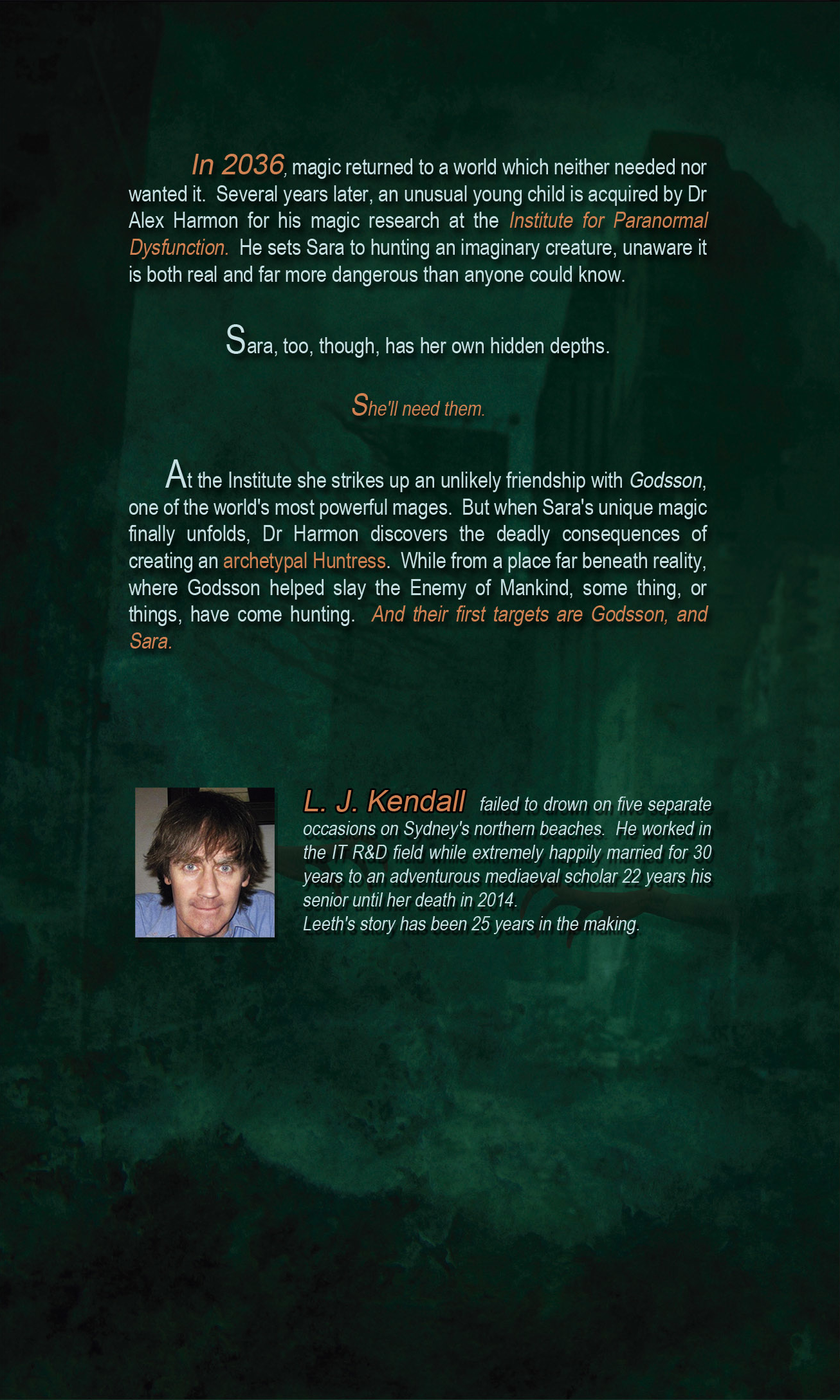


*Wild Thing*

L. J. Kendall

*The Leeth Dossier Vol. 1*

**For my wife, Stella, who encouraged me and helped me, through all the happy years we had.**



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**Novels by L. J. Kendall**

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[*Wild Thing*](http://bookshow.me/B019DQVR76)

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*(Lost Girl)*

*…*

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PrologUE

Chief High Cloud crouched, silent, hands still trembling in shock. Trying to understand it all: the vision; the bonfire’s snuffing; the hungering cold.

