

Harvest Moon

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— PROLOGUE —

High on a jagged mountaintop, dew drops form on bushy pines. They collect on the needles and drip one at a time until they fill the wild yellow daffodils to the brim. When the flowery buckets are full, they lean over and spill their nectar onto the earth. Crickets unwind their long curly tongues and lap up the ferment. Drunk on nature's liquor, they rub their hairy legs together and play their fiddles.

A shadow stirs in the crooked darkness. Two golden halos catch the moon's rays and glow. They hover in the infinite abyss.

A hooting owl mercifully rattles its tongue against the roof of its beak, asking, "Who? Who?" in short bursts. When no one can answer, it persists with long, drawn-out inquiries: "Whooooo? Whooooo?" The wise ol' owl warns all that danger lurks near those glowing eyes.

Restless creatures hear the warning and shy away. The resting are caught fatally in the jaws of surprise. Predator and prey lock claws, antlers, and fangs, dancing an exhaustive tango of survival. Run, fight, or die—these are the laws of nature.

I am powerful! the wolf thinks, patiently scanning the valley beneath him. He searches for his next victim. Antelope and deer think they find safety in obscure resting places, but Kiowa can see some of them.

A symphony of crickets applaud his bravado.

Corner flaps of his nostrils flare in short heaves, detecting the familiar scent of his companion among the drowning aroma of pine trees and sagebrush. The quieting crickets sober up when they feel the earth shake. They rest their fiddles and alert him that she is closer than he thinks.

He scans the valley, searching the open places where he can easily spy her. His eyes pull at the shifting shadows below the creaking trees. To mortal eyes, the report would be nothing but darkness. To the wolf's eyes, squirrels, rabbits, and skunks run as though the forest were on fire, even though clearly it is not.

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Patches of white flash between breaks in the trees. Sudden flickers of motion catch his attention.

With soft excited whimpers he lets Anoki know that he longs to see her.

Her pace increases, causing his paws to pat at the hard ground. His claws curl and scratch the earth.

All at once she explodes through the thick shrubs. Moonlight strikes her beautiful ivory coat, illuminating it eerily. Her ghostly appearance would easily be mistaken as an apparition were it not for her sparkling blue eyes and pink nose.

Her topaz jewels fix on Kiowa's golden glowing halos and reciprocate his anticipation.

The massive black-and-white wolf stands erect. Warm tingling sensations crackle like blue lightning in his heart and ignite a fire in those massive chambers. It is a fire that was not felt in her absence. His heart must be empty or he cannot kill. When those flames ignite, love swells and pumps across his thudding chest. He feels it spread from the tip of his black nose to the end of his white-tipped, bushy gray tail.

"Come to me!" He beckons his wife.

Anoki prances with a feminine finesse. She trots over with giddiness in her step. She gently presses her soft cheek against his firm chest. Kiowa inhales her spirit and instantly knows from her many scents that she has hid in the musky den with the cubs, traveled by the minty spring, rolled in the wild prairie flowers, and passed through the tall evergreen forest.

She presses herself along Kiowa's side, then pauses briefly, letting her soft bushy tale delicately rest beneath his snout. She thinks of all the victims who have fallen prey to his fierce jaws. It excites her to know that only her elegance and grace are permitted to prance past those treacherous gates.

She drags the rest of her fluffy tail beneath his jaw and across his back. She turns and smiles when she feels him shudder.

"Your soul is fused to mine," he whispers.

"As yours is to mine. Why else do you think I was brought here? I felt the stitches tug," she responds, circling around him. She tilts her sleek nose down and presses her forehead to his. Their ears lower. Their tails wag. They remain staring deep into each other's eyes like this until the electric emotions overwhelm him. The chambers explode, causing Kiowa

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to tilt his head up, exposing his pale, broad chest. With a deep heave, he unleashes a high-pitched howl, which echoes miles away. The hooting owl spreads its wings and scatters loose feathers. The coyotes tuck their tails and run. Bears snuggle up against their cubs. Raccoons shiver and climb trees. Even the cougars seek shelter inside caves to protect their young. None are safe from the King of the Currumpaw. All are meat.

Anoki tilts her head back and howls just a few octaves higher than Kiowa. The two sing the beastly song of love as the moon goes down.

Amber sun flecks dance across the towering mountain peaks, gathering in the graceful grassy valleys below. Morning birds join the howling wolves and birth a new day for an old love.

Aaaaaaarrrrrrreeeeewwww!

CHAPTER 1

That's not scary!" a bucktoothed lad named John interrupts. His doubting tone and squinty chestnut eyes shatter the Woodcraft Indian scoutmaster's trance over his four-man troop.

"We want to hear a scary story, not a y-u-c-k-y love story!" his brother protests, curling his fingers like claws and baring his missing front teeth. The most obvious difference between the two brothers is that Luther's hair is pitch black and John's is light brown.

"I don't want to hear a scary story." Kevin, a five-year-old Korean boy, whimpers. He pulls his wool blanket over his bowl-cut black hair. He does this not because he's cold, but because Charlie, his scoutmaster, terrifies him.

