AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF


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Literature has often misrepresented Natives and women. I involved Native Women in researching and editing my novel to fairly and accurately represent them. In open-ended interviews they described their experiences of nature, enjoyment, and discrimination as well as their critiques of the novel itself. Descriptions were of discrimination as perceived difference, originating from their own people, originating from inequality, and of language as both cultural understanding and a stage for discrimination. Critiques varied about representation of estrangement and language, but consistently clarified and corroborated material in addition to supporting my methodology. I ultimately recommend this methodology with additional suggestions.
Barbie Feathers:
Writing Native Women

by
Jamie Lewis Hedges

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Jamie Lewis Hedges, Author
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Introduction

Oral or written, stories act as part and participant in the experience of humanity. By representing the experience of a distinct population group, stories serve to catalyze another way of thought, a way outside our own norm, our own paradigm. Others’ stories are a way outside individual norms, our own collective paradigms. Storytellers tell their stories to convey with their reader another perception of the same challenge we all share. Life (cf. Sarris 1997: 232-233; Narayan 1993: 48-50, 1989: 231-247). As a human, I value diversity of life, nature, and experience. As a writer I am particularly interested in representing those perspectives and experiences through written stories. As a storyteller, my hope is to convey an uncompromising reverence for life.

The roles of both writer and storyteller would be significantly undermined if literature had no impact on the world around them. But literature can affect the way people think about others (Mihesuah 2003: xii). This both supports and complicates the place of writer and storyteller. If I can influence the world around me, how can I do so fairly and accurately? This concern confronted me when I took aim at a profession in travel writing and historical fiction.

I carry the family name of mostly Methodist farmers from Central Illinois and the middle name of my grandfather, a missionary to Africa, and his father, a wiry steelworker known for his climbing ability. It was, however, my maternal grandparents, descendants of Irish Protestants in Appalachian Kentucky and Dutch Quakers in Illinois, to whom I circumstantially credit much of my upbringing. I grew up on their country farm in Indiana, not far from the Illinois border, singing John Denver’s songs around the family piano and playing Grizzly Adams lost in the overgrown fencerow woodland. Since my childhood, we have been separated for various reasons from our home place. The AMAX strip mining corporation forced my grandfather to sell the four-generation farm or be legally removed. When I returned to the spot as an adult, all that was left where my childhood memories had been was a crater-sized hole in the ground. I still feel a great personal sense of loss.

My redhead grandmother taught me that we descended from a Native tribe, inspiring within me her own interest in this part of our ancestry. As an adult I have started to gather family genealogical records, but have yet to find anything other than the knowledge that there is no shortage of people with phantom Native ancestors. This does not diminish my grandmother’s teaching. Neither does it lessen the interest we share in this potential heritage. Her teaching and interest motivated my own exploration of Native philosophies, and this exploration led me to a wide contemporary scope of indigenous issues that are inseparable from these perspectives. My running in the woods instilled in me a driven appreciation for life. Adventure recreation, experiential education, and environmental education
fostered my experiences of different people and places from coast to coast, and from Canada to Mexico. So the perspectives that I offer the reader in this story are to some extent my own (cf. Sarris 1993: 35-48). My own ancestors and life experiences have seeded in me a desire to write about people who are displaced and marginalized.

And I had a story that I had roughly developed, a story about a contemporary Native woman coming home to a place and to a culture after a lifetime of separation. In this I explored my own interest in natural place and my interest in the experience of others who are displaced. Native women have historically and contemporarily experienced discrimination on the basis of both gender and ethnicity (Mihe-suah 2003; Bird 2001; Espin 1997; Portman & Herring 2001). Both demographics are consistently misrepresented and misunderstood by the dominant culture. There are additionally many Native accounts of estrangement and reintroduction. So my story was set against a family’s struggle with discrimination, minority property rights, and preservation of their traditional homeland. The primary conflict is the protagonist’s struggle to find identity in family and culture over inhibitions created by abuse and estrangement that occurred during the separation.

To write about people and places I must experience people and places, but different experiences are a far cry from experiencing difference. What I lacked were the skills to perceive more deeply than the simple encounters I had experienced with various people and places. To write about them, I felt I must know them better. Many counseled me that no further education was necessary. Some of my peers were moving to graduate assistant positions in English departments throughout the country. I had accepted a management position in environmental education, but I wanted more education. I enjoyed being a thirty-something student. An accomplished anthropologist counseled me to consider cultural anthropology.

I knew that the social sciences included methodologies developed for a deeper understanding of individuals and population groups. Through some introductory anthropology classes I had come to appreciate the discipline’s contextual consideration of history and culture as well as the method of ethnology. Ethnology was just the sort of skill I desired: the ability to discern experience, discover perspective, and describe it in writing. This is in the highest tradition of anthropology and of social scientists whose work has often demonstrated a reverence for life dissimilar to prevailing currents. Such writing was already present in popular literature, including Mead’s Coming of Age in Samoa (1961) and Underhill’s Hawk Over Whirlpools (1940; cf. Marcus & Fischer 1986). I agreed with a friend’s counsel that what I wanted to do as a writer, I could do through anthropology.

Ethnographic fieldwork as a practice tries to disregard ethnocentric perspectives in preference for those that are marginalized, acquires understandings that are unattainable through scientific means or material review, and retains the value of cross-sociocultural experience in discovering otherwise elusive knowledge and varied outlooks on the conventional (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997, p. 36-7). Globalizing and Westernizing effects being what they are, those written about have every possibility of
reading and reacting to what's written about them. Spencer (1989) marks this as a positive development in literature that should be considered employable in social science.

The moment of writing is a rather late stage for the interpreter to reveal his or her interpretations to the interpreted. Instead it would seem more fruitful to try to devise ways in which ethnographic subjects are actively involved in their own self-representation. The anthropologist's skills could then be used as an enabling device in a complex and quite possibly acrimonious process of interpretation and argument (159).

To this end I asked Native women to participate in the writing of this novel as both informants and critics. Native women's experience gives them particular advantage in addressing the issue of an inclusive methodology in literary composition (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997, p. 10). Since the story I was writing centers around experiences of nature, enjoyment, and discrimination, the plan was first to hear participants' descriptions of nature, enjoyment, and discrimination. Then I asked the same women to read a draft of my novel and respond critically. This was my foundational experience in writing fiction as an anthropologist or in using ethnographic method as a writer. Here I would like to explain how I rolled the lived experience and critical reaction of Native women into a fictional novel. To do so, let me first explain my understanding of how humans individually and collectively perceive their environment from the inside out, (Tyler 1969; cf. Strauss 1992) and then apply this understanding to the experience of being a Native woman.

**Human Motivation**

Humans may be driven more by a desire for enjoyment than by anything else. Aristotle, Democritus, and Aristippus all asserted that a human values what he or she does because of the happiness it brings to him or her and conversely avoids what brings pain (Aristotle: 1; Elliot & Covington 2001). Pascal suggested the pursuit of happiness may be central to human nature. “This is without exception.... This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves” (Pascal 1670/1962: 113). Humanity's bio-genetic predisposition to pleasure and avoidance of pain has been a survival technique well developed throughout human history (Bargh 1997; Csikszentmihalyi 1990: 17; Elliot & Covington 2001; Schneirla 1965; Zajone 1998).

I have eight years of experience and a baccalaureate degree in outdoor recreation management. Experience and education compel me to believe that one of the most powerful venues for getting people to enjoy themselves is adventure recreation. I have had this persuasion since the first time I helped someone find his way through the woods. He was a fifty-something husband and father who was proactively mitigating a midlife crisis and came to me for advice about taking up backpacking. A year later as I witnessed his tears and childlike ear-to-ear grin on the Smoky Mountain Appalachian Trail, it was clearly apparent that something about shouldering a pack over one-third your body weight and walking 80 miles somehow fostered enjoyment.
Participants of adventure sports experience enjoyment through the activities they pursue. This enjoyment can be explained by looking at the skills they employ to meet the challenge they encounter. Take rock climbers for instance. They are rewarded with a certain enjoyment as they engage the vertical challenge by adapting their critical thinking and physical technique to climb it. In their experience, they have both a challenge and the skills to respond to it. This optimal experience results in their enjoyment.

An example of this optimal experience and the resulting enjoyment is described by John Muir (as cited in Cornell 1987).

In climbing where the danger is great, all attention has to be given the ground step by step, leaving nothing for beauty by the way. But this care, so keenly and narrowly concentrated, is not without advantages. One is thoroughly aroused. Compared with the alertness of the senses and corresponding precision and power of the muscles on such occasions, one may be said to sleep all the rest of the year. The mind and body remain awake for some time after the dangerous ground is past, so that arriving on the summit with the grand outlook—all the world spread below—one is able to see it better, and brings to the feast a far keener vision, and reaps richer harvests than would have been possible ere the presence of danger summoned him to life (36).

The experience of rock climbers and other adventure recreation participants draws attention to a fundamental motivation that we all share. A motivation for enjoyment. Research suggests that enjoyment is simply the experience of having the skills to respond to our challenge.

We live in our world surrounded by family, relationships, society, culture, and nature (see Table 1. Encounter, adapted from Sigelman & Rider 2003). Each of us is continually assessing these surroundings and developing explanations to account for how and why our world is what it is (cf. Kunda 2002: 36). Whenever we encounter something in our world that we have no explanation for, we try to make sense of it (cf. McArthur 1981). We try either to associate the encounter with a developed explanation for a similar encounter or to develop an entirely new explanation (cf. Gil-White 2001; Kunda 2003: 167; Myers 1998: 87; Piaget 1952: 39). With each encounter our network of explanations grows more complex, helping us come to terms with our world (cf. Green, Lightfoot, Bandy, & Buchanan 1985). Based on these explanations we can anticipate what might happen and prepare ourselves for it (cf. Heider 1958; Jones & Thibaut 1958).
Table 1. Encounter, adapted from Sigelman & Rider 2003

So whenever we encounter something in our world, it excites us (Reeve 2001: 305-312; cf. Berlyne 1960). If that encounter was expected then our excitement is minimal. If, however, we did not expect it, our excitement is greater. The less we expected it, the more excited we become. Our level of excitement in turn affects our mood (Berlyne 1960). In fact, even though an extreme amount of excitement can be damaging, we depend upon a certain amount of excitement for our mood to be enjoyable (see Table 2. Excitement, adapted from Berlyne 1960).

Table 2. Excitement, adapted from Berlyne 1960

Just like John Muir and my backpacking friend, we all want to experience enjoyment, but to maintain our enjoyment we must maintain an optimal level of excitement (see Table 3. Mood, adapted from Berlyne 1960). These are biological reflexes and transcend society and culture. Like a thermostat regulating temperature by adjusting the heating and air conditioning, we either consciously or unconsciously regulate our mood by adjusting our surroundings and excitement. If there is not enough excitement in our lives to enjoy, we will try to increase it. In contrast, if there is too much excitement
for us to enjoy, we will try to decrease it (Berlyne 1960; cf. Csikszentmihalyi 1990; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi 2000).

Another way to consider this is that we want to be challenged by our world and to be able to respond to that challenge effectively (see Table 4. Flow, adapted from Csikszentmihalyi 1990 & 1999). Without an increase in either skills or challenge we experience only apathy. If we are challenged more than we have the skills to respond then we experience increasing excitement and anxiety (Csikszentmihalyi 1990). On the other hand, if we have more skills than we have challenge to apply them, we experience increasing relaxation to boredom. Since we are fundamentally motivated by a desire for enjoyment, we are constantly adapting to our world’s challenges. We adapt and regulate our challenges and excitement in a couple of ways. If we are challenged more than we can enjoy, we can adapt our skills to match it, or we can find a way to adapt the challenge itself.

The rock climber’s anxiety is the challenge of ascending a wall with only limited purchase for hands or feet. They increase their skills by adapting their mind to find a possible vertical route and by
adapting their body to execute effective techniques. My fifty-something friend had begun to experience a boredom from the awareness that his life was half over and there was so much more that he wanted to experience. He increased his challenge by losing himself in the wilderness to survive with only what he could carry. The backpacker and rock climber's adaptations enable them to enjoy an optimal experience that motivates their continued pursuit of challenge and adaptive response.

This basic drive to maintain enjoyment by adapting to our world has driven our development throughout evolutionary history (cf. Ulfstrand 2002). Where our survival was challenged, we found ways to adapt to the extent that those adaptations most beneficial to our survival resulted in modern man (Tooby & Cosmides 1990; Zimmer 2001: 275). Today this drive for enjoyment continues to influence how we interact with the family, relationships, society, culture, and nature that surround us. It certainly influenced my experience with writing this novel.

When I first considered writing historical fiction, I felt very capable of writing a novel. I had well-developed skills in creative writing from practice and training throughout my undergraduate studies. I had submitted drafts of a play, a short story, and two fictional novels for review as part of my education. I delivered aloud an original short story and several original poems since at public readings. All were met with positive responses. I had also had four articles and a theater review published in local papers. The idea of writing the novel was well under control. The idea of writing an ethnologically informed novel was exciting: just the sort of challenge I felt ready for.

The challenge quickly increased before my skills did. I had the ability to write, but I most definitely did not have the ability to sell the idea to potential participants. I should have realized this from an earlier failed stint as a cable salesman. I cannot convince people to buy what I feel self-conscious about. And I felt self-conscious about this. Through earlier conversations with Native people and extensive literature review, I was well aware of the historical injustices of Whites toward Natives, men toward women, writers toward both. What would make me any different from other White male writers? How could I convince them I am a considerate White? How could I demonstrate that I am a sensitive man? How could I show them that I was conscientious about their culture and intellectual property?

Now I love what I do. Do I feel skilled to write accurate and respectful historical fiction about displaced and/or marginalized people? Not unless displaced and/or marginalized participants let me. This is where I have matched my skill and challenge. I can be there. I can listen. I can write. These are my skills. These are pretty much all that was truly required for this project. My anxiety resulted from trying to be or not to be something that I was not to begin with.

It was in the context of cross-sociocultural relationships that my anxiety increased, and eventually, my enjoyment developed. It is in this same context—where enjoyment motivates and influences our interpersonal behaviors—that I find the framework to understand experiences both that I shared in and that were shared with me by my fellow participants.
Sociocultural Motivation

Humans are motivated to experience enjoyment by regulating our excitement with adaptive responses to our world or ourselves (see above; cf. Gil-White 2001). But the world we continually assess and rationalize includes family, relationships, society, culture, and nature. It is other humans who play a part in these environments that surround us, and we simultaneously play a part in the environments that surround them. Like most other creatures, human beings group and conform together (cf. Ahl & Allen 1996; Ulfstrand 2002; Kuran 1995; Henrich & Boyd 1998). This feature of our world suggests certain dynamics influence our drive for enjoyment.

Everyone has only their senses—sight, smell, taste, touch, hearing—with which they can perceive their world, and all of these are thoroughly dependent upon our mind. Our mind is in turn affected by our environment, our upbringing, our development, and motivation. From one individual to the next these influences differ. We all grow and live in very different families, relationships, societies, cultures, and ecosystems. The result of their influence and our development results in many very different points of view. So when considering our fundamental motivation to enjoy optimal experience, we must also consider that skills, challenge, and therefore enjoyment are individual perceptions. What one individual defines as enjoyable may not be enjoyable for someone else. What one group perceives as optimal experience may not feel like optimal experience for others. One individual’s experience cannot be generalized. It is the biological and psychological nature of human beings to perceive experience differently through the lens of familial, relational, social, cultural and natural biases.

