

DREAMS SHOULD NOT BE BROKEN

THE FIRST THREE CHAPTERS
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Chapter One FIONA'S BIRTHDAY

Somewhere in time, in the Star World, twelve women, dressed simply in white buckskin, sit cross legged in what is called The Circle of Light. One at a time, each of them rises to her feet -- then slowly steps forward to drop a pinch of sacred tobacco leaves into a small fire that glows in the center of the circle -- before returning to her original place to sit.

Ho ya ne ho ya ne ho. The women chant as smoke from the tobacco, together with that from the wood, forms a picture of a young girl. Fiona Lonestar MacLean.

"Clean up quick and get in here, birthday girl." Momma called out to me from the kitchen in that voice like a chirping bird she used when she was happy.

"I'll be quicker than you can say *alakazam*," I yelled back. Momma had laid my Easter dress out on Brucie's bed. It still looked brand new. I only used it for special occasions, like today. It's my birthday. I turned 12 at six o'clock this morning, June 16th. I slipped my arms through the long sleeves, pulled down on the pale blue skirt and reached back to bring up the zipper.

Every Easter Momma took us shopping at Penny's to buy something special for church. This year we got to buy twin dresses. A pretty blue one with a flared skirt for her and the same for me. Only, of course Momma's fit right away. Mine, I get to grow into. I tied the belt real tight around my waist and folded the sleeves up at the wrist to make it fit better. "I'm movin' up in the world," I whispered.

I walked over to the mirror and stood real close. My blue eyes stared back. I ran my fingers over my cheeks and down across my chin. I wasn't as dark skinned as my brothers, or my mom for that matter. People in my family aren't any one color.

"La-La-La-Lonestar, hum, beautiful Lonestar, hum-hum, you're the only ga-ga-ga-girl that I adore," Momma hum sang as she banged on the pans near the stove to keep rhythm. Momma has a great singing voice. If she wanted she could be a professional singer just like her best friend Ann Marie who sings at the Gaiety nightclub in downtown Detroit. Ann Marie and her husband Andy Joe live just up the street from us.

It was five-thirty. I peeked out of the door of the bedroom I shared with my fourteen year old brother Sean, and nine year old brother Brucie. They were sitting at the kitchen table. Momma stirred a pot at the stove. As soon as Father drove up Goldy would jump up from under the table and bark or at least make some muffled cries. That way I'd know he was here.

The drawer where Father kept his secret stuff was in his dresser just across the hall from our room. All I had to do was take a few quick steps and nobody'd know. Sean told me he looked in it last week and found some neat stuff, so since it was my birthday I figured it'd be okay if I took a turn.

I held my breath and made a run for it. "Blam, blam, blam." My heart beat so loud I thought it was gonna pop out. I'd be the only kid at school with a gaping hole in my chest.

"Thou shalt not," screamed inside of me. "I'm not stealing anything," I said real soft like. "I'm just gonna look." *God punishes sinners. They cook in hell for a long, long time.* Words Preacher MacNeal said during church service jangled in my head. My hands started to shake as I pulled out on the wooden knobs of the third drawer down from the top. "God, Jesus, Great Spirit, *Kokumthena*, don't let me get caught."

God and Jesus are who everybody prays to at church. Gramma, that's momma's momma, is not so wild about those names. *"God and Jesus are mighty powerful energies, but the meanin's gotten misused,* she said. *People use religion as a reason to war with one another. They don't understand that life is sacred. All life."*

Gramma told me that *Kokumthena* is The Great Spirit's helper, the one that does all the work. It's sort of like Jesus is to God. Only she's a she, not a he. I use all the names. That way, I'm covered.

I stopped to take a deep breath and listen. *"Hum, your the only ga-ga-ga-girl that I adore,"* Momma hum sang again as her feet shuffled around the linoleum floor. Sean and Brucie joined in with the, *"La-la-*

la-Lonestar." I bit down on my upper lip. And peeked inside the drawer. A piece of red material covered whatever was there. Musty smells flew into the air. Sean was right. Father did have stuff tucked away. And it was old. Father never talked about his relatives. When we ask he jokes and says "I just sprung into the world full grown." He's such a joker.

I pushed the red material over to the right. A bunch of yellowed letters tied with string filled up one corner of the drawer. I leaned way in to see who they were from. "Dancing Feet, Route 5; Nashville, Tennessee," the return address read. That was a weird name. Was that a relative I wondered?

A vision of a woman leaped across the inside of my eyes as graceful as a deer. "Dancing Feet," she said. It made me smile. I liked seeing pictures in my head.

I carefully put the letters back where I found them and ran my fingers over the top of what looked like an old sketch book. Something an artist might use for special drawings. Sean told me Father had a special book, so I was sure this was it.

The book opened sideways. With the top flipped over it took up the whole length of the drawer. The drawing on top was a fox. Even though it was drawn in pencil, the eyes nearly jumped off the paper they looked so real. Scary too. Like he was about to eat me. Father's name was signed at the bottom of the drawing, Frank T. I've seen him sign papers that way. But no one but Momma seems to know what it stands for. She just runs her thumb and finger across her lips like she's zipping them up when we ask. Father never talks about drawing, "Hogwash and horse feed," he'd say if anyone mentioned doing, being or thinking about anything creative. Yet, here, hidden in his drawer, was evidence of the opposite.

The sound of car tires spitting out gravel in front of our house brought my search to a stop. I stood still and listened harder. My heart did it's loud pounding again. I turned and looked out the window next to Momma's vanity. But it was too late. Whoever it was zipped past. Not Father. Still, the sudden noise gave me the all-overs. Doing things you weren't supposed to isn't easy.