"Me either!" Zack, John's youngest brother shouts, almost matching Kevin's squeaky tone. He glances over his shoulder, flashing the same chestnut eyes his brothers have. The most handsome of the Taylor brothers, he moves closer to the fire and pulls his winter cap down farther, nearly covering his sandy blond hair.

"You're two years older than me," Kevin whispers to Zack. "You're supposed to be braver than I am. Who's gonna protect me in this dark, scary place?" Kevin scans the looming woods. "Run, kill, or die," he chirps. Without a doubt, he knows he would run.

Luther lifts a flaming marshmallow out of the fire and holds it to his lips. The orange flames illuminate his freckled face and scraggly black hair. "I'm not scared." He cocks his head and teases them. "You guys are titty-sucking babies!"

"Are not!" John cries out, leaping off his stump.

Luther puckers his abnormally puffy lips and says, "Are sooo!" as he makes a sucking noise. He turns his attention to the scoutmaster. "Tell us the story about the one-legged man, 'Click Shaw'!"

The scoutmaster's big blue eyes and bulging gnome cheeks divide with a prominent English nose, a bushy mustache, and narrow lips. His

pudgy frame fills his khaki Woodcraft Indian shirt out to the point the buttons pucker and nearly pop off. The fiftysomething man sits on a log stump near the fire and sips a steaming cup of coffee from a worn tin cup. It nearly matches the color of his silver-speckled brown hair.

"Yous fellas don't want to hear about the great Canadian wolf hunter?"

"Yeah, I wanna hear about that!" John turns to Luther with a sour face. "Click Shaw' is a stupid story, and we already heard it!"

Insulted by his oldest brother's protest, Luther gasps and shouts, "IS NOT!"

"IS SO!"

The two go on like this until Charlie calms them.

"It's super-duper dumb!" Zack aligns with John and makes sure he gets the last word.

"No way. It scared me so bad the last time I heard it, I slept under my mom's bed for a week." Kevin whimpers, blinking with pouting eyes. "Don't tell us scary stories in this dark, eerie forest."

"Scaredy-cat!" Kyle mocks him.

"All right, all right, settle down. It's not a scary story, Kevin. '*Chai Ma Kue*' is a story of Indian love and magic."

Charlie pauses and waits for a response. When the boys' faces sag, he adds, "It has some scary parts, though!"

The boys' faces light up.

"There's a war," he emphasizes as he sets his coffee cup down.

"A war?" Luther perks up, raising his brows hopefully.

"It began a long time ago. Imagine, if you can, a place where prairies stretch out like an ocean until the grasslands recede and turn into dry desert lands."

As he speaks, he reaches into his pocket and throws a handful of dry red berries in the crackling fire. They snap and pop. Thick purple smoke plumes, and the Woodcraft Indian scoutmaster masterfully stages the scene. He picks up a drum.

"Many tribes roamed these lands," he says, pounding a beat and then handing Zack the drum. The boy eagerly snatches the drum out of Charlie's hands and matches the beat.

Charlie claps his hands with arms stretched out in front and raises his hands high above his head. He sings, "These are the tribes"—he spins

around and grabs a pair of rough bark sticks, smacks them together, and hands them to John—“of Indian nations.”

Charlie hands Kevin his empty tin cup and flicks it with his fingernail to add a high tone to his makeshift band. The boy takes it and hums along.

“*Hi aiye, hiya.*” Charlie releases a Native American chant the boys have never heard, but they rouse and rally.

“*Hi aiye, hi aiye,*” the boys repeat in chorus.

Charlie cups his hands and pushes the purple smoke up to his face. He inhales, then blows it out in rings. Holding two fingers out, he draws them behind his ear and makes the sign of the Kiowa.

“There were many tribes that wandered these lands. The Kiowa. The Blackfoot. The Comanche. The Crow. The Sioux. The Cherokee. The Navajo, and the Hopi, to name just a few.” The boys marvel at the distinct signs his hands make identifying each respective tribe.

The rotund scoutmaster claps his hands together again, making a thunderous noise that echoes off the dark trees as the purple smoke swirls above their heads and then fades against the rising pearl moon.

Charlie reaches inside his bag and removes a leather pouch. He unfolds it and reveals four brown-and-white eagle feathers. Holding one up by the stiff quiver, he spins it in his fingers.

“Our story begins with the Kiowa.” He hands each boy an eagle feather, then turns around, snatches up the leather pouch, and shoves his hand back in.

The boys’ wondrous wide eyes zero in on whatever must be inside. Charlie slowly removes a plastic bag of hot dogs.

“Wowie zowie, hot dogs!” Zack shouts, dropping his feather and clamoring for his dinner.