One small ember struggled in the frozen ashes, and blowing gently he nursed the fire back to life, taking comfort from the simple act. Firelight breathed traces of warmth and hope back into the shocked faces around him. Their desperate expressions pressed on him like the hopes of distressed children, eager to believe a parent could somehow make everything all right.

*There would be no way to make this right,* he knew.

Behind him, beyond the gathering of mis-matched people, the sun’s last light crowned their geodesic domes in a glow of burnt orange. Even as he watched, the tallest slid into darkness. *Not an omen,* he told himself, as the flame took tentative hold.

But he could delay no longer. Old bones, weakened from too many zero-gravity months in years long past, protested as he stood to speak into the wretched stillness.

“Let us talk. We can not accept one whose Way is murder. Human Beings should kill only for food, respecting our brother creatures for the gift of their life. We cannot open our hearts to the woman in the vision we have just seen.

“The rules of the Sky Corn community are clear. The child must be sent from us. She must leave her name. She must take nothing. Let her go to a people for whom killing and destruction is a part of their culture: she will go to the *Wasichus*. Let her killings happen there, just as we saw, rather than among the People. If one day she sees the evil of her actions; if the Great Spirit moves her, and she proves herself worthy, then perhaps may she rejoin our community.” He stopped and waited, letting any other speak who wished to.

Abruptly, the girl’s mother rose to her feet. Black hair cascaded down her back like liquid, one hand briefly brushing the gentle curve of her belly for reassurance, yet something – the way she stood, the expression on her face – made her seem dangerous. Her husband flowed swiftly upright behind her, placing large steadying hands on her shoulders. His touch seemed to calm her; allowed words to come. “I would speak.”

The chief looked from her to the shaman who still stood leaden with sadness. The wise-woman slowly lifted her head and nodded. He turned back to the child’s mother. “The Sky Corn community will hear Shining Hair.”

Her words leaped forth. “My daughter would never do these things! She is a good child. Good, and brave. The young woman in the vision was not Happy Mouth.” She looked around at the doubting faces. “You all know my daughter: she is loving, not cruel.

“My husband and I follow your ways. We teach them to our child. We *know* that violence is wrong. Deeply. It’s why we came to you – not just for your vision for the future, or your honoring of the past. We are teaching her to respect life, to reject violence. You know this is true.” She stopped, meeting the eyes of each of the solemn faces, hating the note of desperation which had crept into her voice.

Her voice sank, against her will, fighting fear for her daughter and shame for herself. “Aunt White-Eyes’ vision was not of the future, but the past. She saw me, from my bad days. You have all mistaken my daughter for me.”

A mutter ran through the patchwork tribe. Her husband’s head was bent, now, his face impossible to read. But his hands, still resting on his wife’s shoulders, tightened involuntarily at her words.

The wise-woman shook her head sadly. “No. All saw. It was not you, Shining Hair. You speak with love, but not with truth.”

The vision was too fresh for denial. Raw, red meat, *pulsing* bloody in a delicate hand. Then flames, one girl dancing like a scythe through panicked leather-clad bikers while another fed….

Finally, the twisted scene with its inhuman cold. Cold which had, terrifyingly, reached for them all *through* the flames, scrabbling for purchase in the watchers until the wise-woman broke the link. Leaving a circle of stunned faces around a bonfire suddenly black, cold, and dead.

All had thought their hearts equal to the reluctantly-shared vision. But that vision had been far worse than they had feared.

The child’s mother pushed herself away from her husband. “In the vision, her killing was in a city. Perhaps if we keep her amongst us, the vision can be broken.”

“Our shaman’s visions have always revealed truth,” the chief answered, “even for those who tried to change the future foreseen. Keeping your daughter would be to nurture one who will be a murderer. Should she stay here, maybe she would bring her killings here, to our small community.

“But worse: might not such attention reveal your presence to those who hunt you?”

At those words, all present stiffened.

“But now we know this future we can raise our daughter so it won’t happen!”

“How? You do not know what will make Happy Mouth that way, so you can not know what to change,” the Chief said. “We have seen the natural future for your child. Would you seek to change her true nature? To bend her?”

“So you’re saying it’s natural for her to kill? That it’s *all right*? That goes against everything the Sky Corn community is supposed to stand for!”

“Shining Hair, you have much to learn.” He looked sad. “Though a Way is wrong, we do not try to force others to our path. That Way is wrong too, and most treacherous. A coyote is not a coyote without its teeth. But we will not have her here, now we know her Way.” He stopped again and waited, watching all the faces.