A photograph, about the size of my hand, slipped out of the sketch book and into the drawer next to some old buttons and stuff. I quickly closed the book and picked up the photo. It was a woman. She was wearing an ankle length dress belted at the waist. Her dark hair was set in two braids that fell over the front of her shoulders. She looked about Momma's age, maybe 30, but her skin was a deeper brown. Two children stood next to her, side by side. One looked to be about five or six, the other ten or eleven. They were a lighter color than she was. I wondered who they were.

"Lonestar, uh, Fiona, what in tarnation is taking you so long?" Momma called out again.

Oops! I took a deep breath and blinked my eyes to bring them back into focus. She called me Fiona. She only did that when Father was around. It's a Scottish name. Father's real proud of being Scot's. He doesn't like me to be called Lonestar. That's the Native American name Gramma gave me.

I slid the photograph back into the book. Pulled the red cloth back over everything. Closed the drawer. Shut the bedroom door and inched, shadow like into the hall. "I'm comin'."

My hands were sweaty. I interlaced my fingers and put them behind my back. "Father here yet?" I murmured from the doorway. Sean shot me a suspicious look. "Where ya been?" He asked. I just tilted my chin and ignored him as I hurried in and sat down at the table.

"Not yet, but any minute now." Momma curled up the corners of her mouth and winked at me then turned back to the stove. A pink checkered apron covered the front of her blue dress.

I tried to wink back. But I couldn't do one eye, so I did two. "It sure smell's good in here," I said. "What's for supper?" Every burner on the stove had a pot on it. And something was cooking in the oven. Momma was too busy to answer my question.

Brucie was sitting next to Sean. They were both cutting out stars from colored construction paper. Sean's were perfect, Brucie's were a little ragged on the edges.

Momma looked so pretty in her Easter dress. I loved it when we dressed the same. It made me feel like I was really a part of her. With her olive skin, blue eyes and black hair, she looked just like a movie star.

"You think I'll be as pretty as you when I grow up, Momma?" I asked.

"Pretty is as pretty does." She took a sip of beer then went back to stirring the pots.

"Well I was thinkin' I might wanna be a movie star one day. So, I really need to know if I have a chance." Momma turned from the stove and fixed her eyes on mine for a second. If she thought I could be pretty, then maybe I could be a movie star. If she didn't think I could, I'd have to settle for being ugly, like a toad. She glanced at her watch. Then lickety split, ran into the living room, pulled back the drapes and looked out at the road.

I took a deep breath in, then let all the air blow out of my mouth like a balloon with a hole in it. Her not answering, meant I was a toad. I looked out across the living room and shouted, "do you think ..."

"Don't ask for anything right now," Sean mouthed shushing me. He pointed to the empty bottles of beer setting on the kitchen sink.

The wall clock made a clicking noise. I looked up. It was six o'clock.

"He's prob'ly working overtime again." Momma sighed as she turned away from the window and headed back towards the kitchen. Her eyes looked glassy, like she was ready to cry. "You kids know how he is." Momma pulled out the chair at the end of the table and sat down. "If there's a piece of machinery that's not working 'Good 'ole Frank' will stay until it's as good as new. Thinks he's Superman." She let out one of her sharp laughs. The kind that's not happy, drummed her fingers on the table, stared at the clock, and drummed some more.

Brucie started chewing on his shirt collar like he does when he's nervous. I stood up, reached across the table and grabbed it out of his mouth like Momma told me to do. "Stop it," I said. Brucie gave me the "evil eye", but he did like I told him.

"Sean open one of those beers in the ice-box. Let's start the celebration," Momma ordered.

Sean, sitting kitty corner to her right, shook his head. "You already started celebrating."

Momma raised her eyebrows and threw him one of those, "you'd better listen to me," looks.

Sean jumped up from the table, dragged his feet across the linoleum, went to the ice-box, popped the lid and handed Momma a beer.

"Me and Jesus have a lot in common." Momma ran her fingers up and down the outside of the cold bottle. "Both born on Christmas Day." She lifted the bottle in the air, brought it to her lips, tilted her head back and let a good gulp run down her throat. When she was finished, she wiped off the top of the bottle with a cloth she had tucked in her apron pocket, grinned from ear to ear and handed the bottle to me.

"Happy Birthday sweetie."

I'd never tasted beer before. Even though we always had plenty of bottles in the ice-box, and nobody would care if I took one, I never thought about it.

"You want me to drink this?" I asked.

"You're the only birthday girl here," Momma answered.

I wrapped my hands around the outside of the bottle. It was cold and slippery. Careful not to drop it, I tilted the bottle up towards my lips, pressed them tightly against the top, closed my eyes and lifted my head towards the ceiling. The sour liquid ran down my throat like muddy water rushing down our Jackson Street creek. "Umm, good," I lied as I set the bottle back down.

"The taste grows on you," Momma said reading through my disguise. She took the beer, wiped it again with the cloth and passed it on to Sean. "When you're big, you'll like it."

"I am big," I said sitting up as tall as I could. "I've grown six inches this year." I didn't think growing bigger was ever gonna make me like the yucky taste of beer.

"Wow," Sean said acting smart. "Here's to my BIG sister." With a wave of his hand he brought the bottle up to his lips and chugged it like a cold soda. I rolled my eyes and muttered to myself. I hate it when he acts like being two years older than I am is such a big deal.

"Happy Birthday," Brucie said reaching out to Sean for the bottle.

"Oops, Brucie, sorry it's all gone." Sean set the beer on the counter behind him.

"Man-o-man, why's it you get to decide?" Brucie crossed his arms over his chest and slunk back into his chair.