Charlie takes his seat. “Scattered all across the plains are rolling rocky peaks that twist and turn into emerald mountaintops, packed limb to limb with towering pine, spruce, and Douglas fir trees as big as any you ever seen. Wild prairie flowers fill the air with sweet scents, and their purple, yellow, white, and red bodies spring up freely all around, covering the earth in a colorful quilt of beauty. Down beneath the emerald growth, beige rocky deserts span out as far as the eye can see and sometimes turn into steep winding canyons and rolling mesas. Running waters pass through at length and unite the vast land, offering life to everyone and everything. The plains are rich pastures, which are great

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for cattle range. This desolate beauty is known as the Currumpaw.” He skewers a hot dog and lowers it into the fire. “The Kiowa were a warrior tribe,” he says as the boys use red-handled Swiss Army knives to sharpen pine sticks to points and then skewer their hot dogs.

“Currumpaw was a place of prescribed beauty, but it wasn’t always obvious. In the blazing summers, it was ugly as sin. Cactus and scorching sands burned the venom right out of scorpions. Spring was different. Nights were warm. Evenings were cool. It was a land of sunshine and wildflowers. The air was rich and full of songbirds’ sweet music.

“The funny thing about the Currumpaw is that no matter the season, dawn and sunset turn that place into a magnificent gem. Beige mountains turn pink or tangerine orange. It is unexpected and majestic.”

He pauses and stares off in the distance, as though he can actually see it.

“And terribly dangerous! Though nature poses its own challenges with bitter dry winters, there are of course other dangers.” Charlie’s voice energizes. He holds his hands up and curls his long, chubby fingers. “The claws of the grizzly bear are powerful enough to tear a man’s head off with one swipe!” He swooshes his hands at Luther’s face. The courageous boy flinches, which causes the other boys to duck and almost drop their weenies.

Charlie slowly scoops his hand to his mouth. “With a single bite, a bear’s jaws can bite a man in half. These wild bears are known to terrorize the Indians. Oh, and there are cougars aplenty! And though they may not have the power of grizzly bears, they have speed and determination. Did any of you know a single lion was responsible for the deaths of fifty grown men bigger than me?”

The boys stare in astonishment and shake their heads in disbelief.

“Beneath almost every rock, creeping, crawling critters lurk. ‘Course, the venomous fangs of rattlesnakes and the poison of scorpion tails hide from the sun and come out at night, putting the sting of their hate in whatever they can...just because they can!”

“It sounds like a terrible place!” Kevin shouts.

“Yes! It was a terrible, wonderful place. For the Kiowa, it was home.”

Charlie can see that the boys are paying full attention now.

“Our story begins with an Indian raid...”

CHAPTER 2

A lone Kiowa warrior loosens rawhide straps that stitch together his shirt. The fringe on the sides accentuates each motion. He removes the garment and feels a morning chill against his muscular chest, which looks like it belongs to a chiseled statue. Enhanced by his reddish-brown skin, his rippling abdomen muscles flex.

Pink scars stand out in stark contrast to his permanently tanned skin. Some are small and indicate his skill and speed. The deepest, ugliest scars are the ones he's most proud of. "Proof of my magic," he would say when he would tell his sons war stories.

He hears the frenzied barking of dogs, which makes him suspicious. Sleepy-eyed warriors dressed in nothing but buckskin loincloths abandon the warmth of their tepees. They yawn and stretch themselves awake.

Lazy, Lone Wolf thinks to himself, wiping his grooved face.

His jaw flexed, he slowly scans the distant tree line with determination. He glances at the crackling fires and then up at the sparkling stars, which are beginning to fade in dawn's early light. His high cheekbones lift and make his almond-shaped eyes squint.

"Barking dogs. Predawn. This is no coincidence," Lone Wolf grumbles.

As the tribe slip into their leggings and blouses, a brave points at the dogs and says, "They just started."

"We are about to be attacked. Awake the women and alert the warriors." Lone Wolf speaks with a calm, firm mouth and a decisive tone. His authority is not questioned. The brave leaps to action with Lone Wolf's dismissive sign.

"*Hey ya at ah hey!*" The brave runs over to a wide drum and pounds on it, whooping the war cry.

Lone Wolf wraps his long silky black hair around his fingers and twists it into a bun. He pins it in place with a thin fish bone as the war

cry travels from tepee to tepee. His wife and children quickly grab his war dress and weapons.

Lone Wolf's wife, Grass Woman, appears with a noble eagle-feathered war bonnet. She proudly places it on his head and fastens the chin strap. The tallest feathers in front represent Lone Wolf's most epic battles. The smaller feathers mean less to him, but they are still recorded victories. A long trail runs down his back and nearly touches the ground.

"I will gain many feathers today!" Lone Wolf says, reaching for his weapon of choice, a bleached elk shoulder blade, which has been sharpened and spiked. Dried rust-colored bloodstains indicate the weapon's extensive use. His son holds the weapon out to him, smiling when his father receives it.

His oldest son, Two Moons, hastily paints a rectangular black square around his dark brown eyes, to keep him focused.

"My love for each of you swells with pride every time you prepare me for battle!"

"Father, it is our honor," Two Moons replies as he sharpens the corners to his war paint. Grass Woman ties a leather pouch of magic to Lone Wolf's waistband and kisses him on the cheek. "May you kill many enemies, fill my arms with their scalps, and return without harm," she prays aloud, looking at her sons.