Remember that as we pursue optimal experience in our world, whenever we are confronted by something that conflicts with our own understanding of our world, it excites and challenges us. This creates the possibility that one individual’s pursuit of enjoyment, because their idea of skills and challenge may conflict with our own, could represent a challenge to our pursuit of enjoyment (see Table 5. Conflict, adapted from Csikszentmihalyi 1990 & 1999). This conflict affects our mood and motivates our response with the same adaptive possibilities; each of us may try to adapt our skills or adapt our challenge to restore an optimal experience for ourselves. Since the challenge in this case is one another, the result could be an integration or differentiation of our pursuits, or it could continue in conflict.
Integration and differentiation must be balanced for us to experience enjoyment as members of the groups and environments around us (cf. Brewer 1991, 1993; Brewer & Pickett 1999; Csikszentmihalyi 1990; Giles et al. 2003: 1-23). Validation of our identity to a very real extent comes from the prevailing group (cf. Durkheim 1966: 87-93). We must find ways to both identify with our surroundings and stand out from them. We want to be individuals connected to others (cf. Doosje, et. Al. 1999; Simon 1992). Though our perceptions of what contributes to optimal experience may differ, we can identify across the differences in a way that fosters freedom for everyone to pursue individual and collective optimal experience (see Table 6. Integration, adapted from Csikszentmihalyi 1990 & 1999). Effective families, relationships, societies, cultures, and ecosystems all successfully adapt to promote both distinct and cooperative pursuits of optimal experience (cf. Csikszentmihalyi 1990: 191; Kuran 1995; Henrich & Boyd 1998). Where we are unable to find this balance we can experience alienation, learned helplessness, existential dread, and failure to thrive (cf. Csikszentmihalyi 1990: 12-13, 86; Espin 1997: 445-56; Espin 1992; Godbey 1997: 209; Pipher 1994: 36-44; Ryan & Deci 2000: 68-78).

Table 6. Integration, adapted from Csikszentmihalyi 1990 & 1999
So what happens when the pursued optimal experience of one group conflicts with the optimal experience of another? What one group perceives as enjoyment may cause anxiety in the other that causes fear and struggle for control (see Table 7. Inter-Group Conflict, adapted from Csikszentmihalyi 1990 & 1999). The challenge affects the overall mood of both groups and motivates responses of integration, differentiation, or continued conflict (Hornsey & Hogg 2000). Explanations are developed individually and collectively to account for the challenge represented by the other group (cf. Schneider 2004; Volkan 1997). These explanations are more often considered to be the intrinsic condition of the other group rather than the result of circumstances (Jones 2003). The more strongly members identify with their own group or the less strongly they identify with the other group, the more negative are the explanations developed to account for the difference (Doosje & Branscombe 2002).

![Diagram](image)

**Table 7. Inter-Group Conflict, adapted from Csikszentmihalyi 1990 & 1999**

As with individuals, groups that are unable to find both identity and similarity with encountered groups are left to their own alienation, learned helplessness, existential dread, and failure to thrive (see above). This is especially true in our modern experience of unprecedented population growth. Encounters with conflicting group perspectives are now frequent and continuous. The power of defining identity and culture should belong to the individual members of the group (cf. Barth in Eriksen 2002). Through historical colonization and contemporary globalization, however, groups have been and currently are not only confronted by challenging perspectives but also overwhelmed by them.

Initially, with very little identity with our own group, we may be very unaware of the challenge represented by the other (Cross 1991: 189-223). Our experience is essentially relaxed (cf. Csikzentmihalyi 1990; Sessoms & Henderson 1994: 82). When we become unable to balance our individuality with our identity, however, we encounter a difference that represents significant challenge. This may be when our identity defined by the overwhelming group conflicts with how we define ourselves (cf. Pipher 1994). We may resort to apathy by withdrawing from the challenge (cf. Csikzentmihalyi 1990; Sessoms & Henderson 1994). Or we may revive enjoyment by adapting our
environment to be immersed and reinforced in our own identity, or by adapting ourselves to the identity overwhelmingly defined for us (cf. Cross 1991; Erikson 1997: 72-77; Espin 1997: 445-456; Pipher 1994: 36-38; Mihesuah 2003: 82-112). Eventually, we again find an optimal experience through a reconciled understanding of who the overwhelming group tells us we are and who we know ourselves to be. We either achieve balance by assimilating completely into what the overwhelming group defines for us, or we find the skills to confidently balance this definition with the identity defined by our own selves and group (Mihesuah 2003: 84).

I have witnessed this process with adventure recreation participants. They may start off with an interest in rock climbing or backpacking with little or no awareness of society’s stereotype of adventure sports as manic or childish. When they encounter the difference, they either defiantly identify themselves wholeheartedly with the sport, or they conform to mainstream activities. Eventually they may find a way to balance the two, identifying themselves personally and navigating their world accordingly.

Application

This process illustrates as well the experience of Native women, especially so because both gender and ethnicity have a critical influence on identity (Espin 1997: 445-456). The encounter between the developing United States created a disordered environment for Native American people. Perceptions of Natives are influenced by the written opinions of people who are not Native (Mihesuah 2003: xii) and who seem uninterested in reality (Bordewich 1996: 17). They have found themselves overwhelmingly identified as animals, savages, warriors, and princesses regardless of how they have defined themselves as members of over 500 deeper and more diverse groups (Mihesuah 2003: xii; Bird 2001: 63; Bordewich 1996: 60-92; Portman & Herring 2001: 185-200). As a result of this misinformation, the average U. S. citizen wouldn’t recognize a Native if they saw one (cf. Bird 2001: 63, 89).

Speaking to Native identity, Momaday has offered the definitive elements of self attribution and life experience. “An Indian is someone who thinks of themselves as an Indian. But that’s not so easy to do and now has to earn the entitlement somehow. You have to have a certain experience of the world in order to formulate this idea” (Discovering Columbus 1990). If Native identity is dependent upon self attribution and life experience, what is the implication for a Native whose self attribution is inconsistent with the predominate attribution of dominant community? Or what is the implication for a person who did not grew up in a Native community and identifies more with dominant perceptions?

As well, women in the United States are overwhelmingly identified with the latent stereotypes of patriarchic medieval Europe. Voluptuous, ignorant, passive, domestic forms are emphasized, again regardless of how they experience a multitude of deeper and more diverse roles of womanhood. More stereotypes seem to be generated regarding women than men (Wood, Groves, Bruce, et. al 2003: 169-
179), and men are more comfortable with these stereotypes than are women (Buss 1999: 278). These forms reinforce the importance a woman places on her appearance, so much so that children demonstrate a bias for body-size by age five (Pipher 1994: 184). Women internalize these ideals and suffer from low self-esteem (cf. Pipher 1984; Cash, Melnyk, & Hrabosky 2003). This emphasis on appearance results in unhealthy ideas about eating (Cash, Melnyk, & Hrabosky 2003; Petrie, Tripp, & Harvey 2002), affects cognitive health (Strachan & Cash 2002), and encourages unhealthy behaviors (Petrie, Tripp, & Harvey 2002).

I've found no clearer description of the cognitive dissonance between what it means to be a woman and being a woman in the U. S. than in *Ophelia Speaks* (Shandler1999).

In tenth grade, I pulled away when my then-boyfriend touched my stomach. Shocked, he shook his head in disbelief, and asked, “Do you know practically every woman in the country would kill for your body?” Now, some three years later, I do not remember the words he used to describe my intelligence, to encourage my artistic talent, to support my ambitions—but I do recall that one compliment, word-for-word (4).

For Native women, this encountered difference is doubled, as members of both groups (cf. Espin 1997: 445-456). Just as women are plagued with society’s definition of their ideal appearance, and Natives are plagued with society’s definition of their ideal identity, the “greatest stressors” for Native women have to do with appearance and identity (Mihesuah 2003: 81). These ideas are reinforced through media, from the days of dime novels about Indian hunters and puritanical manuals of chastity to today’s icons of red men in headdresses and naked thin Calvin Klein models. These images support a definition for the overwhelming population of what it means to be Native and to be a woman, but they do not to offer a reality consistent with that of all Natives, women, or Native women (cf. Portman & Herring 2001; Bird 2001: 53, 91; Mihesuah 2003: 7-8, 29). They have come to be represented by something close to Disney’s Pocahontas (Edgerton & Jackson 1996: 90-99; Gleiberman 1995: 42): a slightly dressed, aerobically shaped Barbie dressed in feathers and beads.

To be a Native woman is to experience an overwhelming challenge to who you are as a Native and as a woman, to struggle for balance between the challenges presented by an overwhelmingly different understanding of who you are and your ability to respond from your own understanding of who you are (Mihesuah 2003: 7, 29, 150; Portman & Herring 2001: 185-200; Espin 1997: 445-456). One young Native woman wrote in *Ophelia Speaks* (Shandler 1999), “Not only is it hard being a female in today’s society, it is very hard being a minority and especially an interracial minority” (254). This understanding of what a Native woman’s experience might be has informed my approach to writing about Native women. My novel is about a Native woman navigating this conflict. To inform it I needed to know Native women’s perspective. So I elicited Native women’s descriptions of nature, enjoyment, and discrimination.

*Method*
As I said, I had a fictional story. Should a White man write about Native women? After all, many prolific Native writers are writing their own stories. Even in the fictional genre, writers like Louise Erdrich, Michael Dorris, Ella Cara Deloria, Sherman Alexie, and so many other wonderful Native writers that I've read. If Native writers are writing about themselves, maybe there's no need to for anyone else to write about Natives. The answer for me is that the need is mine. I have a story that involves Natives. It came to me, and with the same need to write it, I have a need to write it respectfully and accurately.

White men will write about Natives, women, and Native women anyway. In today's world where globalization and increasing population are compressing the proximity of all nations, cultures, societies, and people, how realistic is it to suggest that one should write about another? The follow-up question is: If a white man writes about a Native woman, what are the conditions under which it should happen? If I am to write about another, it is incumbent upon me to do so respectfully.

Churchill, a Native man, is perhaps one of the harshest Native critics of any White representations of Native people. In critiquing both Hollywood and Dances with Wolves, the movie directed by Kevin Costner, Churchill (1992) lists four suggestions for those whose intentions are to “alter public perceptions of Native America in some meaningful way”:

- Story Setting Contemporarily Versus Mid-1800s
- Plot Centering on Liberation Effort
- Conflicts Including Legitimate Native Issues
- Production Styling of Salvador, El Norte, and Under Fire (246).

A Black Water Creek Mythology is a story set in the contemporary and historic Cascades of the Pacific Northwest. The specific location—the Black Water Creek watershed—is entirely fictional and could be in Washington, Oregon, or California. The plot centers on a Native American woman in contemporary times, who is being reintroduced to her family and culture after a lifetime of separation. This reintroduction is set amidst her family’s struggle with discrimination, minority property rights, and preservation of their traditional homeland. The primary conflict is the protagonist’s struggle to find identity in family and culture over inhibitions created by abuse and estrangement that occurred during the separation. Her experience of revitalizing her own culture and language is very real to the experience of many Native women today. The genre of this novel is historical fiction, which is currently very popular, and therefore may have a greater potential of influencing public perception. When the novel is finished, I hope to appeal with the writing and artwork to a young adult section of the popular audience.

Churchill of course does not represent the sentiment of all Native people, and as Mihesuah (2003) points out, “We cannot always please everyone with what we write and how we go about writing” (24). It seems reasonable, however, to use an extreme critique in designing my own writing
and methodology, especially since my intentions are to “alter public perceptions... in some meaningful way” (Ibid.).

Mihesuah, a Native woman, for her part chooses to not write about actual Native women from history unless she can benefit their descendents by doing so (2003: 6). I haven’t written about any specific Native figure. My hope, however, is that my writing does benefit my participants and their relations through fair and accurate representation.

Another important aspect of this project was its submission to the Institutional Review Board (IRB). IRB was established to review and hold accountable any institutional study involving the recruitment or research of human subjects. Ideally, IRB are to insure the highest ethical treatment of human participants. One critique that Mihesuah (2003) makes of literature on Native women is that novelists are often not held to the requirement of IRB approval for their research. The implication is that there is then no accountability for the writer who does not treat their informant ethically. In my case, I was a graduate student recruiting Native women as informants and critics of my novel. So this project was submitted to the OSU IRB and approved.

But why fiction? Having already discussed the pitfalls of literature in writing about people and culture, a fictional novel also has certain benefits. One of the most significant problems in writing about Native people is overgeneralization. The average reader may not realize that there are over 500 different populations and cultures of Native people in the U. S. So by writing about any one tribe, a writer runs the risk of being discredited on the grounds of another. By making the Native community in the novel entirely fictitious, I could avoid misrepresentation and misappropriation of any single culture. I also hoped that by fictionalizing the culture, I would emphasize the experience more than some real or supposed association with a specific tribe.

As I mentioned earlier, Underhill used ethnology to inform her own fictional writing. In discussing Underhill, Bataille and Sands (1984) consider Underhill’s fictional character in Hawk Over Whirlpools (1940) that was based on Chona.

[Underhill] fictionally creates a character similar to Chona as the mother of the protagonist.... The narrative style of Chona’s autobiography would have distorted modern fiction prose style, so the narrator of the autobiography is redefined and expressed in a wholly separate literary style (65).

Underhill demonstrated precedence for expression of human experience through fiction as well as the use of ethnology to inform it. This fiction gave her freedom from certain confines in the pursuit of her goal that the original autobiography did not. She was careful, however, not to confuse the fictional character and the informant (cf. Bataille & Sands 1984: Footnote 41, pp. 149-150).

Even though the story is fictionalized, the novel would do little to share authentic experience with the reader if it did not have its root in the reality of Native women. One of Mihesuah’s (2003) most strongly stated guidelines to writing about Native women is “if writers want to find out what Native
women think, they should ask them. If they want to know about past events and cultures, they should do the same thing” (4). So that is exactly what I set about to do.

**Participant Sample.** Due to the time investment in this project for both the interviewer and the participant, the number of participants was to be held to between eight and ten people. Based on accessibility and plot setting I was compelled to solicit participants from the following demographics:

- Native North American
- Women
- Tribal Location (Prehistoric, Historic, or Current) Near Cascade Mountain Range
- Legal Adulthood (Eighteen Years of Age or Older)

For continuity, participants were elicited across a range of ages, working toward the following ideal:

- Two Between Age Eighteen and Thirty
- Two Between Age Thirty and Forty
- Two Between Age Forty and Fifty
- Two Older Than Fifty

As it turned out, only six people fitting within these demographics were involved in the project. Four of these were friends from a confederation of tribes in Eastern Oregon, one from a confederation of tribes in Western Oregon, and one from a tribe relocated from the Eastern states. Many more tribal members from Western Oregon were approached to participate in the project but were unable, unwilling or unresponsive.

Initially the idea of interviewing people with whom the interviewer had a non-professional relationship was not considered inappropriate since the experiences in question should not be affected by the relationship. In addition, a casual relationship was seen to be potentially helpful, since the participants would potentially be more comfortable sharing intimate details with a known interviewer than with an unfamiliar one. In consideration, however, of potential skewing, attempt was made to work toward an ideal of one person from each age group being familiar to me, and one person from each age group being unfamiliar. Of those six who were willing to participate in the project, five were relationships of the interviewer that began professionally and evolved into casual friendships.

**Interviews.** Native women’s experience is one of adapting to the ever-present challenges to their identity as Natives and women. But my perspective isn’t what matters. To write fairly and accurately I needed to understand Native women’s perspective. So I elicited Native women’s descriptions of nature, enjoyment, and discrimination. I approached Native women with an understanding that whether or not there is an external reality, reality is subjective to the perception and
interpretation of the people living it. In other words, if I was going to get at Native women’s experience
of nature, enjoyment, and discrimination then I was going to have to get there through their personal
descriptions of nature, enjoyment, and discrimination. So I used a format of open-ended interviews. I
met with participants individually and asked them to tell me.

The process was to involve one to three interviews, each lasting from one to two hours and
conducted as follows: The first interview was to explore the participant’s descriptions of nature,
discrimination, and optimal experience. The primary objective of the initial interviews was to give
direction to the novel, where I gathered descriptions of “nature” (as in the non-human biological
environment), states of optimal experience (cf. Csikszentmihalyi 1999), and experiences that have
caused a diminished self-perception of human value (discrimination). These were to be conducted by
June 30, 2003. After completing the initial interviews, a draft of the novel was to be completed and
submitted to each participant to read.