Sean pulled his shoulders back and sat up tall, "Because I'm your BIG brother," he growled. I kicked Brucie's foot under the table, blinked my eyes and mouthed "you didn't miss much," but he still looked pained.

A car horn honked just outside our front window. Goldy barked and ran to the door. Momma's face beamed as bright as a fresh red apple. I jumped up, pushed Goldy out of the way, ran to the front door and stepped out.

It was Harriet Helmsly from next door. I watched as she drove in and parked on the side road that divided our house from hers. Harriet's one of Mom's coffee buddies. They sit at the kitchen table Saturday mornings and gab about the news, relatives and anything else that catches their fancy. I gave her a quick wave, then looked hard up one way and down the other. Herby, Dickie and some of the other kids on the block were playing ball. But, no sign of Father. I went back and sat down in the kitchen.

Brucie jiggled in his seat. "Something smells good, can't we eat it?"

"Scotch pie," Momma muttered. She pushed her chair back, stood up and went to the stove. "Barley'n peas," she added lifting the lid off the pan. Steam flew out, followed by a sweet smell.

Brucie threw a pained look in my direction. Vegetables are like poison to him. "I'll eat them," I whispered.

"And strawberry birthday cake." She recounted the twelve candles on the counter.

"Umm." I licked my lips. I loved strawberries.

"No bread pudding?" Sean whispered as he put his hands together and looked up at the sky prayerfully. "What are we gonna do with all our stale bread?"

Brucie and me covered our mouths trying not to laugh, but it didn't work.

"Are you three making fun of my cooking?" Momma said as she started to put the candles on the cake.

"No Momma. Your cooking's great!" I said. "Yeh, if you like pigs feet," Sean growled. "Yuck," Brucie made a face, "and cow's tongue." Momma shook her head and laughed. "You three don't know it yet, but you get to dine like royalty." She turned back to the cake, took a deep breath, then slowly made a circle with the candles.

Goldy brushed up against my leg under the table and whined. She didn't know we were just joking. I reached down to scratch under her chin. That was one of her favorite spots.

We sat quiet for a long, long time after that. The only noises in the room were the clock ticking, Momma's checking on stuff, Goldy licking her chops and our stomach's growling.

Suddenly Momma hit herself on the side of her head, like something important had just landed there. "Sean, do you ..." Momma cleared her throat and sat back down with us, "think you could?" Her eyes shifted between Sean and the door, "you know?"

"Go up the street to Morrie's Bar?" Sean said looking her straight in the eye.

"Well, yes," she answered squishing up her face. "I hate to send you there." Her eyes got all soft and watery. "God knows it's no place for kids ... but, maybe he's not working late. Maybe he's ... umm ... dropped in to see some of his friends and forgot ..." Momma swallowed hard, glanced at me, then back at Sean, "the time."

"Of course I'll go," Sean said standing up. "And I'll give you odds, ten to one, I'll find him."

Usually Sean went to Morrie's by himself. Being the oldest he was always in charge of stuff like that. I hated it when he got to do things I didn't. We'd passed by the bar every time we went to church or the movies or anywhere near the shops around the corner. The windows were dark so you couldn't see what went on inside, but I could hear the sounds of people laughing, singing, or playing music whenever I was within a block of the place.

Sean headed out the front door. The screen door slammed behind him. His shoes made skipping sounds as he went down the steps. I thought about him going to that mysterious place again without me. It didn't seem fair. I mean, it was my birthday. Fire burned in my stomach. I leaped up and hurried over to where she was standing in the doorway. "Momma let me go with Sean?" I shouted.

Momma shook her head, "What are the neighbors gonna think?" she asked, but I knew it wasn't really a question. "Besides, you're a girl. Girls don't go to bars. At least not *that* bar."

"It is my birthday." I pleaded like I'd never pleaded before. "P-I-e-a-s-e?"

Momma took a deep breath, one that went from the top of her head to the tips of her toes.

"Will you take care of ...?"

I nodded yes. Taking care of Brucie was something I always did.

We grabbed three dinner rolls from the table, one for each of us, and ran out the door lickety split. I didn't want to give Momma time to change her mind.

I yelled at Sean to wait up so we could walk together. He was all the way up to Ann Marie's house by that time, but he heard me. Brucie and I ran as fast as we could to catch up. I handed Sean his roll like it was a Cracker Jack prize. "You guys shouldn't be coming with me," he said. But he ate the roll anyway.

Ann Marie waved out the window as we gathered in front of her house. We waved back then headed up the street like we were just playing, not out on a secret mission. Even though Ann Marie and Momma were best friends and shared lots of stuff, Momma still wouldn't want her to know she was letting us go to Morrie's Bar. "Never hang your laundry in public," Momma always says. That means to keep things about the family, in the family.

I peeked into the window of Mr. Johnston's shop at the end of Jackson Street, just to the right on the main road. He's the ophthalmologist who helped me straighten out my crooked eye. I used to have one eye that went right while the other went left.

"*A wandering eye for the boys*," Father'd say. He'd raise one eyebrow, lower his chin, wiggle his shoulders and go into that Scots brogue voice of his. Momma says he jokes on account of he's just a big kid. I'm not so sure about that. He's a whole twenty years older than I am.

One of the kids at school teased me about wearing glasses. "*Na, na, na, na, na, na, Lonestar's got four eyes like a monster from a slimy pit*," she sang in this stupid sing-songy-tweaky voice. It didn't even rhyme.

Gramma said when kids are mean to me it's just because someone else is mean to them. "*Turn around and walk away Lonestar. Meanness is contagious. Don't catch their sickness*." I wanted to "*Na, na, na, na, na*," right back, but instead, I did what Gramma said.