Lone Wolf glances at his wife. "You magnify my love for you with these sons you have given me. Ah-hoe, Grass Woman, you are my beautiful little woman."

She blushes, then scurries about grabbing this and that, anything he may need for the fight.

"Hurry. We haven't much time!" Lone Wolf orders his elite band of savage Dog Warriors.

Within moments Two Moons has his father's face, neck, chest, arms, abdomen, and back covered in red paint. Dipping his finger in black, he quickly smears a wolf's image over his father's heart.

"Darken the light areas with streaks," Two Moons orders his younger brother, Weasel Tail, as he begins covering himself in red paint. Aged sixteen and fourteen, the boys are not virgins to war, but they are not seasoned Dog Warriors either. Two Moons looks up to his father. "I pray to the wolf that you will be swift, powerful, and deadly."

Weasel Tail rests his fingertips on his father's head. "I pray to the wise owl that you will have courage, cunning, and above all, wisdom."

Their father closes his eyes and listens to their prayers. He feels the increase in his heartbeat as it matches the beat of the drum. *Thump, thump, thump...*

He reflects on the word “wisdom” of his son’s prayer and envisions his previous enemies’ conquered faces. One by one he plays out the mistakes they made. He sees their leg muscles flex, their heels rising as they step too far forward or their muscles relax, heels staying on the ground as they shuffle back.

Watch the toes. Toes tell you everything! he thinks, mentally preparing himself. The drum keeps time.

Elderly women and children frantically run around and dump thick bushels of moss on crackling fires. Flames swell at first, then create a lingering smoky haze that billows and hovers.

An old woman orders a young boy, “Go fetch the medicine man, Onendah. Our smoke is not working properly. It will never mask the village like this! We need his magic.”

The tribe divides itself into those who can fight and those who cannot. Some women remove their beaded buckskin tops and expose their bare breasts. With the help of their husbands and children, they paint themselves red like the warriors. The elderly, the young women, and the children hastily paint their own faces and clothes brown and green to match the colors of the forest.

“Don’t forget your brother,” Glances Then Glares says as she straps her son Makes Trouble to a papoose. His sister, Kida, slides her arms through the cradle’s straps and secures her brother to her back. When she’s finished, Glances Then Glares looks up at the enemy, then down at her daughter. She leans in and kisses her surprisingly calm daughter.

“Go now to the safe place I showed you!”

Kida retreats and dissolves into the forest with the others.

Glances Then Glares wipes a tear from her eye. She grits her teeth, grabs a bow and a stash of three-foot-long arrows with four-inch feathered fletch-and-steel tips. The arrows are painted with similar symbols of magic, which identify her tribe, her falcon god, and wavy symbols of the wind to guide her aim true. Grooves carved in the shaft allow blood to ooze out, while the tips are loosely fastened so that when the enemy pulls to extract them, they stay in place.

Chaos turns to order as the entire tribe readies for war in less than

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fifteen minutes. Lone Wolf raises his weapon high in the air. Painted warriors quickly circle around him.

“Put fear in their hearts before you shatter them! A heart filled with courage will not break. A heart filled with fear blows apart like withered leaves.”

“*Ha hoe!*” the warriors shout in unison. Their voices echo off in the distance and send a message to their unseen enemies that the Kiowa are not afraid.

Surrounding their chief, the men show their crude weapons of war. Some hold iron-cast tomahawks, while others ready weapons of their own creation. Some have carved spikes or wrapped deer-hide tomahawks with round stone tips. Others have spears. Most warriors have shields with sacred animals painted on them.

Some greet the unseen foe with smiles, some with frowns. Everyone feels the thrill and responds accordingly.

“Father, we are ready,” Two Moons shouts.

Lone Wolf stomps his foot and leads the whooping Kiowa war cry.

“*AIYE YA-AYE HI WHA YA!*”

Their voices unite in one loud roar, echoing off the distant pine trees surrounding their clearing and sending the ravens soaring. The black birds hover in the summer sky like black demons, circle appraisingly, and caw. The vile ravens perch out of the fray, jeering at the players.

“Do you see how they would not land on those trees over there?” Lone Wolf asks his sons.

Two Moons nods.

“Why do you think that is?”

CHAPTER 3

It is because our enemy is there." Two Moons grunts, pointing at the trees the birds avoided.

"This I know. Ravens always linger for rewards," says Raven Claw, a short but fierce warrior. His narrow face tightens and his eyes squint into slivers.

In the thick of the dense pine forest, beneath the cawing ravens, a Cheyenne chief lies flat on his belly. Covered in the hide of a black bear, he remains perfectly still and completely hidden beneath the North Pacific ferns. His stone-colored eyes shift back and forth. He exhales gruffly. Beneath his hooked nose, his abnormally large jaw clenches. He tilts his broad face to the side; the right side is painted black and the left, white.

Will they charge us? Fox Thoughts, a seasoned warrior, signs as he gives away his camouflaged position.

If they knew where we were, Black Bear signs back.

All they would have to do is look beneath the cawing ravens, Fox Thoughts signs.