If I had not already had a story in mind, I could have simply had no interview guidelines. I
could have just recorded a very open-ended description of whatever my participants wanted to tell me.
This approach would have worked really well for a life history project where I was writing about the
women with whom I was interviewing. An important distinction must be made that this novel was not
to represent or describe the women who participated in the project or any personal event described by
them. Instead, their participation was to inform and critique the novel. To do this I needed to have some
direction for the interview.

When I originally began these initial interviews, I had a detailed instrument of questions about
the participant’s access to nature, the activities they were involved in, and events that made them feel of
little value throughout their past and present. There were even transition statements and follow-up
questions. After the first several interviews, however, I threw the paper right out the window. People
needed to know what I wanted them to talk about, but after that, they needed no help in talking. They
wanted to tell me these big stories that they thought might be relevant and then let me pull out what I
was looking for. I found that the best approach to the interviews was to begin by telling them what I
was looking for, then to sit back and just listen. Occasionally there was something I wanted them to talk
more about, and this was handled just as the dialogue that it was.

The second interview was to explore the participant’s critique of the draft, specifically to
insure that the participant does not feel exploited by the material and to determine if the writing
accurately represents the experiences that such a fictional Native woman might have. The primary
objective of the secondary interviews was to illicit critique from Native women on the novel. These
were to be completed by November 30, 2003. After adjusting from the prolonged solicitation of
participants, the deadline was extended to January 21, 2005.

After completing secondary interviews, another draft of the novel was to be completed and
given to each participant to read for a third critique, giving participants a final opportunity to influence
the writing and direction of the novel. The eventual goal of this methodology is to be a completed final draft of the novel with steps taken to publish. Those participants who indicated their wish to be mentioned will be included in the acknowledgements of the novel.

Interviews were analyzed using a grounded theory approach to identify salient themes (Bernard & Ryan 2000: 607-621). Grounded theory approaches transcribed interviews like Bible scholars approach the Jewish and Christian Bibles. The manuscripts are studied for salient themes in their micro context then generalized into broader concepts that are recognizable on a macro level (Bernard 2000: 463-469). Essentially, I poured over the transcripts looking for any theme that stood out clearly. Then I grouped themes across all the transcripts. I used the concept of optimal experience to analyze the texts. What did they perceive as challenging? What did they perceive as enjoyable? When did their descriptions contain the elements of optimal experience? By searching for these salient themes throughout the interviews, I tried to understand what it was like to navigate the two worlds: U. S. versus Native. Some themes were shared. Others were individually unique.12

The concepts that were drawn from this methodology—such as the power of language in the experience of a Native woman and association between experienced discrimination and perceived difference—were used in the building of this novel.

The initial interviews were conducted with Native women who were willing to participate in influencing, reading, and critiquing this fictional novel (see Table 8. Participants).

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Table 8. Participants

The initial interviews were not finished until February of 2004. A recorded open-ended interview was conducted with all of these women, and most lasted well over an hour. Each was prompted to talk about her experience of nature, enjoyment, and events that made her feel less or of little value throughout her life. The themes gathered from the interviews, however, extended far outside the scope of nature, emotion, and discrimination. A nearly 200-page draft of the novel was completed and submitted to the participants by November 2004.

The difficulties in maintaining participation were as unanticipated and as challenging as soliciting participation. Secondary interviews were attempted from December 2004 through January
2005. To date only two secondary interviews have been completed. However, only one participant has officially withdrawn from the project. The remaining participants have either been unavailable for interview or unable to finish their review of the draft. Several events conspired to limit participation in the second interview. The package sent with drafts of the novel took one month to reach the participants in Eastern Oregon. EN was hospitalized then involved with other responsibilities. SN proved inaccessible through any available means. RO withdrew from the project because of her own academic load.

It was only LO and TW who both reviewed the draft and made themselves available for interview. I will take this moment to draw attention to the effort they made to do so. LO was so constrained by family and community responsibilities that she took leave of her employment for a full afternoon to read 80 pages for me. TW was also inhibited by her own employment, academic load, and illness recovery, but managed to read 100 pages.

There are two significant points to be made by this. First, it is incumbent upon me to both recognize and appreciate that my participants have made significant personal sacrifices to be a part of this project and have done so without any compensation. Second, any project that seeks to share the load of authentication with experienced participants must recognize and account for the effort they must make to be invested.

This having been noted, the limited scope of these secondary interviews notwithstanding, the themes they produced were significant to the further development of this novel.
Endnotes

1 My values in this regard have been influenced by philosophies of and similar to Schweitzer (1929), Abbey (1988), Fletcher (1989) and Quinn (1999).

2 Though research on this has not been found, biological precedence in the adaptations of other mammals suggests that there are certain benefits to navigating environmental systems individually as well. The presence of both adaptations in humans could contribute to explanations of certain psychosocial and antisocial tendencies.

3 I have not found any other discussion or application of Flow theory in the context of cross-sociocultural relations. The remarks and applications I make here about optimal experience are my own.


7 Numerous, including *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993).

Grove/Atlantic.

8 A 1990 film about a horse culture starred in and directed by Kevin Costner. Since its release there has been considerable critique of stereotyping and hegemony, as well as controversy surrounding Costner’s intended plans to build a casino in the Black Hills. The historical context of the movie must be taken into consideration when making judgment, however. It was one of the first attempts in Hollywood to depict Native history with any sort of cultural respect, including the casting of Natives as Natives, which was not practiced several years prior. *Dances with Wolves* was the blockbuster debut for a number of Native actors whose careers have continued since: Graham Greene, Steve Reevis, and Floyd (Red Crow) Westerman to name a few.

9 Directed by Oliver Stone and released in 1986, this movie portrayed the true story of Richard Boyle, a journalist in the El Salvador civil war, and U. S. policies supporting the El Salvador dictatorship.

10 A 1983 film by director Gregory Nava that follows two teenagers from Guatemala who, after their parents are killed by the army, journey through Mexico to become illegal immigrants in the States.

11 Apparently a reference to a 1994 film by director Arthur Dong about homosexual men and women who enlisted after Pearl Harbor when alternate sexuality was not tolerated in the armed forces.

12 Interviews were recorded using Sony digital recorder. And interviews were coded using NVivo software.
Black Water Creek begins at a confluence of smaller creeks 2,200 feet above sea level. The canyon often fills with snow, rain, or misty vapor rising slowly up from the creek bed, amidst the Douglas fir, over the ridges, and through our spirits.

We are here, some of us delivered into this world through a cleft right here at this confluence and nurtured here for thousands of years, others led here as recently as a hundred years ago and tarrying still for whatever we thought we’d find.

Still among us are the vestiges of our lives, our tears, our struggles, and our happiness. Wood and iron haunts, once filled with trade and tradition, now rot and rust back to the earth, mostly fallen and nearly entirely lost to those who would find them.

The ghost town scarcely remains...

...and so do the ghosts.

Anna. I’ll tell you this story. Alángshi, but not so long I can’t remember it, I was young, y’know, but it all... it still here. Those were bad days for us, y’know. A lot of bad news for all us people.

Anyway, my brother and I was eatin’ in a garden there by that opera house. I never was in that garden before. I seen it. I seen it with all them nice flowers, and them water fountains, and them pretty white women in their dresses, and their beaus all dressed up. I seen them men when they weren’t so dressed up, too, and those women knowed it, ‘cause those women didn’t want me there teasin’ their men.

But we wasn’t there for that. I don’t know why it was my brother brought me there. It sure wasn’t good for us. I tell him no white people would stand for people like us to be sittin’ there, no matter who we was, no matter who it was invited us. But he was a going and I was to go with him, so I did.

This storm was comin’ up real slow from down there. There was lightnin’ just flashin’ and thunder, y’know, for long time, just somebody’s drum goin’ like this, or something, ‘n then it got real loud. Louder than that rowdy town was. It came up fast an just about made my heart to stop. Then I seen it wasn’t thunder at all. It was men on horses that did that, that made that sound. They came right up on the boardwalk over that creek. That sounded like the thunder, y’know.

Around then everybody was real quiet, ‘n that... that man, Fowler—I never did like him—he calls for my brother. I knew there was trouble and I said so, but my brother goes right out there. He s-say...says... he tells me, “This is why I came.” He says that, my brother does, and just walks out like he was waitin’ for Fowler. I don’t know. Maybe he was.
No sooner's he get on that boardwalk then a bunch of men throws him off into the creek. That water, it moves fast, y'know, an it threwed him right up agin that tree and it held him there, that water pushin' him up against it so he couldn't move. I tried to go to him, help him out of that creek, but there someone was holdin' me back, 'n then everbody was runnin' from all over town like they knew something was gonna happen. I don't know if they did, but I seen all them aldermen standin' together like that. They knew maybe part of what was gonna happen. I know'd that for sure, 'cause they were callin' my brother a... a vagrant. That minister up to that church on the hillside was hiding under his coat behind them aldermen, but I seen him there, and I heard he been sayin' my brother was... he called him a no-good Indian with a evil spirit. That Fowler said he was a outlaw, said he stole property, or papers, or something and to give it back to him. My brother had stole nothing, an that Fowler only wanted to kill him. He never could let our people have nothin' in peace.

Well, my brother don't say anythin'. I felt like he was givin' ever body the chance to kill him, an I just don't know, but then Fowler shoot... shoot... shot him in both hands. In the hands, he shot him, 'n then he laughed and says he'll make a Christian out of a Indian yet. Well, then I started to smell smoke. I smelled that powder from the gun, y'know, but I also smell like the smoke, like somethin' burnin'. Well, people started yellin' and runnin' all around. The aldermen started yelling at Fowler, that Fowler had set the whole town on fire, an I guess he had, 'cause he turns around and curses them, so I don't know.

I was still tryin' to get loose an help my brother, but somebody kept a hold on me. I turn an seen it was my friend, Maggie. I said to her, “Let me go, Maggie. You got to let me go,” but she wouldn't do it, even though I fought her. She wouldn't let me go. It would have done no good no way. Fowler shot him again, 'n then he went to mock him. He thought that was great thing to kill a Indian, to kill my brother, somebody most didn't even consider human, y'know.

Well, at that time I didn’t think he was alive, my brother, but he shot him. My brother shot Fowler right in the face, 'n that Fowler was as surprised as I was, as anybody was, I guess. I saw him grab his face an fell down. That Fowler was surprised, and he was shocked, but he was shot too, 'n that’s what made him the maddest.

Then it was through. Nessa said somethin’ but I couldn’t hear it, ‘cause some man I didn’t know, somebody of Fowler’s, I guess it was, stuck a knife right into him, ‘n then he just lean back like that against that tree, the water holdin’ him there, y’know. The flames from the town burnin’ were bright 'n I could see his blood soakin’ through his shirt, ‘n then I saw a neatly folded paper right there soaked in with that shirt. Well, that man I didn’t know seen it too, but he couldn’t get hold of it before the creek finally grabbed my brother’s body and went off with it.

Just before Maggie pulled me away, that Fowler looks up, his face bleedin’ an I heard ever word of what he says to me. He says, “I will linger here and see your children lost,” ’n then he died right there, in that same place he killed my brother.
'N that, tsin ptáuáptsha, is how our people survived.

*Micah.* Stories struggle, survive, and scream to be heard. It remains to be seen whether or not the world has ears to hear them. I cannot speak for anyone else, but I do speak for myself, because I hear these stories, and they bring me to tears.

One story in particular captures me and gives me hope. It’s a story of suffering and a story of love that, though it is not mine to share, and though I’ve not yet experienced it, insists on being added to the evidences of faith.

I only ask that one witness be given place to speak.

When I was very young, my family had two very dedicated friends. They walked with me, cared for me, loved me, and I loved them. Together they conceived what I couldn’t understand with a power in evidence all around them. The woman pressed forth a child. I remember holding this creature in my six-year-old arms with the same admiration I felt for both her mother and father.

Those memories sometimes seem so perfect that I think I must have dreamed them. Like a dream not long after waking, the child was gone.

I

Yesterday, the clouds moved in on the Pacific coast.

Building in white piles and black billowy shadows, they gathered before and stole around the low impedance of the coast range at the agonizingly millennial speed of the gods. They moved with vague flashes up and across the valley, gathered and rose in power through the western mountains, us the Douglas River, toward the Black Water Creek watershed.

Rain is no surprise. In the spring it rains a lot, sometimes constantly for overcast weeks, other times sporadically beneath great cumulonimbus crowds. One hundred twenty inches each year fall on the ranch in long straight lines, infrequently windblown, seldom punctuated by thunder, never illuminated by lightning.

But from far down the drainage rolled percussion, so low in volume that the ranchhands held their play and listened for confirmation. Time passed. One cowboy returned his attention to the ace of spades. Temperature was dropping. The horizon above and beyond the tree line turned from blue to cobalt. Shrouds gathered around Alonso and Wystan ridge, Mount Boris and Bataille. Horses made silently for the stables. Dogs sat beneath the porch, growling at tiny dust devils dancing and vanishing in the arena. Cedar and vine maple held limb and leaf very still, careful to not incur misplaced aggression from approaching spirits.

Early Tuttle knew something from the way the storm moved in. He heard something from the breeze whispering in his hair. He recognized something in the animal’s reaction, and he threw two quarters in the pot without looking.
"It's fifty cents to you, Gerrish?"

"Damn, if you ain't got the cards, Early. I'm out."

"Gerrish is out, and dealer stays in for a quarter. Okay, pot's good. Four of hearts to Traverse' pair of Aces. Queen of hearts to Early! Could be a three of a kind. Dealer takes a six of clubs. I believe the pair of aces has the table."

The man looked at Early's king, queen, 10, 9, and 7 that were showing and noted that the man's dark beady eyes watching the storm. "Something wrong, Tuttle?"

Early didn't answer.

Another rumble, louder and undeniable. Then flash and barely audible tones rose to snapping cracks that forced the men to look up in surprise as the sound rolled upward, between bark and boulder, under heaven, over earth, then faded away, leaving behind collective regard for the awesome challenge. The gods were approaching, incited against some unseen offense.

Traverse shifted his weight on the truck, which made Early look back at the game. He didn't see a thin vapor whisp creep slowly around the saddle barn among taller grasses. It was vague, just an obscurity in the view of things, like looking through a camera with a smudge on the lens.

Gerrish glanced up to see it, then squinted for clarity.

Is that fog?

At first it had looked like the wind whirling across the barn lot. He quickly realized the wind was moving fast and the vapor was moving slowly. He sat very still, watching. The vapor twisted within itself and moved between the coral and ranchhouse. It wasn't dust. It couldn't be. It moved with a conscious quality, defying the opposing wind.

What is that?

"Whatcha see, Gerrish?"

"Ah." He looked back at the game, up at the vapor once more, and down again. "Nuthin', I reckon."

Early looked up but didn't have time to focus before Kellye slammed his palm down on the truck bed.

"Well, dealer's stayin' in the game for a quarter. I ain't afraid of that. Hope the rest of you aren't chickenshit. Traverse? Traverse, is chickenshit also. Goddammit, Traverse. You can't fold. You know he bluffs like a sonofabitch. Lemme see your cards. Fine. A quarter to you, Tuttle."

Early threw in fifty cents.

"Well, I'm matching it. Pot's good. Last card is face down."

Gerrish glanced back out into the lot and saw nothing.

Strange.

The first solitary drop tapped the nape of somebody's neck.

"Here it comes," muttered Traverse.
The second solitary drop slapped against the metal body of the truck with a hollow pop. The third and the fourth were indistinguishable from the fifth and subsequent. Drops struck needle and leaf, sounding like footsteps of the dead on the duff, slipping through the surrounding scrub.

Early took his card.

"Bet's to ya'."

A dollar landed softly on the change.

"Better fold, kid," someone said.

Kellye flung down his cards and stomped off, profaning Early and his "damn Indian mind games."

"What's with you, Tuttle?" Traverse asked.

The dog beneath the porch, hackles up, rose and snarled. Early, Kellye, and Traverse looked up, saw nothing, and turned to look at the dog. Gerrish looked at the dog then turned to look at the lot.