Only silence answered him this time.

“Then it is so.” He looked back to the parents, troubled. “And you, Shining Hair and Crazy Bee, will you hold to your vows and stay? Or will you go with your daughter, and join in her killings?”

The mother glared back. “We will go with our daughter and *prevent* her killings.”

“But if you leave, and they find you – what then? When you sought refuge here, did you not say his vengeance would be terrible, on both you and all who had harbored you? Did you not both give your word to do nothing to draw that vengeance down on any here?”

The woman said nothing. Simply stood, with fists clenched.

The Chief turned to the tired shaman. “White-Eyes Woman, will you seek their future, should they leave with their daughter?”

The shaman nodded, slowly. Nothing could be worse than the future she’d already seen tonight. She and the Chief looked back at the fire-pit – once warm and welcoming, now cold and somehow hostile, the new flame still struggling.

The Chief beckoned. “Come, we will use my tepee.”

In ones and twos, then, the council disbanded. Shining Hair stalked behind the Chief, hardly aware of Crazy Bee’s larger hand gripping hers as they followed the chieftain to his hide-lined, geodesic ‘tepee.’

The wise-woman, crouching before the fire pit and remembering the hungering cold, struggled still to understand. A chilling awfulness lay beneath the impossible quenching of the bonfire. *What* had killed the blaze?

Finally, heavily, age aching in every joint, she rose to follow the girl’s parents.

-

The semi-permanent structure used traditionally-tanned hide, bonded to interlocking Bucky-struts earned from the community’s expertise in sustainable orbital technologies. Inside, the four sat while the Chief kindled a small ritual flame.

The shaman was surprised by how easily the new vision flowed; and as the monstrous scene smashed through her, *ended* it just as quickly, amidst horrified cries.

All four reeled from the image now scorching their retinas: the community’s holding, a wasteland scoured black. Nothing but drifting ash, mile after mile. Recognizably the same trees and buildings, but reduced to charcoal spars and triangular charred skeletons. *In the same positions they were today.*

“Fuel-air bomb.” Crazy Bee’s analysis was reflex; his tone, hushed disbelief. “Maybe a tac nuke.”

Still the woman denied. “No. Once we leave… even if they found us, we would never tell them of your aid. This can’t be-”

The shaman interrupted. “These people who seek you: what would you *not* do, should they threaten your daughter?”

The man and the woman flinched.

The wise-woman did not relent, though she took no pleasure from her words; her voice sinking to a whisper. “Or, might they not even seek to force the truth from your four-year-old child herself?”

The parents froze in horror, knowing the answer. Imagining what he would *enjoy* doing to their daughter.

“Which future do you choose, Shining Hair?” the Chief asked. “Which future for your daughter, and for us all?”

The two stood motionless for a long time, the man’s arms close around his wife’s shoulders. At last his head bowed forward.

Shining Hair stared across the small fire into the milky eyes of the wise-woman. “No. It’s not true.” The woman’s long black hair whipped in angry denial. “You can’t see the future. No one can. I reject this prophecy. Either you let my daughter stay, or we take her and leave.”

The Chief shook his head. “We cannot let your daughter stay. If we are not true to ourselves, our community poisons itself. She must leave. And if you leave with her….” His head moved left, right, refusing that fate. “We have just *seen* the doom which that choice would bring to all who remain here.”

She made a cutting gesture with her hand, chopping off the Chief’s words. “No. Aunt White-Eyes is mistaken. Or deceived. Come on, Crazy Bee, we’re going.”

“Shining Hair- ’*Lita*- wait, let’s think this through. Maybe….”

Crazy Bee faltered to a stop at the look his wife turned on him. She stared at him as if he had just transformed into a complete stranger. Somehow, that expression unlocked his voice, and he spoke from the heart. “I love you, ’Lita. I love our daughter. But I know we’ve seen the truth tonight, in these visions. I don’t understand – not the how, not the why – but I *believe.* You do too, I know you do.”

Her lips thinned into familiar stubborn lines, and he found his fists clenching helplessly. Still he tried. “’Lita, we gave our words when we came here; when the Sky Corn took us in despite the danger we brought to them all. Remember that night: every member agreed. *Every member*. And in return we made them a vow. You can’t break that vow.”

His wife stared at him, her shoulders hunched. “So… what: you’ll *stay* here, ’B? What about your *marriage* vows?”