An elderly Kiowa medicine man steps in front of the Kiowa tribe. His face is painted red, with stripes of black. A yellow circle is painted around his right eye to show that he has the power of future sight. A pale moon is painted around his left eye so that he does not forget the past. His long silver hair is divided into two braids. Wire copper rings widen his earlobes. Around his wrinkled neck, he wears a bear-claw necklace. Beads mesh against the claws. Each color represents a spell, and he wonders, *Which one will help the most and use the least magic?* Gold wrist couplings gleam in the morning light. He clacks them three times, summoning his power. *Fog will protect us,* he thinks. His deerskin leggings and bone breastplate are woven with the scalps of his enemies. Not all are Indian; some are white people. By the length and curl, a few are obviously women's.

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Brass bells and a human scalp hang from the handle of his wand. The tip is an eagle's claw with a round clear crystal firmly fixed in place. He raises his medicine wand and chants.

"PAHN-BAH-KHAW-BAH." The turquoise-encrusted handle begins to glow like blue lightning. The facets of the crystal ball illuminate his face and reflect in his pupils.

He raises his hands up and down, summoning a strong breeze that lifts loose silver strands of hair off his shoulders. The leather fringe in his worn bleached-white blouse rattles against his sides. His brown eyes gloss with a milky haze. Vapors rise from the earth. As he chants, the vapors turn into a thick fog and swirl around his firm frame. Soon the village is masked by the medicine man's magic. His wand glows like a lantern on a misty day. When his work is done, the light fades and a village that could be spotted by a sneaky enemy is now perfectly concealed in a smother as thick as a cloud.

In the pine forest, the sneaky enemy, Chief Black Bear, signs, *Do not let their medicine man fool you; they are terrified.* Reflecting on this latest development, he's forced to reconsider his commitment to the raid. He scans the Kiowa village and admires their mind for war. The smoke screen conceals every living soul, and the barking dogs have cost him his most precious weapon, the element of surprise. Chief Black Bear pauses for a moment and wonders, *Is their magic stronger than mine?* He appraises the village, counting the tops of tepees poking out of the thick gray cloud.

Fifty tepees means fifty warriors—maybe more but probably less. The main body of their tribe is off hunting, Black Bear thinks. *What is that to my hundred?* His confidence surges, and he leans toward attack.

Gray Hawk approaches his father, Black Bear, and the two crouch together, conspiring.

"The warriors grow uneasy and want to return to camp," his son whispers. Gray Hawk, a younger and handsomer version of his father, wears a thick, bushy, dome-shaped war bonnet of gray hawk feathers. His face and muscular chest are painted black, with streaks of white.

Black Bear remains silent. He focuses intently on the stirring mist.

"Father, they sign 'bad magic' and fear for their scalps."

"Magic?" Black Bear says with a broad smile. "I have the greatest magic on earth!" He hammers his fist to his bone-plated chest armor.

The Kiowas' smoke stirs, the mist whirls, and the haze reveals a lone shadow. It is soon joined by another and another.

The numbers grow quickly, and Black Bear counts about fifty. The Kiowas' thunderous war cries make the tribe sound like hundreds, maybe even a thousand warriors. The Cheyenne chief wonders if his hundred warriors are enough for this fight.

If we leave, the warriors will lose respect for me. Surely one will challenge me. But if we fight... He steadies his heart rate, closes his eyes, and seeks vision. His eyes flutter as he searches for an answer. He knows this is the most critical piece of information any chief can ascertain before waging an attack. *How many warriors do I face?* "Listen! Listen to your chief! Take courage! Like all of you, my heart had doubts. They blew in just now, but I have just been told by our war god, Hotamintanio, to purge our hearts of doubt and fear. Give ear to my words. In my vision Hotamintanio says the main tribe is farther north chasing buffalo. We found their tracks and followed them back here, did we not?"

A few men nod.

"Hotamintanio says no more than fifty Kiowa are in that village and if we leave, their horses and scalps will not be ours. He says to light a fire of wrath in your hearts. It is our right to raid. RAID NOW! Take from them their women, their horses, and their scalps, even their children. Make our tribe rich! Do you want to offend our god?"

The men look around, their doubting expressions mirrored all around them.

A warrior with arms as big as boulders speaks up. "I have two troubles that lean me toward leaving. Your first vision said this would be the fight to end all the Kiowa. This isn't one fight, but now two. My second trouble is with your magic. It made sense when we could stalk them, easily kill them in their sleep, and take all the spoils you promised us. How can your magic be believed now that they are awake and ready to give us a good fight? The spoils should already be in our hands. We have much to lose. Women. Children. Horses. Scalps. I say my scalp is better fixed to my head. I say it is better to kill and scalp you than take these risks."

Gray Hawk steps forward and speaks over his father in a hushed voice with outstretched hands. "You cannot threaten my father, Boulder Arms. Your strength will feed your family. But my father has told me something he has not yet told you. Listen to him now before your heart fails you."

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The warriors' long, painted faces turn toward Chief Black Bear.