"What's got that dog spooked?"

"Storm."

The vapor now rolled silently outside the ranch house, stopped, and shifted direction against the wind. Gerrish swallowed.

What the...?

The wind ripped in fury through the branches of Hemlock and threatened unsure Douglas fir. The rain blasted loose, slashing basalt cliffs. The ranchhands ran for the bunkhouse.

Except Gerrish. He was transfixed. The vapor grew less solid and seemed to crouch lower to the ground. It was watching him. Gerrish stood to get a better look. The vapor responded to his attention, grew denser and turned. Gerrish pointed and opened his mouth to call out, but the sound never came.

"Come on, Gerrish. Help me shut up the barn!" Kellye yelled.

"Gerrish," Early stopped both the others.

Gerrish stood alone, his face and hands white as if every drop of blood had left his body. His eyes were wide and his mouth was still open without a sound.

"Gerrish!"

Gerrish didn't move. They ran back to him in the sharp rain. Gerrish was gray: a pallid, lurid, sickly gray like a hue of ash left in a fire pit. One of the men reached out and touched his unresponsive arm, then his hand. It was cool to the touch.

"What is wrong with him?"

"What'd he see?"

"Hell, if I know," mumbled Early, looking hard towards the house.

Gerrish started to tremble and then shake. By the time they pulled him out of the truck, he fell limp in their arms, his body quaking uncontrollably.
“Man, he’s going into shock!”
“Kellye! Go call 911! And get Sean!”

Traverse ran to the bunkhouse, carrying Gerrish. Early pursed his lips and looked solemnly at the tortured body in Traverse’ thick arms. The eyes were still open, unblinking, staring intensely at something...nothing. Early Tuttle looked back again at the house.

“He’s here.”

Anna. That thunder was loud that night before it was you came, ‘n then the rain, beatin’ hard again that pane there. It wakes me up, ‘n it was cold, so cold, outside ‘n’ then in the house here. Cold.

I knew who it was come here. I remember them words he said. So I knew that one’s been coming long time. I says, “There you are.” Right there in the night, but there weren’t a answer. Only it was just so cold.

Tifani. One dark eye. One light. How fucked up was that?

She couldn’t remember ever liking her dark and dumpy reflection, neither the godless girl in the mirror nor the miserable meaninglessness about her. She was tired of straining to see what wasn’t there, what she once thought should be there. The whole image left her sick to her own stomach.

Tifani exited the lavatory and walked down the aisle to the window seat 14F, excusing herself past two outside passengers. As she sat down the intercom announced, “We’re going to begin our descent into the airport. The tower reports that it’s storming with a temperature of sixty-two degrees.”

The flight hadn’t been long enough. Perhaps she should’ve waited longer. She reached up and adjusted the climate control, felt the air with an open palm, and adjusted it again. She turned to ask permission to recline further. They smiled and nodded. The man beside her returned the airline periodical to its pocket, stretched, and looked around the plane. She peripherally saw him turn slightly toward her in mock casualness. Before he spoke she turned away toward the window and checked the time display on her left arm. She didn’t want to pretend right now. She wasn’t polite or happy.

The plane lurched a little.

With her head on a pillow, she could watch outside the window beside her. It wasn’t a beautiful view. The moving haze of clouds outside the window covered the sod patchwork and pavement lines she’d watched earlier. She didn’t care. She didn’t feel beautiful. She just stared straight out to the horizontal separation of white vapor and clear blue. She heard the man pull out another magazine and begin flipping through the pages. She felt guilty. Her mother, Mrs. Hunter rather, had often turned away from her in the same way.

The plane bumped again. She tried to envision what it’d be like if the wing suddenly ripped off and they twisted violently to the side, careening downwards. Everyone around her, including “magazine
man”, would scream and flail about in hysteria. She’d sit quietly, contemplating the irony: having never existed, to die en route to finding herself.

* A fitting end. *

Sixteen years of survival, twelve of escape, for nothing. They’d been her pain. They’d been her condemnation. They’d been her constant recollection, but they hadn’t been her parents after all.

The plane grew nearer the oceanic billows, met them, and submerged into the softness. The entire world outside was white, then turbulent and dark, blue violet between sinking swells as they sunk into the complications thrashing Earth below. She swallowed hard against her popping ears, against inward anger. Eyes narrowed, lips pressed tight, jaw set. She should feel liberated. She’d cried and tried but could not. Instead she felt cheated. If it were possible, she felt more violated than before, *still* injured and now for no reason.

She twisted in her seat against her tightening muscles.

*Pointless.*

“Ladies and gentlemen,” the intercom interrupted. “The seatbelt light is on. Please fasten your seatbelts at this time. If you’ve had occasion to use any of your carryon luggage, please return it to the luggage compartment or under the seat in front of you. Return your seats to an upright position. We ask that you refrain from using electronic equipment until you’re inside the airport. Thank you.”

Wing flaps adjusted with a moan and whir beneath her. She nervously pulled her hair up and let it fall down naturally about her face. A craggy pyramid rose up beside the plane. The lace pattern of snow between purple shadows flowed seamlessly into the surrounding train of clouds. What lay before her now was the line of an e-mail, typed by a man DNA confirmed as her biological father:

“Please come home.”

She was a stranger’s daughter. Seemingly as sincere as it was simple, but she’d been fucked over one too many times. She wasn’t even sure why she’d left so soon after graduation. She was now only a few hours away, regardless, so she stuck the folded e-mail and a complimentary bag of peanuts into her pocket. There was a bright green and blue world outside that window, canopied by oppressing clouds. Raindrops painted a transparent windowpane tapestry. Her face reflected salty tears on a silhouette of human pain.

She’d meet him, just to see what could’ve been.

* Micah. I can’t make up my mind about where to go. I’m not sure I ever could. My sense wants to go to Merton, hitch a ride to the airport, and fly down to Taos, New Mexico. My heart says to go down to Black Water Creek.

Deep, low, slick emeralds laced with pale yellow veins and edged by fine teeth, soaked in the pouring rain. This leaf hangs by a single web from the stalk it was once attached to and is blown about
by a voiceless breeze. As its whisper swells I inhale slowly, deeply. As it ebbs, I exhale. I can feel the sensuousness as it caresses every leaf, every needle in a great swath about me and beyond here.

The wind tousles the grass of the higher meadows and the boulders strewn about the mountainsides. Violet green-backed swallows play tag on its current above and dive down on unsuspecting insects. The air currents rise invisibly, moving white clouds between green ridges and toward rocky peaks, then race over ice-hardened snow before taking to the clear blue sky above.

The breeze having coursed through this wilderness, through every fiber of my body, moves eternally. I open my eyes and everything around me appears crystal clear and close. My fingers tingle, but that could be carpal tunnel syndrome.

Enough of the ethereal bull shit. I’ve been living, hiding in these mountains off and on for the last ten years, and since waking up this morning in the pouring rain, I’ve felt this undercurrent behind every other thought, trying to move me. It’s an intention I don’t understand, and I wish I wasn’t so damned indecisive.

I look up at Trail 1273. Within two days I could be in the air, heading to the southwestern desert. A raven drops from a limb and flies down the watershed toward Nánuelám, along Trail 1270. Tomorrow afternoon, I could be at the ranch, visiting with Sean, Anna, Ceri, Early, and Kellye.

Somewhere in the thicker wood below, a downy woodpecker’s percussion echoes up to me. I feel the air closing in and stand up to get a vantage. I’m surrounded with clouds, thick and dark. More rain. It could be as intense as last evening’s.

The image of the ranch remains. Like a leaf fallen from the tree lands solidly but weightlessly on the surface of the water. What is up with this Taoist mood I’m in? Without emotional splash or eventful cataclysm, and yet unmistakably there, daring denial. Enough with the Gary Snyder, already! Fuck it! I’m going to Black Water Creek. There’s gotta be a reason I can’t shake the thought.

I pick up my pack and shoulder it with a little effort, in well-rehearsed habit, and sigh as I cinch the waist belt and look with decision at Trail 1273.

II

It was on a day many years back and business was slow in Traverse’ Place. There were a few of us just off from work. Micah sat at a table about midway, his back to the wall, facing the door. He was hashing something out with black ink on white paper.

The front door slammed against the frame with a thud that made Micah look up. The first thing we all saw was Sheriff Thurston Brisbane walking toward him with purpose. His hand was pulling his pistol, and Micah reacted with purpose. He jerked his knees upward, knocking the table on its side and fell to the floor behind it with one quick, erratic movement. A .45 pistol in his hands was pointed steadily at Brisbane, who now had his own pistol aimed at Micah’s center of mass behind the table.

“Drop your weapon!” Snapped Thurston.
“Take your fucking finger off the trigger!” Micah shouted at him.
Some girl screamed.
Some man said, “Shit.”
The pump action on Traverse’ 12-guage shotgun ku-klacked.
“Stop it!” He yelled. “Now!”

There were a strain of seconds with each man’s eye on the other’s trigger finger, each man hoping they wouldn’t overlook a movement, everyone’s heart praying neither would imagine a movement that wasn’t there. Gray hairs were popping up through Traverse’ scalp like daisies on a grave.

“Damn it, Thurston,” he muttered.
Thurston announced, “Micah, you’re assaulting an officer of the law.”
“I’m defending myself,” Micah was collected.
“You’re interfering with an officer in the line of duty, Traverse.”
“You walked in here pulling your gun, Thurston.”
The sheriff must have recognized that the public would see this as his mistake, but he wouldn’t lose face.

“That’s no excuse. I’m an officer of the law.”
Traverse countered, “No warning. No warrant. No statement of arrest. You looked to shoot Micah!” He was bullshitting, fighting for his friend.

“That’s no excuse!” Thurston screamed his rage.
“Oh, please don’t,” whimpered some woman in the corner.

“I don’t want shot today, Thurston. I don’t suppose you do either.” Micah was as calm as his adrenaline would allow. “I’m gonna take my finger off the trigger. I recognize you don’t have to, but with all due respect, I’m asking for the same consideration.”
It was a step of faith. Micah did as he said and breathed easier as Thurston obliged.
“Thank you,” Micah said and lowered his weapon. After the briefest moment marbled with relief and stress Thurston did the same. Both weapons were holstered.

For a full while, Thurston kept us all in suspense. Micah was going to jail, for sure, we thought. Both men stared at each other, both with contempt and relief.

Traverse finally broke the silence. “Shit, gentlemen.”
Everyone in the bar collectively exhaled.
Thurston shocked everyone. “I’m going to overlook this incident by the grace of God.”
Micah didn’t speak.

“I’ve come to serve you.”
He carefully pulled a folded paper from his shirt pocket and held it out.
Micah still didn’t speak.
The sheriff closed and opened his eyes slowly. "You're charged with vagrancy and ordered to submit to legal custody or depart from this county within 30 days."

Micah looked at him for a long time. Traverse glared at Brisbane and shook his head. Thurston maintained his pride by not lowering the extended summons an inch. Micah slowly found his way to his feet and walked across the room until he stood close, eye-to-eye with Thurston Brisbane.

"You can keep your order and your church, Brisbane. I've no use for either."

Micah walked out the front door, loaded his pack at the ranch, and walked into the mountains.

Micah. By the time I walk through the back gate of the ranch today I'm well soaked by rainfall and well outside the statute of limitations on vagrancy. Not to suggest I haven't been here in ten years. Most of my friendships are outside the limits of law, especially my friendship with Sean. I no sooner drop my pack on cowboy hill than he grabs me up in his typical bear hug, his stature pulling me to my toes.

"Ah, bless my friend, Creator."

Though Sean is quiet, he's ever emotionally childlike: a deficit of attention when excited, deflated when disappointed. At this moment, however, I can tell by his shimmering eyes and breathlessness that he has more excitement than his big body can contain.

"My daughter's coming home."

Oh, my God! I catch my breath. I watch his eyes moisten and lower lip tremble, then I start to cry. "Wh-when... what...? Ah! How?"

"Letters. E-mails. Phonecalls." A stream of heavy tears soaking his face with the rain. He calls her his little girl. "Tsin pinisha. She's coming home, my friend."

I say nothing. There is no word that could add to this happiness. I just smile back into his joy, remembering him sitting head-in-hands for hours, walking around the ranch, searching for lost fatherhood. It's been twenty-seven years since she was stolen from her crib. Twenty-seven years since even I held her. Sean and I embrace again.

I follow him to the house. Anna's asleep on her sofa, so I kiss her cheek and leave her to rest. Ceri's cleaning away every offending dust particle. She offers me coffee and sliced fruit then shoos me away. The cowboys, however, kick tires with me in the barn.

"We heard you was coming," Kellye says.

"Where'd you hear that?" I ask.

"Early."

"Well, I didn't know I was coming until yesterday morning."

"It's okay. Early didn't tell us til yesterday morning."

We don't call him "Early" for nothing, and we give each other a knowing smile. Earle Tuttle has a sixth sense that made him a highly respected spiritual leader for the Tsináti. When he walks up to
us in cowboy boots, men's jeans, buttoned shirt, and felt hat I can tell right away that he's acting strangely, but then most people feel Early always acts strangely. Especially in conservative mill country where people just can't wrap their minds around transgender.

“What’s up?”

All I get is, “Not sure, yet.” His green eyes stare hard at me for a long moment.

I cross my eyes a bit and have to admit he could be either a soft man or a hard woman.

Early says, “This place just seems to have a way with things.”

There’s no doubt that Black Water Creek does have a way with things, but to what Early is alluding I have no idea. Strange.

The two men ask if I’ll hire on the rest of the season, something Sean has asked me as well. Apparently Gerrish, a sperm and egg that should’ve never met, had some sort of nervous breakdown.

“He’s sayin’ he ain’t comin’ back,” says Kellye. “He weren’t much for the job anyways, don’t reckon.”

I say I’ll think about it, just to keep a secret of my own. Right now the entire ranch is holding its collective breath for Sean’s daughter to arrive, and so am I.

“Let’s go hold our breath over a beer, Kellye.”

In the truck, Kellye twists his fists on the steeringwheel.

“You know I ain’t really into that whispering tree shit that Early and you are,” he says. “I’m Irish and Italian and that don’t leave much room for nothing I can’t put my hands on. Something scared the shit outta Gerrish, though, and him lying in that hospital bed staring at the ceiling is real enough to me. I’m just wonderin’ what’s goin’ on, is all.”

So am I.

We coast into Shaw.

Black Water Creek is certainly within the borders of your good ol’ U. S. of A. and you can drive through these mountains without negotiating a crossing guard. You should carefully understand, however, that mountain people have their own affairs, their own logic, their own attitude, and their own behaviors. Mill towns in Black Water aren’t little Denise-the-Menace, Pleasantville towns. They aren’t bastions of American innocence. There’s no altruistic officer fending off outer evil. Behind the quaint façade you see from the highway is rough history.

And the officer isn’t altruistic. He’s an ass.

I haven’t been in Shaw for years, but it shouldn’t surprise me to see Thurston Brisbane. I knew I’d see him eventually. I was just hoping not so soon after leaving the truck. He sits on a bench beneath the overhang at Traverse’ Place, eyeing me silently til I pass him by.

“How long you here for, Micah?”

“How long than you want me to be,” you son of a bitch. I turn and smile, enjoying the honest joke. “I’m working for Sean. You know Sean Samuels, don’t you?”
He looks me up and down carefully. I would suggest he’s undressing me with his eyes, but I’ve already pushed him far enough.

“Sarcasm’ll get you nowhere. Keep yourself on the straight and narrow. I’d hate to run you out of town again.”

_I bet you would, you fucking bastard._ I laugh like he’s joking and walk inside, seething that I’ve left his threat unacknowledged. My buddy, Traverse Wertz, is quick to grab my hand, slide me a beer, and offer his advice, all without asking.

“To my way of thinkin’ you don’t owe that horse’s dick one fuckin’ nod. He showed his ass to you and everyone else in this town. In plain words, don’t give him the pleasure. You understand what I’m sayin’ to you?”

I do.

