covered her ears and yelled at it to stop, but her words were lost.

As suddenly as the outcry had begun, it ended. The bird disappeared with its song, but a feather, glowing red and green, twirled its way downward, coming to rest at SuSaan's feet.

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SuSaan bolted awake, her heart thundering in her chest. *A dream*, she told herself. *It was only a dream*. Breathing deeply, she concentrated on calming her racing heart. About her, everything seemed to be as it was when she fell asleep—the spring sang quietly, the wind drifted through the trees, and the trap was set.

The trap! Directly within its center stood a rabbit eating the bread. Reflex took over; SuSaan grabbed the rope and pulled. The net leapt up and wrapped around the rabbit, lifting it into the air. SuSaan tied off her end and ran over to her captive, but when she grasped at it, the net was empty.

“It escaped?” she asked aloud as she undid the trap. Within it, she realized, something was entangled after all—though it was definitely too small to be a rabbit. Carefully, she unwrapped it. When the last strand was freed, out fell a long, shining feather. She picked it up. Down its shaft were red and green barbs.

SuSaan's dream came rushing back, and in her mind she heard the scream of the great bird again. She dropped the feather and covered her ears. “No!” she yelled to drown the memory out. “Get away!” her voice told her. “Get away!” Ripping the net from its

bindings, she bolted to her resting place and tried to reel in the line, but it was stuck in the branches. Frantically, she shoved the rope aside and grabbed her ollas.

Fleeing the spring, she glanced behind to make sure nothing followed.

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Though SuSaan kept a steady pace all the way to the Kwaaymii village, she was able to collect her thoughts and decide on a course of action. She needed to see a shaman. With that in mind, she sped straight for Lugo's wickiup. He was exactly where she expected, sitting before his home, enjoying the hot wind coming up from the desert. In front of him, though, another man paced, gesturing with his hands to emphasize words SuSaan was unable to hear.

SuSaan recognized him. It was Swift Foot, the fastest man in the village. She suddenly realized she had stopped her sprint, and was walking. Frowning, she picked up the pace, and came to a halt before the two men.

“Lugo!” She gasped. “Lugo!”

“Stop,” Lugo commanded. “Catch your breath. We can wait.”

“I just—” she protested, but Lugo had closed his eyes and bowed his head. Reluctantly, she obeyed, dropping her things and walking in circles with an effort to cool down.

“Now, SuSaan,” Lugo said presently. “Speak.”

“I was at the spring. The one a half-day north of here. I had a dream, Lugo! I mean it wasn’t just a dream. I saw a lot of things. But there was this huge bird with many colors. I dreamed it dropped a feather to me, and then I woke up and saw the real feather!”

Lugo stood immediately, and his wrinkles bent downward. He said to Swift Foot, “Go get Black Bear. Quickly.”

Swift Foot spun toward SuSaan. Lowering his voice, he grunted, “Must you always do this.” Before SuSaan could reply, he ran to fulfill his errand.

“Come inside,” Lugo told her, and entered the wickiup.

SuSaan settled herself in a daze. Things were happening so fast—the run, Swift Foot, being invited inside a shaman’s wickiup—it was almost like she was still in the dream.

“...A dream,” Lugo was saying. “I am very interested in your dream and what it told you. I would like you to describe it. Everything you remember.”

“It was so strange,” SuSaan said. “I was lost. Well, sort of, I guess.”

“You were going somewhere and you couldn’t find your way?”

“I don’t know. There was more to it than that. It was like I was looking for something.”

“And you never found what you sought?”

“No. I saw a man, and I wanted to ask him, but his baby was dead.”

The conversation continued with SuSaan giving small details, and Lugo questioning everything. SuSaan felt as though her tale was wild and disjointed, and that Lugo would never believe her, but he offered no hint of doubt.

“The giant bird,” Lugo said after SuSaan had gone through the whole dream. “Did it show you what you were looking for?”

“No,” she answered. “I thought it would, but—”

Black Bear stuck his head into the wickiup, interrupting SuSaan.

“Enter,” Lugo directed.

Black Bear’s lips were pulled into a tight line as he crossed his legs. “What new trouble has my daughter gotten herself into?” he asked.