"If you leave this war party, you make peace. The Kiowa will use your peaceful kindness against you. They will make more children. We will fight again— you know this to be true. If we fight now, we take their peace from them. Do you so easily forget your hatred for what the Kiowa have done to our people? Do you forget the hell they made for us on their last raid? I say we make a hell for them. Let their women be your wives! Make their children your slaves. Imagine if our women and children never had to dress an animal or gather firewood. Our days would be made easier by the hell we make for them today."

Chief Black Bear's speech is incredibly effective. "Their horses will be yours. Boulder Arms, you can pick first of everything we take!"

This brings many agreeable nods.

Boulder Arms still isn't convinced.

As Black Bear gains steady support, his eyes flash with excitement. He raises his voice, but not loud enough to be heard by the Kiowa. "Think of the glory that will be ours. Their scalps will rest on the arms of our women, who will dance with them, singing, 'Look, here is my enemy who cursed me. What has become of him now?' Which of you would not want this honor?"

The warriors raise their weapons and celebrate with growing approval— everyone except Boulder Arms.

"I see that you do not support me, Boulder Arms, and you have challenged my magic. That is good! Who can say magic is this or that without seeing it with their own eyes?"

Boulder Arms nods with a deep, questioning frown.

"Look here!"

CHAPTER 4

Chief Black Bear leaps to his feet and answers Lone Wolf's challenge. "Behold, the Sun God has blessed me with his power!" he shouts as he unveils a supernatural golden lance that glows like the amber flames of the sun. Brilliant light illuminates his eerie black-and-white painted face and his greedy smile. A glowing, celestial light creeps up his arms and arcs over his shoulders, then trails down his torso. His cold, hard eyes shift back and forth wildly. His long black hair blows back. Where Lone Wolf's war bonnet is crafted out of eagle feathers, Black Bear's war bonnet is made out of the sun.

"Warriors, hear me! Boulder Arms has asked to see my power, and here it is!"

"*Ha ya!*" the Cheyennes' whooping war cry begins.

Chief Black Bear swipes his fingers across Boulder Arms's chest to make the mark of the bear claw. Glowing light illuminates from the finger trace.

"He paints with the sun! Our chief has the power he proclaims!" Boulder Arms declares his belief.

"Let the bravest warriors touch Boulder Arms and share in my power."

One by one the strongest and bravest Cheyenne touch the magic mark and stand in awe as the amber aura passes from him to them.

Black Bear shouts, "See my power and believe my words. This is the first battle that will end the Kiowa. Tomorrow we will find the rest of their tribe and kill them all! Ready your tomahawks! Unsheathe your spears! Prepare your arrows! Spread your warrior wings and dip your feathers in the lake of their blood. Do not worry about your own scalp. Instead, let them fear the gleam of our scalping knives. Today the SUN GOD IS WITH US!"

A hundred black-and-white painted Cheyenne warriors glowing

with the light of the sun circle around Black Bear and Gray Hawk to revel in their glory. Their hopes are high, and they are ready to attack.

Chief Black Bear steps out of the shadowy forest, parading the golden lance high above his head. Not wanting to commit his full force to the fight, he makes a strategic decision to divide his force into two groups: a main attack composed of his best warriors to wear the Kiowa down and a reserve force he'd send in later to finish them off.

Black Bear points his magic lance at the Kiowa and shouts, "TAKE COURAGE! KILL THEM ALL!"

Lone Wolf is shocked to see a strange phenomenon emanating from within the forest, beneath the cawing raven. The sun seems to have fallen from the sky, and its rays now flicker and burst up out of the tree line.

Has the sun lost its place? Lone Wolf wonders.

The Kiowa warriors gasp at what they see. Chief Black Bear seems more like a god than a man.

Lone Wolf does something he's never done before; he takes a step back and feels a great fear tighten in his throat. His legs wobble and feel as heavy as mountains.

"Cheap tricks," Lone Wolf hears the medicine man, Onendah, protest, as he steps out of the mist. "If they could use that power to harm us, why wouldn't they?"

Onendah's calm voice reduces Lone Wolf's fear. As he looks heavenward, his worried eyes spy a pure white eagle soaring over the tall pointy pine trees. Its high-pitched screech scatters the ravens and sends them swarming for cover. Their cawing symphony mixes with the Kiowas' war song.

Without flapping its wings, the white eagle glides over towering emerald timbers that nearly touch the sky. Time seems to slow as the swaying trees lean one way, then gradually the other.

"I know not your name, White Eagle, but I must understand: Have you come to take me to the happy hunting grounds?" Lone Wolf questions.

Lone Wolf

watches the elegant creature tilt its wings. His eyes grow heavy and drop to the earth; he watches the eagle's shadow slowly circle around him. He looks up and feels an avalanche of emotions crash inside him. For the first time in his life, he feels the frost of death nipping at his

heels. As quickly as the fear came, it melts. Lone Wolf feels an immediate sense of calm that erases the pettiness of this world. For a tranquil moment, it is evident that his circle is complete.

“They sound close. Should we not step out of the mist and greet them?” Two Moons asks, breaking Lone Wolf’s tranquility.