“Glad you’re here to keep the kid straight,” he tells me and looks toward Kellye who’s slamming his fist into the jammed jukebox. Traverse twists the corner of his mouth and shakes his head.

“Whaddaya wanna eat?”

I haven’t seen a grill in weeks, and I have in mind beef, mushrooms, onions, and melted cheese. Halfway through one of the best mushroom and Swiss burgers Traverse ever fixed, everyone in the bar looks out the front window.

“Foreigners,” remarks Kellye.

Traverse agreed. “Easy to spot when they’re rubberneckin’.”

The rain has stopped and a Toyota pickup is pulled to the shoulder. A dark-haired chick inside is looking around intently. Woman. Stranger. If it’s not her, she worth talking to. So I walk outside. The cab vibrates with driving industrial music.

“Don’t wait on that stop light to turn green,” I call. It’s a flashing light.

The woman turns. Her eyes are intense, each a different color, in fact, and they catch me off guard. She’s frank—“Guess I better be going, then”—and I stand there like an idiot as she drives off. I stare after her and hear Brisbane’s observation from the bench.

“She’ll be trouble.”

What overwhelming irony. “Funny you should say so, Thurston.”

His eyelids narrow slightly as he sucks on his tooth.

I walk back to the door. “That’s Micaiah’s daughter coming home.”

_Tifani._ Flaked reflector tape on a highway sign.

“Enter Shaw. Est. 1892. Pop. 1940. Drive carefully.”

All through the valley pouring rain and traffic spray had made vision difficult, even with the wiper blades on high. Now the rain held, and the sun came brightly out. The drenched grass, puddled asphalt, and poststorm sky shone otherworldly in the yellow light. She lowered her own windows,
breathing in the cool humidity. There were these subtle smells she couldn’t recognize, but felt she should.

The road leveled into a broad lefthand curve away from billowing smoke and a yellow crane surrounded by milled lumber. She decelerated by an old, weathered Texaco sign, original paint rusted, red star and white circle peeling away. There were no cars at the time, but there was a horse, a chestnut mare clove-hitched beside the entrance. Odd, but Tifani was glad for it.

She pulled off in front of Shaw General Store, at the flashing stoplight, and looked again at the directions.

“Turn left at flashing yellow light.

“Fifteen miles to first homestead on right, one mile past covered bridge.”

On the phone Sean had said, “I’ll meet you at the airport.”

She’d arrange her own transportation.

“It’s a rough mountain road.”

She’d arrange a truck. Tifani wasn’t sure how long her savings would last, but she’d not stay in their home, and she’d not eat with them if she could avoid it.

Green and white patrol truck across the highway to her left, alongside a brown brick building. Concrete sign at the edge of the yard denoted it “Town Hall.” On the same side a large white church faced away as if built backward. Expensive windows and a fashionable sign over the back door: “Shaw Community Church”.

The General Store on her right displayed all manner of tack and foodstuff. Beyond the store two large panes in a white wood façade with bold western etching: “Traverse’ Place.” Both store and bar shared the same roofed boardwalk with three benches and a bulletin-littered corkboard. Two benches occupied by a dark man in gold-rimmed glasses, an older man in a lumberjack shirt, and a third dressed in stiff polyester. All three hard. The third threatening. It’d been an imprudent idle.

“Don’t wait on that stoplight to turn green.”

Tifani turned to see who’d spoken.

A younger man stood on the sidewalk with a longneck bottle and a cocky smile. A smart ass waiting for response.

“Guess I better be going, then,” she said and pressed her foot to the gas.

Half a dozen HUD houses stood behind the bar and store. Some kid stepped off his skateboard to a door, pulled a housekey from his neckline. Tifani looked in the rearview. Another dark-haired teen in dirty clothing led the chestnut off the road. The man who’d spoken to her still stood on the sidewalk, watching after.

A flashing yellow light. She turned left off the highway. Just after doing so there was first one sign— “Snow Zone. Road Not Maintained. Snow Chains Advised.”—then another—“No warning signs next 21 miles.” Blacktop wound left and right, steadily but not steeply through the mountains,
following, crossing, and re-crossing Black Water Creek. Silver sparkled through spaces between trees. The roar of rapids punctuated the rush of air. Tract houses were left behind in lieu of shacks and cabins hid in the trees. Alder crowded in over the road like a long silver tunnel, flickling raindrops onto the windshield.

A curve in the road.

Tifani cried, “Oh!”

Flora and climate broke in unexpected view of snow-laced evergreens and steep mountainsides. Then it vanished. Thicker growth. Another turn in the road. Her heart beat heavily.

“That was beauty!”

Momentary glimpses teased her at every bend like a child behind the trees. Another curve, another sight, a little longer, but gone too quickly. She watched carefully. She slowed down and sped up, trying to see better, hurrying to the next view.

A sign: “Covered Bridge – 2 Miles.”

Tifani placed a hand on her abdomen.

“What am I doing?”

Returning home.

The answer settled quietly of its own, salient from her own thoughts. She wouldn’t have called it “home”.

She rolled through the structure then noted another sign indicating where the “Pavement Ends.” It did and surprised her. Less than a click of gravel and the road became muddy and raw, filled with ruts, potholes, and washboards she wouldn’t have been able to cross with a car.

Tiel-green lichen hung slothfully over hemlock and Douglas fir. The occasional snag supported several shelf fungi, was riddled with woodpecker holes, or both. Slick skunk cabbage and spindly fiddleheads rose from the grey, wet forest floor.

Rail and wire fence. A brief gap in the trees. A longer one. Then …

Then Tifani had no conscious consideration of pressing clutch and brake, shifting to neutral or engaging the brake. It was spontaneous. She left the door open and sat against the warm hood.

Thirty meters down the road a log bridge crossed the creek to “the first homestead on right”. Her eyes followed the drive through what must have been thirty sloping hectares of rocky pastureland dotted with chestnuts, pintos, sorrels, and midnight horses. Most grazed quietly. One stallion cantered uphill. Two mares stood head to tail. A nearby filly watched her carefully. All these overlooked by the white mountains she’d been chasing.

“Damn,” she breathed. “I’m part of a horse culture.”

The filly twitched her left ear.

“Are you beauty or what?” Tifani asked.
The filly raised her head for a better look as Tifani stepped nearer and held out her hand. The horse made a short whinny but didn't move away, still acutely curious. Tifani stepped again. The horse backed away, searched for signs of aggression. Tifani searched her jeans and pulled out nuts from the flight. She poured them on her palm and held it out. The filly accepted, and Tifani rubbed the horse's cheek and neck.

Someone was coming down the drive. The knot in her stomach returned with a vengeance. Her hand jumped, and the filly moved away.

Tifani was embarrassed. She tried to swallow back the nerves and walked along the fencerow. He was running toward her. Distance was tricky, but as he came nearer she guessed he was between forty-five and fifty years. His shaven face was youthful. The only hint of age were the suggestion of wrinkles with thick white and black hair pulled back and falling over his jacket collar. He slowed to a walk, and she realized he was thirty centimeters taller than she.

"Tifani?" A quiet voice. For a frightening second he looked as if he'd embrace her. She was relieved when he only held out a hand.

She took it and nodded.

"Yeah. I'm Tifani."

"I'm Sean, your father." Tears in his eyes were unmistakable. "It is so good to see you again."

Sean. When you were born I looked at your fragile life in my arms. I was in awe of how your little ribs moved with each breath. How something so new to you could be so natural!

I looked in your eyes, through these tiny pupils into the spirit beyond, and I imagined how you'd be in five... ten... fifteen years. How long you'd wear your hair. What traditions you'd follow. Interests you'd chase. First words, first steps. All I wanted then was to hear your thoughts develop, hold your scraped knees and broken hearts, feel my pain on your first date and the first time you walked out my door.

I never had any of that.

I know you're hesitant to come here. I want you to know that when I look at you now, all I want is to know you for the rest of my life.

This is what I want to say.

But I choose to wait.

Until you're ready.

Tifani. The house dominated the rise on the right-hand side of the drive. Two stories. Open window in the eave. New green metal roof. Battened siding warped, split, and weathered completely gray. A shallow porch skirted the first floor, lined with rusty mining equipment and other antiques. All this encircled by rock-edged gardens and early spring sprouts.
Was there anything she should avoid? Tifani shifted the truck to park and looked about carefully.

Sean beckoned her. "Any luggage?"

Should she avoid him? She exited the truck anyway. "Nah, I'm fine, thank you."

He led her along the gravel pathway, up three wooden stairs to the porch where a woman with straight gray hair down to her thighs held open the heavy front door. She stepped forward and grabbed Tifani in a remarkably strong embrace.

"I'm your grandma Ceri, Tifani."

Her voice was gravelly nasal from the back of her throat—a feminine version of Marlan Brando's *The Godfather*—with a mild accent

"It is so good to see you!"

Tifani thought Ceri's silver-gray eyes and tight-lipped grin looked like she knew something many didn't, a secret she kept hidden in that hair.

No one pressed Tifani. Sean and Ceri only stood aside, but it took a lot for her to walk through the entranceway into the darkness of another family's life, even if they were supposedly her own family.

*I can turn around.*

Especially if they were supposedly her own family.

*I can walk back out any time I choose.*

Her eyes darted about, but she stepped over the threshold despite her cautiousness and felt swallowed up by the earth as she did so.

Stairwell on her right, poker table on her left. Large bay window seat in the far left corner. Kitchen in the far right corner separated by a sit-down counter. River-stone chimney directly before her in the center of the house. To her left, facing the hearth, nearly completely enveloped in a blue-and-white patchwork quilt, sat an older woman.

"Tsin ptúuapsha," her voice called quietly. "Kláskaiä."

Tifani had initially overlooked her. A thin white braid trailed along the furrows of the quilt alongside a recessed face.

"Come let me see you," the elder beckoned.

Tifani snapped her head around when she heard Sean latch the door behind her. Ceri, following behind her, smiled calmly. Tifani was uncomfortable, but the setting was inviting and the voice of the elder was tender. Tifani looked back at the woman's featherweight fingers patting the sofa lightly. She sat and looked into the reflections of firelight set in her leathery face.

"Skin and bones like your mother."

The leather separated and pealed back from worn and uneven teeth.

"And so beautiful."
Her warm and velvety hand grasped Tifani’s.

“I’m your great, great grandmother Anna.” With effort she leaned very close to Tifani and nearly whispered, “We all waited long time for you to come home.”

Anna rested back with a sigh of weariness and pleasure.

“What was it, when I came in, that you said to me?” Tifani asked.

Anna smiled. “That was the way we once speak, y’know, before we was taught to speak English. I say, ‘Tsin ptâu/aptsha, kläskaä.’ ‘My little daughter, welcome.’”

“Oh.”

As Tifani’s eyes adjusted, she could see that the floor, ceiling, and walls of the house were hewn from large old growth. Above two crossbeams, the living area was completely open. The river stone chimney towered up through the second floor balcony and the attic cockloft that overlooked them.

Ceri had settled on the sofa opposite Anna and Tifani but appeared ready to leap at any moment. Sean settled onto the hearth and encouraged the flames. His size and position hindered her way to the door.

Tifani laughed nervously. “How old is this house?”

Tifani saw both Anna and Ceri waiting for Sean to answer.

“Partially over one hundred years,” he said momentarily. “It nearly burned down twenty-seven years ago.”

“Really! It been in the... I mean, yous owned it that long?”

“It was my brother won it in a poker game,” answered Anna. “He got this house and... and... the country that he... the land was on it.”

Tifani was interested. “In a poker game?”

“Right up stream there in the ol’ town, ‘n then they killed him for it. Was in nineteen an’...”

Anna looked to Ceri for help.

“That was 1904.”

“Oh. Sorry.” Tifani looked about the house, considering this. “The fambly room is ‘mazin’ fer sure.”

The quietness of the house made the snapping embers loud. No one else seemed to mind the silence. They appeared to almost embrace it. For Tifani’s part, it made her back tighten in anticipation of what might be coming.

She looked at each of them. They smiled. She admitted, “I don’t know what to say.”

“Well, I should say not,” said Ceri. She wiped her eyes with the apron she wore. “Lost as a babe in the woods.”

“You’re from Kentucky?”
"I was born and raised in the Appalachian mountains. How did you place my accent?"
Tifani answered, "I knew someone from there."
"Well, my mother was Tsináti, but she and my father lived in the East. I came back here after she died. I’ve been happy as a lark ever since."
Ceri darted off suddenly to the kitchen.
An earthy potpourri filled Tifani’s nose. Beyond the fireplace she could see herbs hanging from the ceiling in the kitchen and Ceri removing dishes from the oven. Tifani shifted in the sofa, but she’d just gotten here. How could she excuse herself from the meal?
Anna squeezed Tifani’s hand.
"Ceri be good help to ya. She knows ‘bout that other part of the country. She knows, too, how it is here with us."
Sean helped Anna to her feet. Tifani saw how much Sean had to support the elder and took Anna’s free arm as they moved around the fireplace to a large heavy-looking table. Ceri came and sat, wiping her hands on her apron. Tifani felt awkward. No one reached for the baked salmon or salad on the table. Something was pending.
Anna wrapped her hands around her water glass. "Creator, we thanks you and all the relations for blessin’ us."
He certainly never blessed me.
"We gives thanks for the happiness before us now, our daughter come home this day."
I came here on my own. I’ll leave on my own.
"Ho!"
The prayer rested heavily on Tifani’s mind. Sean fixed Anna’s plate for her. The elder wrinkled her nose and waved away the soy and violet salad.
"That one’s a vegetarian," Anna confided to Tifani about Ceri. "She’s starving me."
Ceri ignored the comment and chucked as she took Tifani’s plate. "You must be hungry enough to eat a horse. You’ve traveled so far."
"Sorry." Tifani pronounced the "o" like cola. "I’m just tired."
"Do you like the mountains, Tifani?" Ceri asked.
"They’re beauty, eh? How vous survive up here?"
Sean said they made a little cash leasing stables, a little more from breeding horses, and even more outfitting out-of-towners. Ceri added that they lived as self-sufficiently as possible, growing their own hay, oats, vegetables, generating their own electricity, fluming and filtering their own drinking water.
In response to their interest, Tifani shared only briefly that she’d grown up in Toronto then attended college and graduate school in Chicago.
She bowed her head to her fork and slipped a sideways glance at Sean helping himself to seconds. So very quiet. What did that mean? It unnerved her. She didn’t know how to interpret the silence. It could mean anything. Does he have nothing to say? What was he hiding?

Tifani kept Ceri from spooning a third helping on to her plate. They sat around a dessert of leftover fry bread smeared with salal jelly.

After listening to forks scrape against porcelain, Tifani asked, “So yous lived here a hundred years?”

“Many thousands of years,” answered Ceri.

Anna rejoined. “Up here’s where we come from, y’know?”

“What of the land bridge?”

Anna was abrupt. “The what?”

Tifani just stared back.

“The land bridge, Anna,” said Ceri. “Anthropologists say Indians walked over here from Asia. They say that’s how we got here.”

“Oh, well, we wasn’t here before, if that’s what they mean.” Anna shrugged. “But we wasn’t from no land bridge neither. In the winter we used to live right down there by them falls. Down there where the salmonberry come in real thick now.”

Ceri explained. “The falls above the covered bridge back down the road.”

Tifani nodded.

“That’s where we use to stay, y’know. I never did see that, but my brothers and sisters older ‘n… who was older ‘n me was born there. Why, the houses were right down in the earth, y’know, ‘n round with walls and the ceiling made up like this.” The elder’s hands patted the air. “With… with cedar and the… on top… the earth pack in on top of it. In olden days the whites call it Cataract Village in them olden days. Yeah, we all live there in them houses the whole winter long.”

“Aboot how big was it?”

“Some of ‘em were big… for two, three, four families, ‘n some were real big for the dances… the winter dances.”

Ceri clarified. “She means how big the village was, Anna?”

“Oh, I don’t know. There never was a lot of us, even before the white people come up here. Before the people up the stream come over the mountains. We been here long time. The people down the stream, and those on down in the valley, on up to the big river, and out to the coast, they all come up by here an’ trade with us, y’know. We never had any fight with anyone. Up the stream, down the stream, nobody. We was peaceful with everybody.”