Her jaw set grimly. “Right-”

“No, ’Lita. No. I will stay here, and so will you. Only Happy Mouth will leave.”

She looked at him as if he’d gone mad. Or she had. She shook her head, words briefly failing her. Took one step back. “No,” she whispered, before her voice strengthened. “No, ’B, I’m leaving, and I’m taking Happy Mouth with me. With or without you.”

“No, ’Lita. You’re not.”

She stiffened at those words. Then, strangely, *relaxed*. Her posture subtly shifted. Loosened. An air of danger suddenly draped her once again, like a dark shroud hovering at her shoulders. “You won’t stop me.”

The man’s face looked carved from the earth itself. “But I’m the only one here who can. So I must. Please, ’Lita, I’m begging, don’t do this! Don’t risk the safety of our unborn child. *I love you*. You think I *want* to abandon her? That’s crazy! But our other choices are *wrong!* And I’ll be betraying you, and me – all we have and all we hope for – if I let you do this!” His eyes locked on hers, *willing* her to see what he could. “As deep as my soul, I know if you ignore this vision, you doom us and everyone here.”

Her slim hands moved across her belly, instinctively protective, and for those seconds, as her gaze turned inward, he dared to hope his words had reached her.

Then her hands fell away, her expression darkened, and she turned sideways to him, rolling her shoulders as she took a defensive stance. “Never.”

From behind, he heard the shaman mutter – he recognized the beginnings of a spell – and he spoke without looking around. “Aunt, even if you *do* succeed in putting her to sleep, you will lose her trust forever. It must be me who stops her. Who makes her see.”

His wife was abruptly in motion, flashing forwards, lit by the warm light of the fire in the enclosed space. He rocked his head to one side to avoid her palm strike, right hand rising to deflect her left, anticipating the simultaneous knee strike, sliding his thigh forward and into it, diverting the force a moment before it could blossom. Her left leg flashed up… to those watching, it seemed the two danced: a strangely-accelerated series of moves and powerful countermoves choreographed in fury and love.

The Chief’s heart ached in his chest as he watched Shining Hair, for the first time in over four years, forsake her vow of non-violence; the mother in her literally fighting against the impossible choice suddenly confronting her.

Husband and wife contested their daughter’s fate with frightening intensity, feet weaving intimately in and around each other, body jolting body, limbs blurring and meeting, the impact of flesh on flesh jarring the man time after time, rocking him.

As they fought, the Chieftain felt a chill run through him. He was no expert in combat; was very far from a martial artist; and the two *had* been frank about their past. But perhaps in their brevity, he had underestimated the depths of their capabilities. The fight stopped making sense to him as the pace increased, the two bodies locking together in a series of blows, grips, twisting moves and blindingly-fast strikes from hands, fists, knees, elbows, which he simply could not follow. Dirt flew from the floor as the two spun and wove together. He felt he watched two tigers fighting, inches from him. Skin prickling, he had to stiffen his spine.

Time and again, Crazy Bee jerked or flinched, often only the ugly sound of a hammer blow on meat signaling a successful stroke. One of ’Bee’s eyes was swelling, his cheek already darkening with a livid bruise. A *crack* of bone and a sharp gasp from the male warrior, and Shining Hair spun away, rebounding from the powerful impact of her elbow into his ribs. For a moment, Crazy Bee paused, stunned, while Shining Hair completed her spin. This time the Chief saw her right leg flash out against her husband’s left knee, an audible snap as ligaments broke. The man buckled.

Instead of moving away, though, the woman flowed instantly forward again, sobbing as if she were the one who’d been injured. The man *had to* collapse; but instead, somehow he turned, sliding behind her as if he’d expected the maneuver. Or as if she had deliberately left herself open. One massive forearm suddenly clamped across her throat while his other curved lower, above her waist, pulling her against him to trap her there, and for just a moment, she sagged into him as if relieved. He murmured soft words even as his forearm tightened against her throat.

No one moved.

But then she snarled, in denial: *still* refusing the truth. One tautly-muscled leg flashed vertically upward to smash against Crazy Bee’s face with the impact of a club, rocking his head backward as blood gushed from his now-broken nose.

But his hold did not falter, his grip did not shift. Tipping himself backwards, he fell heavily to the floor, absorbing the impact as best he could.