My stomach started to jump as we walked in front of Morrie's black window. I squeezed Brucie's hand. "Let's stick together," I said. Sean held the door open while we slipped into the darkness and noise of the bar. Once inside, Sean motioned for us to stay behind him. The jangle of the music and people talking rushed at me and blew right through my skin. "Fiddling music!" I shouted, trying to make myself heard over the noise.

"Those are *ceilidh* sounds," Sean shouted over his shoulder at Brucie and me.

"Kay-what?" I yelled.

"*Ceilidh* sounds," Sean said talking into my ear. "It's pronounced kay-lee but you spell it *c-e-i-l-i-d-h*. It means a big party. It's where everybody dances, sings or something. Kind of a show-and-tell for grown-ups. Part of who we are and where we come from and stuff like that." I hate it when Sean knows stuff I don't. Sometimes he sounds like he reads the encyclopedia from cover to cover.

We walked around the dozen or so tables and made our way through people who were watching someone out on the dance floor. We didn't see Father. We figured he must be part of the crowd facing away from us watching the entertainment, so we scootched over towards the back to wait 'till the show was over. Some people crowded together and made room at the far end of the bar and motioned us over.

Brucie and me climbed up over the newly vacated stool and stood snug against the back wall, next to the framed head of an elk. Sean plopped down on the bar stool in front of us. We tried to see what was going on, but it was hard. Besides the smoke, there were bright lights going on and off, and people standing around blocking the view. Brucie's hand felt like a part of mine. "Don't let go!" I ordered as we looked out towards where everyone else was looking – trying hard to see what was going on.

"Look it's Father," Brucie squealed as he pointed to a figure dancing amongst the crowd.

I looked hard towards where he was pointing. A quick chill whipped through me. It was Father all right. Dancing. By himself. In a kilt. He leapt from side to side. One hand on his hip and the other high up in the air. The silver pin on the front of his tam sparkled.

This morning I had snuck into his briefcase and put a note in the center of his tam. *Fiona's birthday*, it said. *Don't forget she wants a bicycle*. I didn't know he was going to put his tam on ... and dance. I thought he just carried it around in his briefcase in case it got cold and he wanted to keep his head warm. I had no idea where the kilt came from ... *that* wasn't in his briefcase.

I strained to catch glimpses of him as he moved around the floor. Sometimes I could see all of him, other times just pieces. "Wow! He's really good," I said.

"Yeh! He's good all right. I've only seen him dance like this a few times."

"Why didn't you tell us?" I asked.

"Why? You'd just be mad because Momma wouldn't let you come to the bar," Sean said as he turned to look up at me. "It's not a place for girls."

I rolled my eyes and let out a deep sigh. "Girls are no different than boys," I huffed. But, I knew Sean was right. Momma only let me come this time because it was my birthday.

People started to clap and stomp, hoot and holler. The fiddling got faster as Father twisted and jumped, kicked and turned. His head bobbed up and down above the shoulders of the onlookers over and over again. Sweat beads gathered across his forehead and streamed over his high cheek bones. I tugged on Brucie's hand and shot him a big grin. His eyes beamed back at me. We must've looked like a couple of flashlights in the back of the room.

I looked around at all the grown-ups! They were smiling. Everybody loved Father, just like Sean, Brucie, Momma, and me. I swallowed hard. A part of me wanted Father to come home, but another part didn't want the show to end. I let go of Brucie's hand so we could start clapping and stomping along with everybody else.

"Heads up," some men over to the right of us started to yell as they passed someone along through the crowd. "Here'e comes." The pants going through the air seemed familiar.

I looked down at Sean's bar stool. "Jeez," I cried as I stopped clapping and stomping and reached out again for Brucie's hand. Everybody else stopped too as they moved back to clear the way for ... Sean. Hand after hand passed him forward like a surprise bundle.

Father must've seen what was happening because he stopped dancing. The fiddling music screeched to a halt. I wasn't sure if he knew Brucie and me were at the back of the room. He didn't glance up in our direction as he walked towards Sean. Father's face was almost as red as his hair.

"Well, what have we here then?" Father said in that Scottish brogue accent that he used sometimes. "Is it the little folk from the forest?" His words were playful, but sometimes he sounded playful when he wasn't.

"Father, you know it's me," Sean, boomed back, trying to be as loud as Father."

"Now, is that a fact, then?" Father tousled Sean's dark hair with his big hand.

Brucie and me waited, trying not to make too much noise breathing while we held our positions on top of the bar. My legs were kind of tired, but I didn't dare move. I didn't want to be sent home and miss what was gonna happen next.

Father looked at Sean, laughed and shouted, "come dance with yer old Fa'er then. Show 'em how we kin do it together." Bubbles of joy exploded inside of me. *He didn't see us, he wasn't mad and now we were going to see more of his dancing.*

The fiddling music started again and quick as a wink Sean was standing next to Father, chin held high, one arm raised over his head, and the other at his waist.

"*Bas no beatha*, life or death," Father cried. "Follow me."

The bar we were standing on began to shake. The elk head, on the wall next to us, shifted. Sounds of clapping and stomping roared through the room. Our hands and feet moved right along with everybody else's as we watched Father dance, this time with Sean. "One day that's gonna be me," I whispered to Brucie. "I can feel it in my bones."

"Drinks all around ... on me," a man in the crowd yelled. The bartender started throwing beer bottles out like they were juggling balls. We'd been to the circus downtown Detroit once and sat up high in the bleachers, but this was like being *in* the circus.

After a while the music stopped. The clapping and stomping faded away. Father's chest heaved in and out. He grabbed Sean's shoulders and staggered a bit. Sean reached out to steady him.