Lone Wolf takes a deep breath and looks beyond this life. He rests his weapon against his thigh. His massive shoulders rise and flex. The veins in his neck contract. His biceps pulsate. His back muscles tighten. He tilts his head and cracks his neck.

“Father, can you hear me?” Two Moons asks.

“Shields up! Arrows will soon fall like raindrops,” Lone Wolf answers, wiping the tears from his eyes.

“What will we do?”

Lone Wolf searches for words that will inspire his son. They form slowly in his heart and come softly from his lips. “Live your lives as though there is no tomorrow, for today is all we really have! I have spent my life fighting. I know what I must do!”

Lone Wolf ties his shield to his arm, smiles, then charges the Cheyenne all on his own.

CHAPTER 5

Lone Wolf's hasty attack lifts the morale of his enemies. They respond by drawing the strings of their bows, eagerly awaiting the symphony notes they will add to the chorus of war cries.

"See how afraid they are, my brothers!" Black Bear shouts. "Only one warrior is brave enough to fight our hundred!"

Black Bear points his magical lance at the painted bowmen.

"Deliver them death!" the Cheyenne chief orders his longbow archers.

The snap of their strings unleashes a whistling wave of arrows, which arch high in the blue morning sky.

Lone Wolf watches the distant splinters scatter like swarming locusts. They peak at a high arch, level out, and then the tips tilt and they come raining down. He sprints for a fallen tree that the men have been hollowing out for a fishing canoe.

Arrows pin into the earth. Wobbling three-foot-long shafts *thunk* as they strike the trunk. Their distinct markings identify the owners as the Cheyenne tribe. Additional markings show that they are really several bands of the Cheyenne nation.

From Black Bear's vantage point, Lone Wolf's position is riddled with arrows. He hails his victory with a bold war cry that excites his reserves and makes them froth for the attack. The archers fire a second wave.

Flint-tipped arrows continue to strike all around Lone Wolf. He sees the arrowheads spark when they smash against the ground and snap in half.

"Thank you, Taime, for sending me an enemy that has poor craftsmanship," Lone Wolf whispers to his god. "And thank you for letting Water Boy play in the grass last night. Had he not skipped and danced all about, poorly made flint arrows could have sent your other son, Fire Boy, to destroy us."

Bodies covered in black-and-white paint sprint across a wide-open field that separates the Kiowa from the forest. Half of their bodies disappear in the tall lime-green grass.

Bushy dome-shaped war bonnets made of ravens' feathers swoosh back and forth as they go. The enormous size makes their heads seem much larger than they really are.

"*Nat hey, hey ya!*" The Cheyenne scream their war song.

Lone Wolf can tell by their aggressiveness that these relentless warriors have one ambition, to wet their weapons with Kiowa blood. The thought of his children or his brothers being harmed ignites a fire that feels like an exploding sun. Courage melts to hatred. *What can be done? They wave their weapons wildly and sing for our scalps*, he thinks.

Lone Wolf lies low against the grass and watches to see how the Cheyenne move. He intentionally placed the village a good distance from the forest for this exact reason. At the time it had seemed like a good idea, but now that he sees the quarter mile the Cheyenne must sprint across, he knows it was wonderful wisdom! From the Cheyennes' perspective, the waist-high grass makes the village seem closer than it actually is. The bravest, most excited warriors separate from the pack.

Lone Wolf pushes his seething rage back to clear his mind. He does as his father taught him: watch, plan, act. Most of the Cheyenne run at a similar pace, but what makes Lone Wolf happiest is seeing the increasing number of stragglers exhaust themselves and slow to a trot.

In your weakness, I will take strength! Lone Wolf thinks, biding his time.

Behind the patient, motionless warrior, the lingering hazy smoke cloud begins to clear. Seventy men and women painted bloodred grip their weapons of war.

Half the Kiowa spearmen hold long metal-tipped spears twice the length of their bodies. Archers carry fine bows and metal-tipped arrows. The Dog Warriors ready their shiny steel tomahawks and their buffalo-hide shields.

When the Kiowa can finally see the Cheyenne approaching, they release a war cry with one loud voice, which surges like a wave over the field and causes some of the Cheyenne to rethink their attack.

Chief Lone Wolf's confidence rises to elation when he sees that his enemies' arrowheads aren't the only weapons made of stone. Their tomahawks, spears, lances, and crude weapons are all crafted with some use of

HARVEST MOON

stone, which means they won't cut as deep, fly as far, swing as fast, or do nearly as much damage as his tribe's superior weapons.

"Bad day to be Cheyenne," Lone Wolf mumbles.

Rather than sprint toward their enemy, the Kiowa start at a steady pace that keeps their group united and focused.

Lone Wolf smiles broadly. "Now when we fight, we fight as one!"

He waits for the Cheyenne warriors to get even closer before standing up.

Gray Hawk, Chief Black Bear's son, stops in his tracks as he approaches their spent arrows. Unable to locate their kill, he looks behind him and realizes that his raiders have dispersed.

"GET UP HERE, COWARDS!" he orders the stragglers.