Shining Hair smashed her head back into her husband’s chest, each impact sounding like a mallet blow, screaming her defiance and desperation. He withstood each strike, murmuring still in her ear, tears running from his craggy face as he carefully tightened his grip across her neck, silencing her cries even as those cries changed to panicked attempts to draw breath. She struggled harder, the fury of her smaller body arching his own much larger form forward into a bow.

But still his grip did not ease, and slowly her movements weakened even as the desperation in her cries grew, and his tears flowed harder, as if his soul broke.

Long seconds passed as her struggles faltered; and, finally, ceased. She fell still. For a few seconds more he held his grip, eyes closed, panting but alert even now for a trick: he knew his wife. But at last he released his arm from her neck and awkwardly slid her gently to the ground, eyes now imploring the shaman. “Please. Aunt White-Eyes. Check my wife. Check our unborn child.”

The blind woman moved forward, the strangely beautiful dance of terror and love that she had sensed, now settled into an awful pool of peace – and of terrible fear. The blood dripping from his nose to the floor shone in her Sight like flares of molten fire.

Tears flowed freely down her own face as she moved forward to sink beside the man, her hands moving surely over the woman, dreading what she would find – but soon amazed at how little injury Shining Hair had suffered in the furious melee. She sensed the small life within, shaken and frightened, and sent it soothing waves of reassurance, of calm.

“She is well. *Both* are well. She will wake, soon. But what then, Crazy Bee?”

“Then: I *hope*.”

-

She swam up into consciousness with a strange reluctance, as if not wanting-

Remembering, ashamed, she gasped, leaping to full awareness, lurching upward, her eyes darting.

She lay in their own tepee-dome, while her husband sat calmly across from her, sketch-pad in his lap, head down as he drew. One leg stretched out awkwardly before him as if his kneecap ached, and one of his eyes was swollen shut. His whole face was bruised and purpled. Her eyes widened in shock. *I did all that!* she suddenly remembered.

One hand flashed to her belly, and the relief that flooded through her almost made her groan. But her – other? – daughter?

They’ve taken Happy Mouth!

She lunged forward, grabbing the pad from her husband’s lap; furious with herself, furious that *he* could be sketching-

Oh.

A long dark line now scored his drawing, but the scene struck her with the same force, the same sickening blow to the belly as when the shaman had shared it earlier.

His pencil sketch showed the once-green lands of the Sky Corn community as the burned and charred wasteland of the second vision: charcoal spears that had once been pines, now sharp black bones extruded from the earth; blackened triangular spars, the skeletons of scorched geodesic tepees. He’d been partway through drawing a carbonized skeleton. A very small carbonized skeleton. Her breath caught in her throat, and she flung the sketch pad away and rose, stalking to the entry-way.

She paused. “Where is-?”

“When I asked you to marry me,” his quiet words from behind her somehow stopped her own. He continued in that same gentle voice. The same love in the tone as when he had fought her, when he’d been forced to risk their unborn child’s safety by rendering her unconscious. “I promised to respect your wishes. Today, for the first time in our lives together I could not do that. If you wish me to leave, to find a different tent, then… then I will.” He pulled angrily at his hair, like he wanted to tear it out. “Just *think.* That’s all I ask.

“*Think*. I swear, ’Lita, in my bones: I know if we do as your heart begs you to do – as mine begs me! – within two weeks the Sky Corn will be a sea of ash blowing in the wind, and Fate alone knows what sick vengeance he’ll visit on us. And on Happy Mouth, to hurt us best. *He won’t kill us*, ’Lita. He has people surgically altered for his amusement! Remember his own *daughter*?”

“Have you finished, ’B?” She refused the truth, turning away. “Good. Then I’m going to find where they’ve sent our daughter, and get her back. With or without your help. I’ll-”

“She’s not gone, yet. They’re waiting for your okay.”

“*What?”*

“I stand by my vows to you, Shining Hair. I always have, and I always will. If you go, I will go too.”

“Then what are we waiting for?” Refusing the doubts; refusing to even acknowledge them.

Her husband unfolded without his normal fluid grace as he stood, then limped across the small living space to his splayed-open artist’s pad. Picking it up, favoring his left side, he limped back to his wife still standing at the doorway. A part of her, an old and well-trained part, realized he must have had some healing already, or he would not have been able to use his knee at all.