“The trouble she brings may reach well beyond herself,” Lugo answered. Black Bear’s muscles tightened.

Uh oh, SuSaan thought.

Lugo returned to his questioning. “You mentioned a feather, SuSaan. What did you do with it?”

SuSaan’s eyes darted between Lugo and her father. “I... I dropped it,” she stammered. “I guess it’s still at the spring.”

Lugo’s head lowered at her response. *That’s it*, SuSaan thought, afraid to look at her father. *I’m in for it now*.

Black Bear asked urgently, “Was it a colored feather?”

SuSaan's voice deserted her, chased away by an unexpected tinge in her father's tone; it was as if he were curious rather than angry. In her confusion all she could do was nod.

"Wait," Black Bear said. He climbed out of the wickiup, and immediately reentered.

"Is this what you're talking about?" He presented a red and green feather.

SuSaan gasped. "That's it!"

"I saw it tangled in the netting outside," he replied, handing it to Lugo.

Lugo held the feather to catch the light from the entry way; he rubbed his hand up and down its shaft, and rolled it in his palms. Finally, handing it to SuSaan, he asked, "Do you know what this is?"

She considered the feather, but gave no response.

In answer to his own question, Lugo said, "It is the proof. You were visited by the Kwaaymii bird."

"What?" SuSaan exclaimed. "But I thought that was just a legend!"

"Unfortunately, you are not alone in that belief. Many have forgotten the Kwaaymii bird. But we take our people's name from more than a simple legend."

"It's supposed to protect us," SuSaan mumbled.

"And guide," Lugo continued. "It appears to people of its own choosing. And when it does, it always tells of some event. Usually a warning to the tribe, but only in the most grave circumstances."

Black Bear said, "You're telling us that the Kwaaymii bird has chosen SuSaan."

"Yes. Without question."

Black Bear paused, his jaw slack as he considered the implications of Lugo's statement. Lugo gave Black Bear the opportunity to reply. When he held his silence, Lugo addressed SuSaan, "In seeing the Kwaaymii bird, there are always things—important things—that stand out."

"The whole dream!" SuSaan said.

"Of course," Lugo replied patiently. "But was anything extremely unusual or striking?"

"Beside the bird? I guess the warm water, and... Yes! The village burners! They were like no one I've ever seen."

"The olive-skinned men? Tell me more."

She had mentioned them earlier, but not their faces. As she described their wide noses, her father expelled a loud breath and she thought she heard him whisper her mother's name. His face took on a far away look. Some memory had crept upon him, and he lived it again as he sat there.

"This is something I feared," Lugo said when SuSaan finished.

SuSaan wanted to ask Lugo what he meant, but Black Bear snapped into the conversation. "Why her?"

"I cannot say," Lugo answered as though he understood the question.

"She is too young. She's not even through Taakaayp."

Too young! SuSaan thought with a grimace. *Too young for what?*

Lugo replied to Black Bear, "The Kwaaymii bird is the messenger of the Great Spirit. It must have its reasons."

"I am blind to any reason here."

"I too sit in darkness. But I trust the Kwaaymii bird as I trust the Great Spirit."

"You are a shaman! You live your life in belief and conviction. It's not so simple for me."

Lugo sighed. "Have you no faith at all? Has your well run dry?"

Furling his brow and clenching his fists at his side, Black Bear grunted and shook his head as if he were casting aside unwanted thoughts. In avoidance, he steered to a different subject, "You are sure the vision is real. And that they have returned."

Lugo gave a shallow nod.

"How am I supposed to protect my daughter? I failed with her mother. And now they come to burn our village."

"No," Lugo said. "Not Kwaaymii, but a desert village."

"That may not matter. She's had the vision, she'll be caught up in it. Isn't that how it works?"

"Whatever the outcome, it is the Kwaaymii bird who has chosen her. We cannot deny the path it has laid before us."

Black Bear began to reply, but Lugo held up his hand. "I feel your pain, Black Bear, you know I do. But argument will simply lead us in circles. Let us take the next step

without delay. We need to call a council. Our desert cousins are in trouble, and it seems that we must help them."