I stiffened against the wall. *Was Father going to fall down?*

Father pulled himself up, laughed, raised one of Sean's arms high up in the air and turned to the crowd. "What da ya think? Hey?"

My tension eased. Everything was okay.

"Good for you kid." "Great *ceilidh*." "Way to go Sean." "Just a chip off the old block." Happy words sailed through the air from every direction.

Father and Sean laughed as Sean led the way to the back of the room towards Brucie and me. I reached out for Brucie's hand again, this time ready to walk out the door.

"Don't forget the sawbuck you owe me," a heavy man, sitting next to us said.

"Yeah! I'll cover it next week." Father's breath came out hard, like a horse on the way back to the stables. "I shoulda called you on your cards, but your sour puss is too good a disguise for me. I'm gonna work harder on my poker face so ole Lady Luck'll be in my corner next time." Father laughed so hard his belly shook. I liked it when he did that.

"A sawbuck's a funny way to say ten dollars," I whispered to Brucie. "Father likes to gamble. Sometimes he wins, sometimes he doesn't. I guess with this guy, he didn't." I slipped down onto the stool, then stood up and waited while Brucie did the same. We both stood real still waiting to see what Father was going to say to us.

Father wobbled toward us. He dabbed his sweaty face with a cloth. We stood real still. "Looks like I've got me whole clan here." Father looked at Brucie then me. The sweet-sour scent of beer came out with his words. The back of his white shirt was wet through. I squeezed Brucie's hand. "He's not mad that we're here," I said softly.

Brucie grinned then looked up at Father. "You ... you ... are TRIFFIC," he blurted out.

"TRIFFIC, am I, Laddie? TRIFFIC, now that's a new word for ya."

"Will you teach me to dance like that?" I said breathlessly. The thought of it made my heart shutter.

"You want to dance like your old man?" Dad raised one eyebrow and peered at me through the sides of his dark eyes. He smacked his lips and made a sipping sound like he was thinking about it. "Sure Lassie. I'll teach you one day."

"Wow. Thanks. I really would like that." I closed my eyes and prayed real fast. "God, Great Spirit, let it be true." Sometimes Father said things, then he forgot about them.

As we started winding our way to the door people called out as we passed: "good-bye, fair-thee-well, cheerio," and "see ya next week." I wasn't sure where Father's blue suit was. That's what he wore when he went to work this morning. I didn't know where his brown leather brief case was either. That's where I put my note to remind him about my birthday, inside his tam, in his brief case. "Where's your ..." I tried to ask. But, the noise of people talking was too loud. He didn't hear me.

Sean started doing some dancing steps as we followed Father down Jackson street. Brucie and me copied him. Sean was pretty good. Maybe he had practiced with Father when I didn't know about it. All he'd done at Morrie's was mimic Father's steps, but now he was leaping from side to side like a grasshopper.

"*Gin a body meet a body Comin' thro' the rye,*" Father bellowed as we passed Ann Marie's house. He was having such a good time that it was hard not to sing out with him, but I knew better. I didn't want Momma to be mad at me. She would have a tizzy fit if Ann Marie or any of the neighbors saw the MacLean Clan acting up.

Poor Momma, I thought. She made such a wonderful dinner that nobody got to eat. She even baked a special strawberry cake just for me. Now it was too late for dinner. Most of it was probably burned or dried up.

"*Gin a body meet a body Comin' thro' the rye, Gin a body kiss a body need a body cry?*" Sean's voice rang out right along with Father's. I shot an arrow stare in his direction, but he didn't pay any mind. He and Father just kept bellowing like wild cats right up and into our house. Momma was not going to like their shenanigans one bit.

Brucie ran up ahead of me to catch up with Sean and Father. I stopped on the sidewalk out front, turned and looked into the sky, searching for the North Star in the Little Dipper.

"There you are," I said softly once I found it. No matter how many times we moved, knowing some things stayed the same made me feel good. I pointed my finger up high and drew the design in the air. A rectangle with the North Star in its crooked tail.

My foot stepped on something soft as I started to take a shortcut across the lawn. I couldn't see what it was in the dark, so I reached down and picked it up. It was Father's brown wool sweater. I shook it out and slung it over my shoulder. God, I hoped Momma wasn't throwing all of Father's clothes out like she does when she gets really angry. A few steps further my feet tangled on my birthday streamers. Then I walked over a dress shirt. Trousers. Shoes. And a pair of shorts. My stomach twisted into knots. She was angry all right. There must've been more stuff on the lawn than in his closet.

I started to walk up the front stairs when I heard Momma scream so loudly that her slurred words sailed right out of the house and filled the air all around me, "you're druunk, Frank. You smell like beeeeer ... and ... cheap per ... fume. I've had it with you."

I swallowed hard. The slur in Momma's voice pounded in my ears. She must've kept right on drinking after we left to fetch Father.

"Yer jis jealous a've friends'n you don't." Father yelled back. His words slurred just like Momma's.

"I don't need your kind of frie-ends, gamblers, 'n drinkers 'n playboys," Momma screamed back.

My breath caught in my chest. The sound of my heart beat wildly in my ears. God, I hoped my brothers weren't in the living room. That could be dangerous. I hoped they were in bed, or hiding in the closet. Being around our parents when they were fighting was dangerous. Once Momma was so angry she hurled a frying pan across the room towards Father. It missed him and hit me. My eyes turned black and blue and my head ached like crazy for over a week. Another time Brucie stepped on a broken dish. A sliver of glass lodged in the heel of his foot – blood gushed out like a broken faucet.

I stepped around the porch, leaned up against the house and dropped the clothes I'd been carrying. I knew I couldn't go in. Not now.

The front door opened. The porch light went on. Momma pushed Father out the door. He stumbled onto the porch then down the stairs. I pressed my back into the house trying to stay out of sight.