“How many… Ts—Tsi—Tsináti are there now?”

Anna looked to Ceri.
“I reckon about thirty families in the canyon consider themselves Tsináti. Maybe the same number on the valley reservations still would.”

“Where are the reservations?”

“Down in the valley. All the Indians were forced onto the reservations back in the mid-1800’s.”

“We was moved down there, but a lot didn’t stay there. Whenever we could we come back to these mountains. Some worked in the mines. Most of ‘em I think. Others got jobs as lumberjacks, y’know, cutting the trees. That’s how come there’s so many still livin’ here, ‘n some that is registered with the tribes in the valley.”

“The U. S. government doesn’t recognize us separately from the reservation tribes,” said Ceri.

“They say we got to prove who we are, y’know. Show we are Indian on paper. Show our treaty, but we never sign no treaty. We was never told we could. They say we was... It was them that... that... Y’know, the up stream and down stream people signed a treaty, an’ so they say we gave away our land, but we never signed it. An’ most never signed any roll on the reservation. We just left, made our way back home. So we have no paper they say will do. Same ones says we have to show who we are on paper says we have no paper will do. So I don’t know.”

Tifani wasn’t sure she understood, but she wouldn’t admit it.

Anna asked, “Where was it you said them apologists say we come from?”

“Asia,” answered Ceri.

“No, we didn’t come from no land bridge,” Anna shook her head. “An’ we sure didn’t come from no piece of paper neither.”

There was a long silence before Anna spoke again, addressing Tifani directly.

“You understand this’s where our roots is.” The elder swept her hand in an arc to the east, up canyon. “Nánuelám ni alángshi, pinisha. Where all us people use to live and a long time ago, but I can’t tell you these things now. Later, y’know, when the winter comes. Then I tell you.”

Tifani couldn’t interpret Anna’s solemn look when she said this. Tifani couldn’t even decide whether she would remain here till the winter came.

“I’ll show you your room,” said Ceri.

“Oh!” Tifani was going to leave. “Wait....”

Out the window Tifani could see that night had quietly fallen. It would be an hour drive down mountain roads to the last hotel she’d seen. She didn’t want to stay. She didn’t want to leave.

“Kay,” she agreed reluctantly.

Tifani helped Sean support Anna to her bedroom just off the dining room where Anna kissed her forehead goodnight. Then she ran out, away from the affection, away from Sean, to grab her suitcase. She caught up with Ceri on the second floor landing.

“The bathroom is just there. I’ve got your towels here.”
Ceri led her through a bedroom door at the far right corner. The ceiling followed the gutter angle of the roof down to short batten walls. The bedroom carpet was a terrible 70’s apple green that Tifani immediately adored. To the right of the doorway was a full-sized bed covered in a large quilt: green, tan, and red rectangles, blue interlocking circles. It was carefully tucked beneath a multitude of pillows and hanging nearly to the floor on each side.

“Just put on some clean sheets for you,” Ceri was saying.

Tifani walked to a beautiful cedar chest of drawers against the wall on the left. She tenderly picked up one of several picture frames set on top. Ceri stood quietly, allowed her to study the portrayal. A beautiful woman stood with composure, black intense eyes, full long shiny black hair, hands folded at her waist. She filled out a blue petite dress with a slight but beautiful figure.

“Anna said I was skin and bones like my mother.”

“You are,” Ceri confirmed. “This was Micaiah’s room.”

“I feel like I seen her before.”

“Every picture tells a tale,” said Ceri. “She said you’d be here in your home again, and here you are.”

“She looks so peaceful.”

“Always,” said Sean.

Tifani looked to see him standing in the doorway and instinctively turned her back away. She became terrifyingly aware of a tear slipping from his eye. Her chest heaved between passion and apprehension. Sean’s distance, Ceri’s restless attention, even Anna’s age-cracked storytelling was all laced with foreign familiarity, but they were an unknown people, supposed kindred. Did she want to know their darkened corners, discover what lay behind and beneath these appearances? Was there really any other alternative?

Tifani said thanks and goodnight then shut the door behind them when they left. She was still restrained by passions she couldn’t explain. She was still disconcerted that she hadn’t talked her way out of meals and nights with this family. She was indebted. She felt the same nagging nebulous shame she always felt.

Tifani turned and took note of the things these people had sitting around. A wooden chair stacked with wool and fleece blankets. Elk antlers gathered in a woven basket in the corner. A large chifforobe with a peace sticker. She wondered who had put that there. Had Micaiah? Had she? Had she crawled on this floor?

For an hour she sat and listened to strange noises in the house. She noted the silences. She noted the sounds, wondering what some were, recognizing others. Sean’s footsteps through the house. A car passing on the road. Ceri settling on her box springs. The grandfather clock she’d seen in the family room chiming off the quarter-hours. In a while the sump pump’s faint drone. The weight of the
house pressing one board to shift against another and pop. The rush of Black Water Creek thunderous in 
the silence.

Tifani revisualized the floor plan. Outside this room was the landing. The stairs descended to 
the front door. The truck sat ten meters beyond the front porch.

Happily, the bed was firm. Tifani took off her clothing and slid her bare legs beneath the 
quilt’s weight, barely disturbing it. The sheets were cool to her touch and had their certain smell, a 
mixture of sage and whatever detergent Ceri used. She left every pillow where it was but one, which 
she held between her legs. The sheets grew warm from her heat, and she moved a few centimeters at a 
time until she could find no more coolness. The covers up to her neck, she backed herself against the 
mound of pillows.

She thought of Micaiah’s picture. There was some familiarity about that woman, some quality 
that blazed within her, somehow discernable in the photograph. A tear slid silently down Tifani’s cheek. 
It occurred to her that even though she was in someone else’s home, she could be comfortable, if only 
she would allow herself, but wasn’t sure this thought was true. The sound of the rushing creek outside 
was constant and she wondered how long she would notice it. She wondered how long she would stay 
and, tortured by relentless memories, cried herself to sleep.

Anna. Táuá come in to say you was here, but I knew it already ’cause I seen him run, an it was 
the only time I ever seen him run. When you first come in here I seen the look of fear on you, like you 
was afraid of what you might see, or afraid of what we might...you... we might see in you, or 
something. It was easy to see you was Tsináti, you was one of us, but had forgotten it, forgot where it 
was you come from. You had forgotten it, y’know. I was proud for that you had survived, but I was 
sorry that you had forgotten who it was... who it... you were, ’n I knew there was much I had to give 
you. There was much for you to learn. Some can’t be told. Some there isn’t time for, but we will see. 
We will see.

III

In her darkest corner beneath the bed, she sequestered a few books and magazine clippings. 
Pictures of horses. Horses grazing on an open range. Horses rearing in majestic show. Horses ridden 
by handsome cowboys and pretty cowgirls.

Horses running.

This was her favorite. A butt ad showing a herd running from cowboys. She stared at it. She 
looked so thoroughly she could close her eyes and still see flared nostrils, hair blown by rushing wind, 
hooves kicking up sod and snow. She studied this until she was certain she’d been there and could no 
longer abide her pursuers. She folded back the edge and all she could see were the horses... running. 
Free.
There were a few subjects that neither father nor mother would tolerate her interest. The last time she'd persistently mentioned horses she choked down two of her teeth then suffered a lecture on the hazards of horses. If an attempt at Pavlovian avoidance it accomplished only Pavlovian silence. She never mentioned horses again, but she dreamed. Neither father nor mother could stop her dreams.

*In her darkest corner there was one video: The Black Stallion. She'd stuck it in the back of her pants in Wal-Mart. Someone saw her do it. They followed her out the store and grabbed her. She pleaded and screamed so convincingly with her brown and green eyes that a large man with kids of his own mistook the situation for abduction. He knocked the employee out cold.*

*She knew how to plead. She had regular practice.*

*That evening, in the absence of her own personal captors, she watched the video, face bathed in blue glow thirty centimeters from the screen. The only thing as fascinating as the horse was Mickey Rooney. He looked kind. He liked horses. He reminded her of the large man at Wal-Mart. Mickey Rooney had defended her.*

*Then the front porch bumped, and she ran to hide with her treasure beneath the bed, in her darkest corner.*

*Footsteps scuffing in the bedroom.*

*She closed her eyes and wished Mickey were there then.*

*She imagined horses... running.*

Tifani. Sleep was fitful. Her sweaty outline turned cold in the night. She felt the breath on her bare neck but subconsciously dismissed it as a draft. She was only slightly aware of a smell as he moved about her.

*Her nightmares awoke her in the dark to a splattering on the roof.*

*It was raining again.*

*It took both hands to creak open the front door. She stepped barefoot onto the damp porch. Water fell from the roof edge, but a sprinkle just barely rippled puddles in the drive. There was only the dullest radiance through dark overcast and clouds moving up through the trees. Nippy moistness penetrated her oversized tee, and she wrapped a wool blanket around her more efficiently before leaving the porch and wandering through the front pasture. Her feet were tender, and the blanket was quickly soaked against her bare legs, but wet grass between her toes was exciting, and for some time she stood just watching two raccoons at the creek edge.*

*She left wet footprints on the dry back porch when she returned. The wood was worn splinterless, with moss and brown leaves in the cracks. Tifani sat up on the railing, her back against the post, and raised her knees to her chin beneath the blanket. A rooster crowed behind her. Hushed scuffling footsteps echoed from the bunkhouse across the drive. She heard and smelled a coffeepot groaning on the stove. The backdoor slid open and banged shut. Unaware of Tifani, Ceri paced briskly*
down the steps and through the garden to the chicken coop. She shushed the rooster and cackled with the hens as she gathered eggs.

It all felt nice to Tifani.

"Land o'Goshen, child." Ceri saw her now, returning with eggs in her apron. "You're up at the crack o' dawn."

She marched over to Tifani.

"I figured, what with all that's going on, yo—. You come all this way to catch your death of pneumonia?"

Ceri saw Tifani wet, in a wet blanket, and using a corner of it to wipe the hair from her eyes.

"Land sakes!"

"I'm fine."

"You'll be sick as a dog, sure as shootin'."

"I'm fine," Tifani repeated.

Ceri pursed her lips and snorted. "How do you like your eggs?"

Tifani told her, and listened as she entered the house, muttering under her breath.

"You need to get dry. You'll be in a world of hurt, feelin' worse than a five-eyed goat in a sandstorm, temperature hotter than the hinges of hell...."

Tifani heard hooves splashing in the rainy darkness. She turned and watched a silhouette ride from the back pasture to stop and dismount at the orange glow of a lit pipe.

"Hey, leave her saddled, if you don't mind," he said.

The glow bobbed as the smoker nodded.

"Thanks, Early."

The rider turned toward the house. Tifani went up to Micaiah's room.

Activity came early on the ranch, and Tifani was relieved she'd awoken predawn. She pulled her hair back and stood facing the bathroom mirror, wondering why Anna'd said she looked like Micaiah. The woman in the picture looked strong and passionate. She wondered what had happened to Micaiah, why... how she'd died.

She tucked corduroy tails into her jeans and buttoned the fly. The smell of baking brown sugar and cinnamon rose from the kitchen. Tifani grabbed a long-sleeve fleece jacket hurried downstairs.

She'd not allow others to wait for her.

Ceri was pulling a muffin pan from the oven with her apron, muttering about mitts never being where you left them. She tossed muffins from pan to basket, the pan to sink, and the basket to tabletop with ambidextrous flare, and then laughed at herself.

"What can I do to help?"

"Nothin', darlin'. The others'll be in directly."
Tifani glanced out the back door and saw Sean talking with some man. His wet hair hung loosely below a sopping hat. Tifani noticed the strength of gaze between them. How long had they known each other?

They talking about me?
Why?
She handed Ceri an oven mitt from beneath a cookbook.
“Oh. If it was a snake it would’ve bit me.”

Tifani succeeded in taking a bowl of yogurt from her. The table was laden with soy milk, bran muffins, pure honey, low fat cream cheese, around a bowl full of sliced apple, kiwi, oranges, and cantaloupe.

Anna wrinkled her nose at all of it when Ceri brought her to the table.
Sean came inside.
“Good morning.”
Tifani avoided making eye contact.
“Early’s leaving today.”
“Up country?” Ceri asked.
Sean nodded. “To track the herd.”
“I’ll have his lunch in the morning.”

Sean explained that wild horses ran in the high desert beyond the highest mountains. A friend had invited them to come separate out some of the herd.

“There are really wild horses out here?” A glossy panoramic of galloping mustangs came to mind.

Anna smiled at her enthusiasm. “Yes. Them horses been up there since long time. Before I was a... before I was born those Indians up there use to have good horses, back before white people came, y’know. Why, they was the horses that ever body wanted. Even the white people wanted them. Them people had good horses. We know that. Everbody know that.

“Anyway, those ones use to come over here an... an... whip up on the people up the stream. They was always lookin’ for a good fight or something. I don’t know. So them people up the stream was... they were f-fight... fierce! They was fierce, y’know. An’ those Indians would come fight, then the people up the stream would get the better of ‘em and take their horses. Well, we would get them good horses ‘cause we was friends, y’know.

“So my father was given a horse by... I forgot that man’s name. It was a man we knew up the stream there with them peoples. There had been a battle and them Indians from over the mountains had gotten beat. So here comes my father’s friend an give him that horse, an he shakes his head an said, ‘Those Indians up there sure do likes to give us their horses.”’

Anna, Ceri, and Sean laughed. Tifani smiled.
“He said that.” Anna laughed again.

“That was once the way it was back then, in the old times,” she mused. “‘Til them white people decided all us Indians was wild and needed fenced in.”

Anna, Ceri, and Sean laughed quietly. Tifani didn’t think it funny.

“Tamed it all to death,” snuffed Ceri as she rose to clear the table.

Tifani finished a first helping and fought off a second. She was still disconcerted she’d been unable to dodge meals and nights here. Too much is out of control!

The radio softly announced something that included “rain” and “all day”.

“You could take the day to look around, get to know things,” suggested Ceri.

“I’m not sure how lo—.”

“Tsín ptáuáipsha,” Anna interjected, her mouth unapologetically full of grapefruit. “This will be a good day.”

“Sorry. I’m just tired still.”

Tifani wanted to see the horses.

She did not want to be alone with Sean, but she followed him across the mud and gravel toward the saddle barn. Pouring rain pounded against her jacket hood. She’d refused the hat Sean had offered her. The memories of her nightmares still twisted her stomach. Apple skin stuck in her teeth. Tifani worked at it with a homemade toothpick Ceri had whittled and carried the lunch she’d insisted on delivering for her. Whoever Early was.

Inside the barn’s open doorway a young red-haired Fred Flinstone coiled a lead rope. Long and bulky torso on short bowed legs. He spat tobacco. Tifani hated that.

“Tifani, this is Kellye Stoddard.”

Kellye shook her hand and grinned.

“Well, how ya doin’?”

Pearly yellows. Brown between. His eyes measured her in a what-are-you-good-for way. She didn’t like him.

Another cowboy walked in and beat hat dry against his leg.

“Traverse,” Sean greeted him. “This is Tifani.”

He moved like an old cowboy. His shirt lay open, two buttons from the collar, revealing brown and graying chest hair.

“Hey, there, sweetheart. Traverse Wertz.”

He took her hand and held it briefly in an old fashioned way that made her nervous. The “sweetheart” didn’t seem so discriminatory coming from him.

“How long are you here for?” He asked.

“I’m not sure,” she answered, inwardly wondering the same thing.
“Well, be sure to come by the shop while you’re here.”
The bar she’d passed in Shaw.
“Traverse’ Place.”
Traverse smiled.
“So you’re bartender and sometimes cowboy?”
He laughed. White stubble and strange vertical wrinkles stood out against his tan cheeks. “Oh, I come out and visit sometimes, help sometimes.”