Though they are near, they are still too far behind.

"Wait for the others!" Gray Hawk shouts to his sprinting brothers. "We must be united!" But weapons once unleashed are hard to tame and impossible to control.

Something doesn't feel right, Gray Hawk thinks. He turns back and tries to motivate the larger separated body, but the temperature has risen to the point that they are panting.

From the safety of the forest, Black Bear revels in the soft glow of his power until he sees his youngest, and favorite son, Gray Hawk trying to stop the assault. He watches his bloodthirsty braves within reach of the Kiowa village and wishes for his son to be with them.

Show no weakness! Glory is yours, my son! the impatient chief signs.

At the edge of the village, hidden among the tall grass, several Kiowa braves spring up from the earth and snap the strings of their bows. They quickly cycle through their stash of arrows and laugh as they watch their projectiles puncture the sinister Cheyennes' bodies. One by one the raging lead element falls.

Lone Wolf watches their blood wet the grass. He patiently waits for their bold cries of war to change to the chorus of agony.

All the Kiowa Dog Warriors, spear holders, and archers quickly reunite with the night watch and gain ground. The Dog Warriors raise their shields to make one solid protected line. Kiowa arrows rain down on the stragglers, and soon Gray Hawk feels the effects of his divided attack.

"Here I stand," Lone Wolf shouts, goading the straggling Cheyenne.

"I see you, coward! You hide in the grass like a snake. I will separate your head from your body! That is what we do to snakes!" Gray Hawk shouts, reuniting with twenty or so warriors to press onward.

"AH-HOE!" Lone Wolf screams.

"AH-HOE!" The warriors echo his war chant.

In a blur of the chaos, Gray Hawk leads his troop in a heated attack against the full force of the Kiowa.

The Cheyenne slam against Kiowa shields. On the first impact, the Kiowa stand strong. Lone Wolf orders the Dog Warriors to kneel, and when they do, the archers fire into the horde.

Some Cheyenne fall, but the warriors do not slow in their aggressive assault. They renew with vigor. They swing their weapons wildly and hurl their spears with fatal results.

Next Lone Wolf orders the Dog Warriors to step forward and stand. As they do so, the spearmen thrust at the Cheyenne, pushing them back. For the Cheyenne, the strategy is brutal aggression. They push against the shields, probing for the weakest point. When they see a Dog Warrior fall, they focus all their efforts on the opening. Their hand-to-hand skill is much greater than Lone Wolf had expected.

For the Kiowa, the fight is tempered calm. They work together, shield men blocking the attack, archers taking shots where they can, and spearmen puncturing warriors who get too close to the line.

Most tribes would fall back when facing this kind of skilled warfare, but not the Cheyenne. Always pushing, thrusting, attacking, they are like the red ant of the Indian nation.

With eyes fixed on Gray Hawk, Lone Wolf seeks to change the tempo of the fight. He skillfully sifts through the warring crowd, ignoring the cries of pain around him. He moves with such swiftness no Cheyenne is prepared for his aggressive attack and none can repel him. For when he seems like he's coming straight, he turns at the last minute, bends low, and strikes a leg. Then he runs past and hits an arm. His intent is not to waste his energy fighting all the warriors, just wound as many as he can to get to the leader.

As the Dog Warriors disband and follow Lone Wolf, the spear warriors spread out and form a long reverse V shape that protects the Kiowa flanks and keeps the archers safely in the middle. It isn't long before the Cheyenne realize they are actually fighting two enemies. One body of the

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Kiowa use marksmanship and control. The other uses chaos and raging hand-to-hand combat.

In truth, bloodshed sickens Lone Wolf. He detests the brutality of it. He hates the sound bones make when the tomahawk strikes. He finds no joy in maiming of limbs or disfiguring bodies. In fact, it disgusts him. He detests the bitter rusty taste of human blood when it splashes in his mouth. The salty aroma causes him to gag, but he knows one single truth: If the Cheyenne weren't bleeding and dying, the Kiowa would be.

It is our right to defend ourselves. No living thing when attacked rolls over and dies. That clarity forces him to hack, chop, and slash through Cheyenne warriors until he finally reaches his destination.

"Your wife and children will be my slaves, Kiowa!" Gray Hawk whoops, pointing his blood-soaked tomahawk at Lone Wolf.

Lone Wolf sees images of Grass Woman, his wife, and feels his love for her fuel his rage. He reels back his weapon and ferociously swings at Gray Hawk's blood-drenched face.

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Zachary H. Lovelady is a believer in classy brevity.

He is a writer and screen writer. An actor. A director. A sometimes poet. A pilot. A sailor and scuba diver. A snow boarder. A scholar. An entrepreneur. A techy. A terrible scientist. A lover of math, art, and architecture. A seeker of truth. A believer in Christ. A husband. A grateful son. A traveler. And a passionate patriot.

“If you discovered my soul, you’d find it dressed in a red Marine Corps shirt, and a nice pair of American flag board shorts. I served this country. I love this country. God bless the USA, those who serve, and all of its citizens!”