Flipping to the nearly-completed sketch, he held it up before her as he moved behind her, pulling her into his embrace. It was a measure of the depth of their understanding that she knew this was no ploy. There would be no more choke holds.

“Just look. And listen to me.

“The Chief told the second vision to the whole tribe. And they understood. Yet they also understood your reaction. And they decided. They have already risked all their lives, all their dreams for the future, to aid us once. And they spoke again, and decided to entrust all they have and all they strive for, to us, again. To *you.* To your decision.

“It’s your decision, Shining Hair. Let Happy Mouth be taken away. Or take her, and go.

“They leave it in your hands.

“They ask *only* that you to take time to think, and feel, before you decide.”

Neither spoke, and abruptly, he felt the tension in her shatter. She collapsed into his arms, an awful keening wrenched from deep within her. Like she were dying. Or their daughter was.

He made the call.

Outside their tepee, the wise-woman waited for them both. As the mother moved to step angrily past, the blind shaman spoke. Softly. “Stay. Do not say goodbye to her.”

“What? That’s crazy! She’s only *four years old*.”

“Will she suffer more knowing her parents gave her away, or if she can tell herself she was taken against their will?”

Shining Hair’s fists clenched till the knuckles glowed white. Then slowly, she nodded.

“Shining Hair. Crazy Bee.”

Their desperate gazes snapped from each other, to the wise-woman’s sad, blind eyes.

“Our Way is not violence. We do not believe that death and bloodshed is ever a solution.”

They simply stared grimly back, growing still more angry at her, she Saw. “Yet my second vision speaks of a powerful evil that moves unopposed. Perhaps there is yet a reason for your daughter’s terrible Way, a reason we are not wise enough to see.”

By their auras, the shaman saw her tiny seed of hope take root. And at that moment, also sensed the child’s painting clutched in the woman’s hand, wisps of love curled through the paper: the sense of a child standing between her father and mother, the adult female figure gently swelling with the promise of life.

-

“Why are we going this way? Where’s mama?”

Not answering, the woman continued leading the child to the edge of the village. A land skiff sat rigged and ready in the moon’s clear light, the young warrior chosen to remove the child scowling beside it.

“Oh! Look there, a land boat. And the Chief! Will *he* give me my growed-up name?”

The shaman had already been and gone, summoning a wind spirit to fill the sails of the small land yacht. The woman and the girl reached the Chief, and the child risked a smile when they stopped.

He did not smile in return. “Remember these words, child: a Human Being kills only for food.”

Confused, she repeated them solemnly. She’d seen other naming ceremonies, for her older friends, and knew this was different. More serious somehow.

She waited, a little bit scared. Maybe she wasn’t going to get a Bear name after all?

The Chief’s large hand clasped around hers, leading her to the land skiff where Aunt High Mirror and one of the young hunters, Walks Straight, stood. The adults didn’t smile. She looked around. Where were her parents?

When they stopped, the Chief turned her to each of the four directions, then to the sky, and finally to the earth. To each he spoke the words that took away her Child name, giving it into the care of those Powers. When she had no name, he turned the girl child to him. He looked tired. Old.

The girl put one small hand to his cheek, trying to cheer him up. But the gesture only seemed to make him sadder.

“You are no longer Happy Mouth.” The ritual words fell heavily from his lips. “You are no longer alive to the Sky Corn community. Your parents are dead to you.”

Her eyes widened, and her hand fell away.

“You go now to the white man’s lands, so you will take a name for the white man. You will take the name *Sara*.”

She shook her head once, slowly, then stood stunned, shocked into immobility, trying to absorb the meaning of the Chief’s words.

He handed the young hunter a folded white paper and reminded him what to do when they reached the lands of the *Wasichus*. Walks Straight nodded curtly, then circled the skiff, checking the brakes and squeezing its tires in a final inspection before leaping up and over the side. Swinging past the rigging lines, he hoisted the mainsail while the Chief lifted the girl and placed her on a seat.

“Where’s mama?”

“Your mother is dead to you now, Sara. We can not have killers here.”

She struggled to understand.

Walks Straight checked the reef in the sails. Releasing the brakes as he eased out the boom, cloth billowed taut as it caught the wind and the skiff pulled away, jolting over the rough ground and quickly gathering speed.

“I didn’t kill anything, grandfather!” Sara screamed back, her small face straining over the lip of the hull.

Drops of moonlit silver glistened on suddenly-pale cheeks, sparkling faintly as Night swallowed the land yacht.