"It's yerr kid's birrr-thday and you didn't even re-mem-ber her bi-cycle." Momma hollered from the open front door. A suitcase flew through the air.

"I can-na help it if I ... forgot. It's yer fault Merle MacLean. Yer the one who makes birthdays so cock-a-mamie im-por -tant," Father shouted back as he climbed up the stairs hanging onto the railing for balance. Momma beat her fists against his chest, but he grabbed her hands in his – pushed her into the living room and slammed the door. Momma screamed in pain.

They were fighting about me! Tears welled up in my eyes. I brushed them away with the back of my hand. Noises and grunts exploded from unknown places deep inside of me. *I hated their fights ... the hitting ... yelling ... breaking stuff. I hated it even more when the fight was about me.*

Slowly, chest heaving, stomach aching, I forced myself to move backwards toward the street ... careful not to drag any of Father's clothes along with me ... clothes still hiding in the dark clumps of grass. Once off the lawn I started to run as if I was in a race that nobody could see. I passed the Jackson Street Creek where we caught spiders, tadpoles and frogs ... my best friend Donna's house ... over Ecorse Highway ... and into the forest ... the shortest way to Gramma's house.

"God ... Great Spirit ... keep Brucie and Sean safe," I mumbled as I ran. "And make all this fighting go away.

Chapter Three

RUNNING TO GRAMMA'S

Lungs aching. Head pounding. Legs burning. Stomach growling. I ran on towards Gramma's. The more I ran, the more I hurt, but the hurt was good. It was better to hurt on the outside than the inside.

"*You forgot Fiona's Birthday,*" Momma yelled at Father. "*You forgot her bicycle.*" I was sure he'd remember my birthday this time. Why didn't he see the note I put in his tam? Maybe the note fell out before he put his tam and kilts on for the *ceilidh* at Morrie's Bar.

I was tired of the fights, tired of being forgotten. I was running away and never going back.

A train whistled in the distance. The tracks ran through the middle of the forest, just past our club house, half way to Gramma's. I'd been there dozens of times. Just never in the dark.

Suddenly, something yanked me to a halt. A sticky bush grabbed onto the bottom of my dress. "Stop hanging onto me!" I pulled my dress away from its sharp thorns and stumbled backwards into the weeds.

"Where's that Great Spirit Gramma talks about?" I screamed. "Or the God the preacher says looks over us? Or Jesus. Or *Kokumthena.*" Momma baked a strawberry cake, made Scotch pie with barley and peas and we were all gonna be together, one big happy family. But we weren't and we aren't. Nobody got to eat and nobody got to celebrate.

Brucie and Sean were probably hiding in the closet and Mother and Father were breaking everything they could get their hands on. "*Oh God, I hope nobody's hurt real bad,*" I mumbled.

I pulled myself up, wiped my hands on my dress and moved forward, walking fast instead of running. After a while I started to hum-sing, like Momma did. It made me feel like I wasn't alone.

"*Hum ... Eagles have wings... hum ... they know how to fly ... up to the trees, and high up in the sky.*"

My eyes got used to the dark so I could see outlines of things but not the things themselves. The trees and bushes grew into monsters. A hand came up from the ground and tried to grab me. "*Eagles have wings ... they.*" A purple eyed witch with glarey eyes tried to snatch me by the neck. A jagged toothed vampire tried to suck all the blood out of my body.

"Get away! Everybody get away from me," I yelled, turning in all directions. I reached down, ran my fingers through the dirt, and found a big stick. I held it tight ready to swing. Then, eyes straight ahead, jaws clamped tight, I started running in and around bushes and trees. Nothing was going to stop me from finding my way to Gramma's, nothing.

"*Eagles have wings ... hum ... they know how to fly ... up to the trees ... hum and high up in the sky.*" I sang out loud and strong over and over trying to block out Momma's screams, Father's forgetting my birthday, them fighting over me, worries about my brothers, and every other cockamamie worry stabbing me in the gut.

Somehow I reached our clubhouse. I knew I should keep on going but my legs felt like jelly and my feet throbbed all the way out to the tips of my toes. I put my stick down close by so I could find it again, sat down on our swing and pushed off with my feet.

Then I heard it. My name. Somebody called out my name. *Fiona Lonestar MacLean.* I slipped off the swing and picked up my stick. The voice was deep and low. It was hard to say who it was. I held tight to my stick, listened for my name again, and waited.

"Ba, ba boom, ba, ba boom," my heart thumped loudly in my ears. *Could Momma and Father be searching for me?* Sean could lead them to the clubhouse with his eyes shut. Of course Father wouldn't

call me Lonestar, he'd just say Fiona, but maybe Momma spoke up for me and said he should call out my full name. Maybe he was sorry he forgot my birthday.

I waited. My heartbeat got softer. Crickets chirped. A bird cooed. The wind rustled the leaves in the trees. But, no one came. "*Imagination.*" That's what Momma says I've got too much of. *Nobody was gonna come and get me. Nobody probably even knew I was gone.* Still hanging tight to my stick, I headed for the railroad tracks, angry at myself for hearing things.

I edged along the steel rails as far as I could, then made a big jump into the meadow. The grass was soft and damp. The coolness of it felt good up against my legs.

"I'm more than halfway there Gramma," I yelled, letting my words fly all the way to the moon.

Something screamed in the dark. It, for sure, wasn't somebody calling my name. It was a wild thing. I wanted to run, but nothing would move. Tingles ran up and down my back like so many fingers trying to tickle me from the inside out. But, nothing was funny.

I tried to hum-sing. But there wasn't any air. A squeaky noise escaped through my nose.