He was handsome for his age.
Sean led her through the stables. In their stalls were stolen picture books and magazine advertisements in flesh and breathing. She approached a sorrel mare with two socks on her forelegs. Her mane was soft and combed to the side. A Morgan. Tifani quietly said so.
“You’ve worked with horses,” guessed Sean.
“I’ve dreamed of them.”
He inhaled and exhaled as if this resolved something in his mind.
An Arabian in the stall next door had a shiny black coat was so deep it shined as blue as one of the rifles hanging in the ranch house. She snorted and tossed her head.
“You don’t have to be afraid,” Sean assured.
Tifani acted as though she hadn’t heard. She stuck the toothpick in the stall, opened the gate, and stepped inside.
An ear rotated back. A hoof raised and dropped.
Tifani blew gently.
The mare relaxed a little.
Tifani hummed softly, reached slowly, and stroked the mare’s neck. With one hand on the horse’s shoulder, she ran fingers through her mane. She moved a hand up to her nose, all the time humming softly, until the mare rubbed her muzzle on Tifani’s arm.

She looked at Sean.
“I’m not afraid.”
Sean, arms folded against the rail, said nothing, but his eyes twinkled.
“What’s her name?” Tifani asked.
“Fury.”
The rain slowed and Sean needed to mend fences with Traverse. Tifani declined to join them. Sean was disappointed but smiled and said nothing. Instead she remained with Fury, circling a curry comb down her neck and shoulder, across her back and ribs to her rear.
She listened to the shower striking atop the tin roof. It resounded through the barn drowning them in clatter. Tifani hummed and Fury whinnied softly, her eyes half closed and lower lip loose.
“Hey, that one’ll tear you up, missy!” Kelly yelled from the other end of the barn.
Tifani felt Fury tense.
"I’m fine."
Kellye stomped up to the stall, lead rope in hand.
Fury tossed her head at him.
Tifani looked solidly at the cowboy. Why didn’t he get clue? “Fer real, Kellye, I’m fine.”
Fury flicked her ears.
“Lookit, lady. I don’t want your pa getting’ pissed at me if...”
Tifani came out of the stall before Fury or Kellye could react. She put Kellye between her and the stall, her face looking up defiantly.
“You’re offside, Ass Hat! Sean and Traverse let me in to calm her down. Way to go! She’s all pissed off again. Will you please bag it and bail so I can calm her again?” Tifani finished in her best impression of Kellye’s drawl, “Or is that too much to ayask?”
He was stunned. A little too late for effect he shouted, “Fine!” and stomped out, slamming his palm against the wall.
Tifani followed him to the door, wondering if she’d overstepped herself. Maybe Sean hadn’t wanted her in the stall. Maybe she should leave now before Sean got back. She turned around and walked flat into another cowboy...girl, saddle and tackle slung on her shoulder, leading a piebald Tobiano. The cowgirl looked oddly toward her.
Tifani unclenched her fists. “Sorry.”
Her... wait... no, his mouth was half-raised into a squirrelly smile. He walked a few steps away before Tifani heard him speaking.
“What?” She asked, inquiry mixed with the contempt she still felt for Kellye.
He brought the horse into an empty stall and stood there without a word, half-turned, looking at her. He didn’t appear confrontational, just... peculiar.
Tifani was uncomfortable. “What’d you say?”
“‘You’re Sean’s daughter.’”
Sigh. “‘Tifani.’”
He slipped the halter off the pinto.
“You’ve been in Canada.” His neck was long with no discernable Adam’s apple.
“Yeah. Tronno.”
For some reason Tifani followed him into the tack room where reins, ropes, bridles, and saddles were hung half neatly, half cluttered on the walls. He said nothing more as he swung the equipment off his skinny shoulder to the table. Just as Tifani was about to leave, he said, “It’s a long move.”
He spoke indirectly to her intent, picked up another grooming kit and walked past her.
“I’m not sure I’m staying.” Tifani remembered the lunch. “Is your name Early?”
“It’s never been late.” He grinned with a small mouth of crooked teeth. He still didn’t make direct eye contact.

Tifani relaxed a little but still puzzled at his strange personality. She handed the saddlebags to Early, who hung them on a nail. She stepped into the stall and helped him dry off the horse.

“Are you Tsináti?”

Early nodded his small head.

They flicked the brushes silently until Tifani tried again.

“How long have you worked here?”

“I’ve been here a long time.”

Tifani didn’t want to work for conversation any longer. So again they were silent, brushing until they finished. Something in Early’s dark beady eyes held her own.

“I think it will go better for you if you decide,” he said.

Tifani understood his reference to whether she was staying. She maintained eye contact.

“Please don’t tell me I’m a chosen one, an Indian princess, or anything like that.”

Early’s quirky smile returned to one corner of his mouth.

“No,” he said and picked up the wooden box of combs, brushes, picks, and towels. “We’ve all seen too many movies like that.”

Tifani watched him leave, wondering at his oddness. At length she reached for the toothpick. It was gone, and in its place was stuck a shiny 60’s peace pin.

IV

Early Tuttle just sort of appeared in Black Water Creek with no good explanation from anyone. The first time Ceri saw him was after her husband died. Ciel and her friend Mildred were killed by police with other protestors in the city. News was bad all over. Philo Loupe had been killed in Vietnam. Tierra took their daughter to live with her uncle and grandmother. Philo’s body returned to the U.S. with Tierra’s wounded brother. A year later, Michael’s body was found in a reservation ditch. The last he’d been seen alive was in a tavern that excluded dogs and Indians. It was tense in the valley. Timber industries were forcing the tribes into extensive litigation over property rights. The only revenue available for legal fees was through timber sales.

“Robbing Peter to pay Paul,” commented Ceri. It was appropriate: Catholic Indians losing resources to Protestant lawyers and loggers. She said it to Tierra, her uncle, and grandmother as they dug camas beside the Douglas River.

Tierra had heard State Troopers were thick on the reservation. Maybe something to do with a threat that’d been made on the governor’s life.

“They think a Indian did that?” Anna asked.
Tierra didn’t know, but it was common knowledge the governor received kickbacks from the timber barons involved in the reservation lawsuits.

Ceri was too poor to pay attention.

Esmond only knew authorities couldn’t find the man responsible.

Ceri looked up and saw someone else digging camas down river at forest’s edge and nearly naked.

“Well, I wouldn’t have believed that if you’d told me.”

The others followed her gaze and watched until the person scampered away.

“The loggers been talking ‘bout somethin’,” said Esmond when they went back to digging. He talked to a lot of people on Black Water Creek Road. Everyone waited on him to finish.

“Miners, too. They say there’s a feral child running around up there.”

“What’s that? A fear of child?” Anna asked.

“Nánwetcháhiu,” Tierra addressed her. “Feral means ‘wild.’”

“Like them people used to call us.” Anna snuffed.

“Some of ’em has seen a child up around them mines, y’know,” insisted Esmond. “Not any longer than a glimpse. Not long enough to find out anything.”


Esmond shrugged. “Some says a boy. Some says a girl. Looks Indian, they say.”

Tierra laughed. “Nánwetcháhiu, did we leave someone up there?”

Anna giggled. Tierra and Esmond smiled at each other. Ceri sat up and looked back where the person had disappeared. Her interest was piqued, but no one knew more than that.

The next time she saw Early was one evening outside their trailer behind Shaw General Store. Ceri and Sean had been surviving on very little since Ciel died. Sean was raising a raucous in his ratty playpen, he was so hungry. Ceri stared at the back wall of the pantry, so low down she could’ve licked butter off the bottom of a churn, if she’d had a churn let alone the butter to lick. There was only a Mason jar half-full off flour, a cardboard box of baking powder, and a coffee can of grease. She shook the cardboard box. It barely rattled, and she cried some more and fondled a pin Ciel had worn.

“Well, for the life of Riley!” A form in the moonlight standing still in the middle of the street.

She pressed her face and hand against the window to see better. It was the child she’d seen down by the river standing there in a cedar skirt. She opened the door and beckoned. “Why you waiting there? Are you Navajo?”

The child came in, sucking on a homemade toothpick. In the light she saw it wasn’t a child at all, but an adult her own age and the size of a skinny adolescent. Pretty near her own age, in fact, and cute as a mare’s tail. Ceri studied the shiny hair, the supple face, the long lashes, the large eyes that appeared dilated even in the light. She gestured toward a chair and turned toward the pantry. With the last flour and oil she made the only thing left to make.
Not a word was spoken while Ceri mixed, kneaded, flattened, and fried. She split bread and water between child and guest as she scrutinized the teats rigid from the cold, the muscles flex to rip the bread, the fingers delicately wiping the crumbs, and she nearly dove under the table to figure things out.

Ceri asked for a name in English. She asked with what little she knew of Tsináti. She asked with crayon pictures on paper. The answer came after a lengthy demonstration of charades.

"Earle E. Tuttle."

Ceri was nonplussed.

He asked in plain English for more bread and water.

"Early, all we have is time to wait for dying."

Ceri had used all the flour and oil already, but somehow she shook out enough flour and powder for more. There was always enough flour and powder for more since Early came, and always something different when he left. Ceri noticed the pin missing right away, and the homemade toothpick left in its place. She never learned much about Early and despite his strange behavior. A match would disappear in exchange for a hemlock cone. She never knew if he’d be there when she turned around. A needle would disappear in exchange for a pop bottle cap. Sometimes he’d show up for weeks. She’d get frustrated at him. A button would disappear in exchange for a flower. Then sometimes he’d disappear for weeks.

"I want to know where it is you live when you don’t come here."

Ceri said this over breakfast one morning.

Earle didn’t object.

Ceri put Sean on her back and followed Earle up the river, over the ridge, and deep into the forest. The sun was low before she saw a great circling in the sky ahead. A twisting multitude of black shadows ascending and descending between forest and sky. A dark dynamic Jacob’s ladder on an ominous and heavenly directive. The ladder touched the ground near where Marcham Creek was little more than a brook, around a large ancient red cedar. Ravens. Thick as ticks on a dog. The branches were heavy with shiny eyes, preening wings, shifting talons, feathered faces turning this way and that.

Ceri began to notice a musk in the air. Early led Ceri through a hole in the trunk where rot had hollowed out the heart, and she had to put a finger to her nose the musk was so horrible. In spite of the smell, the hollow was clean and neatly kept. Harvested herbs and roots were suspended from the smoke blackened ceiling around a larger ominous bundle. There was enough room for a shallow fire pit and a bed of hemlock boughs tucked below a wool blanket. The walls were lined with baskets upon baskets of stuff. Some baskets of dried berries, hand fashioned tools, ceremonial items. Many more eclectic collections of gum wrappers, rusty nails, pop bottle caps, mining core samples, et cetera.

Early sat her down and proudly in turn showed her his collection of heads, spoons, watches, and pocket knives, giving examples to her to handle, encouraging her to turn them over in her fingers.
"You are a packrat," Ceri remarked. "No if's, and's, or but's about it. How long've you live here?"

"I've been here a long time," Early answered.

When they left the tree, one large raven croaked and hovered above them for miles. For all Ceri could tell, Earle E. Tuttle had been carved out of that tree and cared for by ravens.

Early disappeared for a while after that. During this absence State Troopers again became more visible near Native communities, and rumors amplified of threats to the governor. The senator did die several years later, in a traffic accident too bloody and bizarre to trace to anyone. Perhaps it was proximal error, but Early began to piece these things together and wonder of Early's role in the world, of his role between men and spirits, especially as Early helped look after her son. She never asked, though. She only observed, and wondered.

Tifani. In her fatigue Tifani had apparently forgotten to shut the room door the night before. She awoke to sounds of Ceri bustling around the kitchen downstairs.

"Good morning, Ceri."

"Well, good morning, tsín ptáúptsha."

"What can I do?" The kitchen tile was cold.

"Not a thing. Too many cooks spoil the broth." Ceri winked at her, then saw the peace pin Tifani had pinned to her top. "Well, where'd that come from?"

Tifani said she'd found it in the barn.

Ceri looked surprised, then studied it with furrowed brow and pouty lip. "Hm, I do believe that belonged to your grandfather Ciel. That was lost a long time ago."

Tifani took it off and handed to her.

"Keep a thing for seven years and you'll find a use for it." She turned it over and over in her fingers, reminiscing. "I reckon that was kept five times over."

She pinned it back on Tifani's top, but Tifani objected, "I don't...."

Ceri put her hand around it.

"Finders, keepers," she smiled. "I'm glad it was you that found it."

Ceri was insistent on not needing help, and Tifani didn't know if pressing would anger her. So she wandered through the lot to the saddle barn, watching warily for Kellye. It wasn't raining, yet, but the drainage and low lying areas were thick with fog, and the overcast was close to the earth, cowling secondary ridges within her view. The barn seemed clear of Kellye, or any other cowboy for that matter. Tifani opened the tack room and first refolded the blankets so the cedar chest could be latched closed. She hoisted a saddle from sawhorse to wall rack and started sorting through the confusion on the wooden table. She was separating leather and nylon bridles when the man with still wet hair and sopping hat appeared.
Tifani’s back tightened when he stood in the doorway. He noticed and stepped out of the way before extending his hand.

“Hey. How are ya?”

His was the tone and tenor of the rider she’d heard the morning before.

“Kay.”

He shook her hand the same way Traverse did, with an old-fashioned gentility.

“I’m Micah.”

“The fourth cowboy,” she said.

He laughed. “You make that sound like a Western dime novel about to happen. I kinda like that. You didn’t wait on any more flashing stop lights, did you?”

“What?” She remembered Shaw. “Wait. That was you, eh?”

He laughed again. “Yeah.”

Warm hazel eyes.

“You know,” he continued. “This is probably weird to say, but I held you as a baby.”

He was cute. She was ready to move on.

“I’m just trying to sort this shit out.”

“Right on,” he said. Then it was awkward silence. “Well, I’ll leave you to it then. Hey, it was good to meet you.”

She didn’t reply. She just looked at him as he left.

Micah. In Traverse’ Place the only spot I can have my back to the wall and see both doors is at the bar. Between peripheral vision and the mirror I can be pretty much aware of everyone in the room, watching over the head of a Guinness.

There’s a mousy brown haired girl laughing with her girlfriend and facing my direction. I don’t know why people devalue that hair color. I’ve always thought it appreciable. Her whole face brightens in a smile that squeezes her eyes shut. Her eyebrows twist and her head wobbles expressively. I smile to myself. I can’t help but adore that. Her happiness makes her beautiful, and I keep looking at her in the mirror.

I like the female anatomy.

I like it a lot.

I used to be ashamed of that and battled with this nebulous guilt over desire. Then I realized unless at least one man had desire for at least one woman, the whole of humanity would be up shit creek without a paddle.

I will be that man.
Why not? Attraction is pleasurable, natural, mystical, and godly, completely necessary to human evolution. I now make no bones about skin. I like it. I like dark skin, light skin, hard skin, and soft skin. It’s a marvel to me. An unbroken means to so much pain and ecstasy surrounding the human spirit.

The kinetic and geometric celebration of a woman’s body in particular mystifies my mind. Her surface rippling above muscular tension and release. Her spinal curve and bend rising out and away in open volume. Her breasts sloping downward from breath and heartbeat with rhythmic response to every movement. Her neck’s sometimes sinewy, other times baby soft cleavage and crease that contradicts strength and vulnerability. Her abdominal tension or relaxation around the connection of life, behind the curve of embrace.

Ah! A woman’s body stands alone as an aesthetic apex of all creation.

I can’t even overlook her variable ornamentation. Jean cutoffs and ripped jeans, my complete downfall. Shorts or skirts from mini to the ankle, my agony. The briefest suppression or revelation of availability! Tight tees or apron tops. Wool sweaters or ribbed tank tops. Bikinis! All a beautiful and acceptable accentuation of natural fairness. It draws attention, attention beckons attraction, and attraction, as I’ve said, makes the world go round. Perceptual companionship and the continuance of the species within such an amazing mystery.

This is where I get screwed.

For some reason, I just can’t get it together. Why is it those with the most desire are the most denied? Buddhism just really fucks me.