“But you will, Sara. You will,” he whispered sadly into the wind.

Part I

(Four years later)



*Enough*, thought Dr Alex Harmon, and draped the spell delicately over the Mother Superior’s mind. Paging through student records in the grim office of the orphanage, he watched from the corner of his eye, amused, as she forced her teeth to unclench – again. But now, he heard her outraged thoughts as though they echoed in his own mind: *«Browsing through my children’s files like they’re items in a shopping catalog!»*

Dust motes glimmered in the watery sunlight, drifting through the room’s still air. Seated at the other side of her heavy oaken desk, he felt the weight of the nun’s stare.

He looked up, unable to keep the hint of a smile from his lips. “Really, sister, this would have been so much easier for us both if you kept your records online.”

“My first concern is caring for my children, Dr Harmon,” she snapped. With his spell still running, he also picked up the following thought: *«Not in making it easy for corporations to examine them*.*»*

He raised one eyebrow, puzzled by her mis-identification. But all he said aloud was “None of your charges seem to have tested positive for any sign of Unfolding. Statistically, I would-”

“You won’t find anyone with magical potential in the orphanage records.”

He was no longer amused. “Sister, I did ask to see the records of *all* the children here. If you recheck the papers I presented, you’ll see that I have permission-”

“You won’t find anyone with magical potential because there *are* none, doctor. Any that test positive are auctioned off to corporations like Asgard or Medigene by the government. Or taken by the government itself.”

“Really: *auctioned* off?”

“That’s what the ‘normal procedure’ amounts to, yes,” she snapped.

About to reply, a sudden thought made him pause: was *this* why his research request had been granted – they thought there was nothing *to* grant? Still, if his theories were correct, he only needed to find a child with just a bud of potential, to be able to Unfold them into full magical ability. Calmly, he returned to studying the orphanage records.

He noted the nun slide the second form in front of her again, and heard the echo of her thoughts as she re-read the paragraph which had disturbed her so much. *«The adoption of (blank) by Dr Alexander Harmon has been duly investigated and approved… custody being granted herewith.»*

When he’d presented her with his documentation he’d watched, at first appalled by the certainty with which she had challenged its validity with Govnet; but soon delighted by her dismay when that challenge had been rejected.

Even then, though, she had refused to accept the validity of the automated response. “After all, ‘Doctor,’ you could have hacked the government site,” she had stated, then insisted on making a direct link to someone in Child Affairs. So they had both had to suffer through a period of mind-numbing ’20’s German ‘neurock’ hold-music interspersed with jarring reminders that ‘a service representative will be available shortly.’ A period during which she refused to allow him to begin examining her records. Eventually, however, she spoke to a pleasant young woman who assured her that, no, everything was perfectly in order. One minute later Mother Superior Mary Provïc had disconnected, and reluctantly handed over her *paper* records.

Apparently, a bureaucratic bungle of enormous proportions had occurred. But it would be all for naught unless–

*Ah-ha!* Extracting some papers from the file, he leaned back in his chair. For a moment he met the nun’s gaze, keeping the triumph from his face as he settled back to examine his find.

He kept part of his attention on her thoughts – highly illegal, but such an advantage in negotiations. *«Sara,»* she was thinking. *«Of course. Full of energy, always in trouble – yet beyond that, something somehow odd about her. Yes, of course it would be Sara.»*

Harmon looked up, calmly meeting the Mother Superior’s cold stare, and began prodding. “Well, sister, I think I may have found… who I came for. I’m sure you won’t mind having Sara sent for?”

He searched the folder he held for a surname, but found none. “Just ‘Sara,’ sister? Isn’t that a little unorthodox?”

“It was clearly indicated on the paperwork provided by her people that ‘Sara’ was her full and complete name.” Her annoyance at that unorthodoxy was clear in both her body language and her thoughts.

Without shifting her glare from him she stabbed a button on her ancient intercom. “Sister Augustine: please have someone bring Sara to me as soon as possible.”

A brief electrical crackle accompanied the response. “Umm. I’ll see what I can do.”

Harmon raised one eyebrow at the doubt in Sister Augustine’s voice, but the mother superior pointedly ignored him, swinging her chair around and shifting her gaze to the decayed dockyard outside the window. Harmon saw her shoulders relax as she turned. *«Let’s see how* you *deal with our attic-haunting little eight-year-old demon*.*»*