"S-C-R-E-E-C-H," that something screamed again.

My head rattled like a tin bucket with a rock in it. When I ran away I didn't think about anything going wrong. "Gramma, I wish you were here," I managed to mumble, somehow able to open my mouth again.

The screeching stopped. My knees jiggled. I stumbled forward. Slowly at first. Then as quickly as I could. Careful not to fall into any holes or run into any bushes or trees. Danger circled around me. I could feel death's heavy breath on my back. It made the hairs on my neck stand up straight.

I'd never thought about dying before. It's so final. Brucie and me put two spiders in a clay box and buried them in the sand at the Jackson Street Creek. When we went back to dig them out and opened the box, there wasn't anything left but legs. We felt real bad.

Gramma says, "*nothing dies, it just changes form.*" But I don't want to change form, not yet.

"SCREECH," went that something again.

This time, I took a deep breath. Turned around. Looked into the shadows. And yelled, "HAYA!" Wings of blackness fanned my face with puffs of air, then disappeared. It was an owl.

Slowly, I unscrunched my shoulders. Still looking up, I turned in a circle. Everything around me looked real big. I was so worried about the owl, I forgot to look where I was going.

Did I turn wrong at the clubhouse? Or was it just around the meadow after the railroad tracks? I dropped my stick and sat down in the damp grass. Mosquitoes buzzed around my face, arms and legs. I swatted them away, but it didn't help. They nibbled on one part of me, then another like I was their dinner.

"HELP!" I screamed as loud as I could. "Somebody help. God. Jesus. *Kokumthena.* Great Spirit. This is me, Fiona Lonestar MacLean. Please send someone to find me. I'm real lost somewhere out here in the forest. I'm scared, and tired, and I want ... my Gramma." My chest heaved in and out. My breath caught in my throat.

I sat real still. The inside of my head sounded like the thumping of Momma's broken down old washing machine as I waited for my prayer to be answered.

After a few minutes I heard something far away. A different noise. Different than the branches blowing in the wind or night birds like that owl. I couldn't tell exactly what it was, but it sounded like someone yelling back at somebody, maybe at me.

"Yo ... hel ... lo," it echoed muffled like. Then it got a little closer. And a little louder. Crashing sounds, like someone, or something, moving fast through the forest, started to fill the spaces in between the "yo ... hel ... lo's."

I squinted my eyes trying to see through the dark. Gramma said that sometimes when you can't see with your eyes you can see with the inside of your mind. I tried to do that. But nothing came in except for the gray and pink from the inside of my eyelids.

The sounds got louder. I didn't know whether to hide behind a tree, lay low on the ground, or get up and stand tall. The more I thought about what to do, the more tired I got. I finally stood up, dug my feet into the ground ... threw my shoulders back ... held up my stick ... and tried to look big and tall just in case whoever was coming was dangerous.

"A'ho. Hakiilhamo?" A booming voice called out as a shadowy figure headed towards me.

I swallowed hard ... tried to say something ... but couldn't. I searched my head to see if I could figure out what the words meant. They sounded like some foreign language. Even though it was warm outside, I started shaking all over. My fist was clenched so tightly around my stick that I couldn't feel my fingers.

"Hello. Are you okay?" The voice said as the shadow moved to a few feet in front of me. "Someone yelled for help a while ago ... so ... I came running to see ... if I could help."

This time, I knew what he was saying. He didn't sound dangerous, but Sean says you can never tell, "*sometimes people sound real nice and rob you behind your back.*"

"Are you out here all by yourself?" His breath came hard and heavy.

I'd called out for help, but now that someone was here I didn't know what to do. Thoughts raced through my head. *Was he going to hurt me? Did he want to steal something? How can you tell if someone's dangerous or not?*

I didn't have any money on me and there wasn't anything I had that he could take away. I had to take the chance that he wanted to help – while at the same time get ready to run like the wind.

"Who are y-you?" I mumbled. My eyes burned hot from trying to see in the dark while the rest of me continued to shake.

"My name's Johnny. Johnny Whitefeather," he said slowly. I peered up at him. After all the scary things I'd gone through it was hard to focus, but he looked kind of familiar.

"I live in a house just on the edge of this here forest," he went on in a kind of flat speaking way. "I was going home when I heard someone calling out for help, so I ran as fast as I could to try to find out who it was, and what was wrong." A white feather dangled over his shoulder, hooked to a piece of his hair.

"Johnny?" I swallowed hard as his honey colored face came into focus. He was Gramma's friend. The one she's known since she was a kid. Father doesn't like him, so we don't see him very often. But, it was him all right. "It's me Lonestar." Tears raced down my cheeks. "I was going to see my Gramma and ... I got ... lost."

"Lonestar!" Johnny bent down and put his hands on my shoulders. "You ... shouldn't be out here all by yourself. What ...?" He stopped mid-sentence, nodded, shook his head, then asked, "Isn't today your birthday?"

"Uh, huh," I said nodding my head up and down. He handed me a big hanky so I could wipe my face, then stood up. The hanky felt soft in my hands. I blotted my eyes first, then my cheeks. "Thanks," I said handing it back.

Johnny Whitefeather gave it a quick flip with his wrist then pressed it into the front pocket of his jeans. "We'll find your Grandmother together," Johnny said as he reached out for my hand.

I took a deep breath and put my hand in his. It felt warm and safe.

"I got lost when I was twelve years old," Johnny said as led me forward through the darkness of the forest. "It was scary."

"Yeah! That's for sure." It felt good that someone as big as him was scared once too.

"My older brother took me hunting for berries in the forest near our house. I picked and ate 'till my skin turned blue." Johnny laughed.

His deep sounds flew into the sky like a flock of happy ducks. I laughed with him. My shakes lessened. Going in and out of trees felt safer now that I wasn't alone.

"Then it was dark. I couldn't find my brother. In my picking and eating, I'd forgotten where I was. Nothing looked familiar. I called out his name and searched through the brush, but he wasn't there. He must've figured that I started on home ahead of him."

I wondered if Sean and Brucie wondered where I was. Since we all slept in the same room they for sure would know I wasn't in bed. And, if they were in the closet, they'd know I wasn't underneath the shoes. I swallowed hard and took a deep breath. Whatever they're wondering, I hoped they were okay and not in any kind of trouble. I swallowed hard and looked up at Johnny, "What happened?" I asked.

Johnny laughed. "I found me an old tree with a big hole in the bottom and crawled inside. Wolves howled in the distance. Owls hooted. Big things moved all around me. I wasn't sure what was real and what wasn't, but I pretty much figured that by morning I'd be somebody's dinner."

"Scary stuff." My head was still a bit dizzy from the scary things I'd run into. Going to Gramma's at night wasn't anything like I thought it would be.

"Yup. It's scary out in the dark all alone." Johnny squeezed my hand and stopped. He moved his head one way then the other as if he was listening for something. After a while we moved forward again.

"What happened? Did your brother come back ... or your mom or dad?" I asked.

"Nope. No one came."

"Oh!"

"While I waited in that tree trunk making up stories about how I'd die I remembered something my father told me." Johnny let out a deep sigh and smacked his lips together. "My father said before you die you must write your own words, sing your own song. This will aid you in finding your way to the ancestral ceremonial resting place."

"I've never thought about writing my own song before. All the ones I know I learned from someone else. Did you do what your father said?" I asked as we walked along.

"Nope. But thinking about it kept me from worrying about being lost." Johnny laughed his deep laugh again. "Now, when I think I have just the right song, it changes."

He didn't hurry me at all, instead of making me keep up with him, he was careful to take small steps and move at my slower pace. Even at that, after a while, my feet started to drag. It must have been way past eleven. I didn't want Mr. Whitefeather to think I was a cry baby and get angry at me so I made myself keep going.

"When I was a kid my father used to play a game he called 'Horse.'" Johnny said. "Care to try it?"

I knew the game meant I was to ride on his back. Funny how he understood what I wanted when I didn't even ask. It must have taken a whole split second for me to throw my stick away and say, "yes". Johnny leaned forward and helped me up.

"Row-row-row your boat, gently down the stream, merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily, life is but a dream," Johnny Whitefeather sang. I joined in after the first chorus. We played with the words as we moved along. Sometimes he'd sing first, then I'd take a turn. It was so fun it took my mind away from my parent's fighting. I almost forgot where we were and why we were making our way through the dark to Gramma's.

We came out of the forest and stepped onto the edge of a gravel road sounding like songbirds. Johnny didn't seem to care if anyone heard or saw us. A few porch lights as well as street lights glittered in the dark.

"If you look to the right you'll see my house," Johnny said. "It's the one with all the lights on inside. When I heard your calls, I just took off."

"I'm glad you did," I replied. "I thought I was a goner."

Johnny laughed. "A goner huh?"

Johnny let go of my legs. I slid down from his back and landed on my feet. They felt less wobbly after being able to rest for a while.

"And, guess what's just ahead?" Johnny said.

I looked up the road, a little woozy from everything that had gone on. A soft light shimmered along the top of the small shiny stones like tiny moon kisses. My eyes landed on a familiar porch, dimly lit, but one I knew well. "Gramma's!" I cried reaching up to hold onto my heart as it started to make that loud skipping noise it sometimes did. All the tiredness I'd felt before seemed to fall away like bark peeling off a tree.

I ran the next half block, Johnny close behind, then stopped in front of Gramma's house and looked through one of the front windows. Candles flickered across her living room wall, casting shadows that looked like eagles in flight.

I hurried forward, stepped up onto the porch, put my right hand on the door ringer, and pushed hard.

Feet shuffled across the floor. The door opened a tiny crack ... then swung wide open. *"Ahaw!* hello, what's this?" Gramma said in that soft sweet voice of hers. She stood wide eyed, her hands clasped around the front of her robe. A narrow gray braid fell over one shoulder and stopped at her waist like a long rope – ready to pull me up – out of the darkness and into the light.

"I love you Gramma. I love you so much and I'm so glad I didn't die in the forest. Momma and Father had a big fight, she threw out all his clothes, and we ... didn't get to celebrate my birthday." I pushed my face against her warm body. My nostrils breathed in her smell. My mouth tasted the cotton in her robe. It wasn't my imagination. She was real. I was safe. I'd made it, and I was never going home again.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw Johnny give Gramma a quick nod before he turned to leave. "My, my, my," she clucked, as she moved me into the kitchen. "Looks like the mosquitos sure had a feast on you."

It felt so good to be with Gramma that whatever pain was there before, vanished.

When she was done cleaning me up and healing my bites with herbs, we made a bed for me on the sofa. Even though it was warm, she covered me with the quilt she made out of old family clothes. "Lives from the past are always part of our present," Gramma said. "Old clothes are one of the ways to carry their spirits forward and remind us that they live in our veins and in our hearts."

As I closed my eyes I wondered who all of those spirits of the past were and if I was ever going to meet them face to face.

"Life is a circle. A circle never ends. It reaches up to heaven. Then down to Earth again," Gramma sang as she sat in the big flowered chair across from me. The candle on the table next to Gramma flickered over my eyelids. The sweet smell of herbs filled my chest. I was safe. *God, Great Spirit, let everyone at home be safe too,* I prayed.