In college there was Clara who couldn’t fall in love with me in three months, but managed to fall in love with Jock in three minutes. Then in seminary I couldn’t fall in love with Sally though I tried for three years. I found Melanie in the ministry. She told me she didn’t want me, but she wouldn’t let me go until she did with a promise to call. I waited five years for that call. I dumped neediness on Lauren. Tori’s obsessiveness scared me away, or was it my fear of repeating the same mistake I made with Lauren? Then began my long retribution of women who wanted me and their significant other, not so much me as their significant other. Partly this could be because there doesn’t seem to be many women who want to hide in the mountains.

I did meet Brianna on the trail, however. Intelligently wealthy. Sensibly impoverished. The best I could hope for. I did nothing she didn’t ask me to and everything she did ask me to. In the end she declared dysfunctional our entire relationship with all the fondness I had for it. That bitch was my last ditch effort. I packed up my things and went back to being and a significant other. At least there was occasional warmth. That may not sound spiritual to you, but it’s the only spirituality women seem willing to invest in my life.

Early Tuttle once prophesied a good woman couldn’t be found by looking. I should live in a good way, and I would find a good woman. After over a decade of living a good way I still build a fire
warm enough for one in an otherwise empty cabin. Instead of concentrating my energies on being a
good man, I’m concentrating on contentment. I am alone in this world.

On the other end of the bar there’s this young man, pleased as punch and twice as full of it,
staring into the eyes of some woman.

*Enjoy her while you can, buddy. She’ll be fucking Bob the neighbor soon.*

I’m sorry. I do sometimes have revelations like that, but this is just bitter attribution, not
inspired prediction. May the Creator, grant them continual joy in each other. It’s good they’ve found
love.

I look back at Mousy Brown. She briefly glances at me in the minor then away.

When I first saw Tif it was her intensely brown and green eyes that I found attractive. The
following morning it was just the way she was sitting on the porch railing. Her casual recline in the
morning twilight was... captivating. Then when I happened on her in the tack room I was fully able to
take her in.

She was shorter than I with a thin body, and she had on—What do they call it?—a peasant top
with breasts full enough to be apparent with the subtlest pressure from her nipples. Her full black and
brown hair was partly pulled back, partly down.

My first impression was to turn around and walk out of there. She could lose the makeup, but
she was beautiful. My second was that she didn’t want me between her and the door.

I managed to take her hand with a smile, but I stuttered out some stupid comment about her
waiting at the stop sign in town. She maintained this straight confident posture. I wondered if her
confidence was real or a front. I could tell she was not all that interested in talking to me so I told her it
was good to meet her and left.

Wow! Was she incredible?

Mousy Brown meets my gaze directly this time, and her eyes are genial. I grin and look away
before she reacts. I’m careful to not look at her again.

I know it’s the quickest way to piss off a woman is to watch her and leave without talking to
her, and I haven’t figured out why I do this. These days even eye contact scares me. When it’s made I
immediately talk myself out of the approach. I determine why the relationship would be doomed to
failure. I find things, invent things even, that wouldn’t work between us. Then I silently walk away. All
without talking to her. How fucked up is that?

It’s like Tifani and I. We could never work. She’s Sean’s daughter. I’m Sean’s friend. Don’t
mix friendship and relationship.

I think I’m afraid of knowing what it is that I’m afraid of.
At any rate, I swallow my beer, put on my hat, and leave through the back. Traverse says Sheriff Brisbane’s stirring up shit in town. Already.

Tifani. Another day, more meals, soon another night. Even though she’d helped Ceri, cleaned the tack room, groomed the horses she was in their debt. Tifani had to get away and think. She got in her pickup and drove down Black Water Creek Road.

She could leave. She wanted to ride tomorrow, but she could keep right on driving and spend the night in the valley. How would she explain this to them? Guilt had her either way, and her life was getting more out of control.

She drove the state road through Shaw twice. The coffee shop was closed. There was no secluded place in the General Store. The only place to sit was Traverse’ Place. She’d avoided bars since college. Twenty miles into the mountains and it was the only place escape. Ironic.

She blew air out her lips and parked at Shaw General Store. A baby blue 1980 Ford New Yorker pulled to a stop beside her. The driver’s ass-length hair was straight and light brown. A white wife beater hugged her too heavily enlarged breasts behind an insulated vest.

She looked briefly at Tifani before opening the back door for a ten-year-old boy with large dark eyes.

In the rearview mirror she saw a white Cadillac and a tall gangbanger in oversized jeans and a Seattle Seahawks jersey. He impatiently walked with an exaggerated swagger up to the woman and boy. The woman leaned down to kiss her boy.

The child got in the Cadillac. The door slammed shut, and the obnoxiously loud bass bellowed in departure.

The mother turned away, visibly upset, and caught Tifani watching. Tifani turned away quickly.

“What are you looking at?” The girl called, unquestionably pissed off.

Tifani turned around and stuttered for something to say. “I was just…..”

“You pretty ones think you’ve got it all figured out.”

Tifani was in disbelief. Pretty? “Wait….”

She looked at Tifani with disgust and walked away.

Tifani would’ve been angry had it not been her fault.

Sigh. “Fuck it.”

Despite reservations about men and alcohol, she’d accept Traverse’ invitation. Inside the bar she had no time to feel awkward beside the “Seat Yourself” sign without the “Please.” Traverse saw her immediately and walked around the bar.

“Hey there, darlin’!”

Tifani backed off a step from his approach.
Traverse grabbed her hand and pulled her to the bar. “Come let me buy you a drink.”

“Rum and pop. Hold the rum.” She sat on an empty wooden barstool upholstered with a green plush cushion. “And I’ll pay.”

Traverse twisted a smile. “On the rocks?”

“Yeah.”

“Coming right up, beautiful.” He gave her a wink. “And your money’s no good here.”

Goddamnit! She stepped on the brass footrest and noted the old-fashioned brass spittoons between stools.

Most patrons seemed to belong in Shaw. Others didn’t really fit. Fifteen people lined the bar itself, a six-meter-long refurbished work of mahogany. The wall behind elaborately shelved with hundreds of liquor bottles around a bar-length mirror. High-backed booths along the wall behind her, circular poker tables down the middle, nearly every seat occupied. All were stained and reupholstered to match the bar. Real ivy cascading from plant holders. Green-globed lights overhead. Two clean pool tables beside a busy dance floor and Jukebox in the rear.

With a laugh Traverse slid her drink partway down the bar in the hackneyed Western way.

Tifani nearly returned his cheerfulness.

“Thank you,” she said.

“Well, thank you for gracing the bar.” He was even more handsome here than he was at the ranch. She’d noticed earlier that his body was squarely cut, like a Dick Tracey cartoon.

“Way to go. It’s beauty, Mr. Wertz.”

“Aw, now you’re gonna make me feel old. You call me Traverse like everyone else does.” He beamed as she looked around.

The place was busy. Nothing was shabby. Tifani was surprised. Traverse put a lot of work into this place.

“Where all these people from? Shaw ain’t this large.”

“No. No. Some live in these mountains, but almost as many drive up from the valley.”

“They drive an hour?”

“Well, they’re mostly coming or going. Merton lake is a big recreational area up here. On the other hand, maybe they think my place is worth the drive.” Again, that proud smile.

“Fer sure,” she stoked. Tifani raised her glass and took another drink in his honor. “You usually this busy?”

He nodded once. “Most of the time. I would be this busy seven days a week if Brisbane wasn’t County Law.”

“Brisbane?”

“Oh. You haven’t met Thurston Brisbane?”

She shook her head.
“That’s him in the last booth before the dance floor,” he said without looking. “He’s been staring you down since you got here, and not in a good way, if you know what I mean. Another one for you there, buddy?”

As Traverse waited on the man beside her Tifani turned and looked. Two-tone brown uniform so pressed she could’ve diced an apple on the creases. Well-starched collars holding the man’s neck like a vise. Clean shaven face glistening in the bar light. Lips thin and tight. Gray hair off the ears and collar, not one hair out of place.

He watched Tifani, and he watched the woman who’d confronted her outside. She sat at the opposite end, a butt poised in her hand, talking with some guy. Tifani turned quickly.

“So what’s the 411 on this hoser?” She asked when Traverse returned.

“Oh, he’s just one of these guys who paints the entire world bad and makes it his job to make it all righteous. You know, looking for demons under every bush. It’s just that Thurston imagines a bush in everyone’s clothing and starts shooting without cause. Everyone’s the bad guy and he’s the only savior God has left to damn the rest of us filthy sinners.”

Traverse held a hand perpendicular to bar in emphasis. “In plain words, he’s your typical asshole a uniform. There it is, short and simple.”

The entire time Traverse was talking she had to strain to hear him. There was a very loud well-dressed woman sitting directly behind Tifani, discussing with her cell phone the “conundrums of being Indian.”

Traverse yelled to one of his waitresses, “Hey, peanut! Tell that lady her conundrums are loud enough for every Indian in the bar!”

Someone at the bar quietly said, “Now she’s as ‘red’ as we are.”

Tifani turned to see a well-dressed First Nations man with dark skin and a heavy skull on broad shoulders. Cornrows and braids were gathered in a tie behind his head. His eyes twinkled, but he otherwise acted like nothing was out of the ordinary.

Parking-lot woman was racking balls in the back. She was alone. Tifani took her drink back there.

“Need an opponent?”

The woman twisted the corner of her mouth. “You’ll do.”

Tifani took a cue from the wall, rolled it on the table. “Tifani.”

“Ria.” She racked the balls and carefully took off the frame. “Break ‘em.”

Tifani chalked her fingers, ran them up and down the cue, took aim, and rolled the ball into better position with her index finger. After a few trial approaches she fly with practiced force. It was a good break. She sunk the eleven and fifteen right off. The cue ball finished behind the nine and a corner pocket. She loved the thud that traveled along the wood to her fingers and the subsequent pathump in the pocket.
“Shit,” said Ria. “Good thing I didn’t have money on the game.”

Tifani pointed at the corner pocket with her cue and hit the ball into a side pocket instead.

“What bullshit.” Tifani turned to her drink.

Ria smirked and took her turn, pocketing the first she aimed at but missing the second.

“How old’s your boy?” asked Tifani.

“Ten. His name’s Jole.”

Tifani raised a leg and rested her hip against the sideboard to reach the middle of the table, fingers down, cue against first knuckle and thumb. The cue slid easily forward and back twice before contact. The ten and thirteen each took a different corner.

“That’s a good name, eh.”

Tifani surveyed the table and took a shot at the twelve. She could’ve made it, but she missed, setting it up for Ria without being obvious.

Ria sunk the three. “Worries me sick when he’s gone. All his father knows is gangbangin’ and drugs, but he’s got minimum custody.”

She made the six disappear. “So who are you related to?”

Tifani didn’t know how to answer this.

Ria saw her confusion. “Who are your people?”

“Tsináti.”

“Uh huh.”

It wasn’t enough. “Sean Samuels, I gues, is supposedly my father.”

“Micaiah Loupe?”

Tifani reluctantly nodded and shrugged. “She was supposedly my mother.”

“We’re cousins.” Ria half smiled.

“Yeah?”

“My great grandfather Esmond was your great grandmother Guadalupe’s half-brother. Anna’s our great great grandmother.”

“Kay.” Tifani caught Traverse’ eye and held up two fingers before taking her next shot. “I didn’t know before just a few months ago.”

Ria lay down two more quarters. “We’re all related ‘round here.”

They spent the next hour playing pool and talking herbs and music. Both jumped when the Sheriff interrupted their game.

He looked dead center at Ria who immediately looked away. “I’ll have no whoring tonight, young woman.”

“I ain’t turning tricks anyway.”

Both Ria and Brisbane looked at Tifani in surprise. Brisbane pulled himself up to full stature, hands coming to rest either side of his buckle.
Tifani was relentless. “As if! I already said I ain’t working.”

“You’re Sean’s daughter aren’t you?”

“What’s the crime here?” Tifani’s pretense was well-practiced. “Are the balls attached to somebody or what?”

Thurston clenched and unclenched his teeth. His jaw muscles tightened and released. “I’m honestly not surprised at this. I knew you’d be trouble.”

“Yeah, I seen this flick, too.” Tifani placed the cue ball and leaned back on the bumper.

Ria looked at Tifani.

Thurston picked up the ball and pinned the cue to the table.

“I need some identification.”

Tifani stood up. “Me too.”

“NOW!”

The entire bar reacted with silent attention. The Jukebox offered inappropriate background for the altercation. Traverse made his way to the situation.

“Didn’t freakin’ bring any.” Tifani answered, defiant past the line of sensibility.

Traverse said, “Calm down, Brisbane. These girls are just playing pool.”

“It seems you are serving alcohol without identification, Traverse.”

“Fine me. Everybody in the bar knows who she is.”

Brisbane narrowed his eyes at Tifani. “Who are you?”

Traverse tried to interrupt, “You kn—.”

“Who are you!?!?”

Tifani’s skin was hot all over and her stomach fluttered, but she squared her shoulders and looked him in the eye. “Tifani.”

“Tifani what?”

“Tifani H-Hunter.” Damn. Why’d she stutter?

“Tifani Hunter, I watched you come in here showing your midriff and your jeans so tight they look painted on. Then I watch you consorting with a known prostitute. The Good Book says whoremongers will have their place in the lake of fire and brimstone. They’ll also have their place in county court.”

“It also goes, ‘Judge not, lest you be judged,’ Ass Hat.”

Brisbane brought his lips so tight that the blood left them. Tifani fully expected him to explode and was quite surprised when his words came out quiet and crisp.

“‘By your fruits you shall know them,’ says the Word. I spoke to the man your trollop friend was with before your game. He admitted that he was propositioned. Now I see the both of you in here together. What does that tell me?”

“Something about narrow-mindedness, I think.”
The air was electric with the tension between their gaze; neither one looked away for a full minute.

"From this point forward you had better take the narrow gate and straight road around this town. You'll not get by with so much next time."

Ria was gone.

Tifani had purposefully covered her departure.

Brisbane snorted through his nose, annoyed, and turned to leave, but Traverse stood eye-to-eye in his way.

"This is the last time, Brisbane. Don't come in my door again without a warrant."

Brisbane walked around Traverse.

"And don't forget whose daughter this is."

Halfway toward the door the Sheriff shot back, "I won't forget you, Traverse."

Then he was gone.

Traverse encouraged his customers to relax. People slowly started dancing again. Others turned back to their drinks. Everyone whispered to each other.

"Sorry, Traverse."

"You alright, there, gal?" Traverse started to offer a single-arm embrace.

Tifani stopped him with an open palm and set up the cue ball again.

"Is he going to bring you trouble?"

"Hell, no, darlin'. I'm sixty-four years old. What's he going to do to someone waiting to die? Shit, I sold alcohol when it was illegal, just as a way flip off the law. 'Ass hole' is the only language some people speak. Don't take any shit from him."

Tifani lunged forward and—Crack!--the cue ball crashed into the others.

"I didn't think I did."

She moved around the table for a better angle.
Conclusion

This project was about the process of including the subject of writing as a participant in the process of that writing. In this case Native women were asked to inform and critique the fictional novel I was writing. The result was that the process became linked to the participants' own time and performance, which includes their inhibitions. To begin, the difficulty in recruiting participants slowed down the entire process.

Participation

I approached probably thirty different women about participating, but most were not interested. The reasons for this include my own reflexivity and actual demonstrated inhibitions of the participants.

*My Own Reflexivity.* One of the most difficult inhibitions of solicitation was my own hyper self-awareness. There is certain irony in a White male researching the experience of Native women. Additionally, I approached this research as a novice anthropologist well aware of the discipline’s reputation in the Native community for mistreatment and misrepresentation. As if these characteristics were not disadvantage enough, the research contributes toward a fictional novel, a genre that traditionally exploits and generalizes both Natives and women (see Introduction). I have tripped all over my awareness of this baggage that I bring to potential participation.

I should have approached people, offered my hand, and said, “Hi! I’m a writer, and I’m doing this piece on Native women. Would you tell me a little bit about your own experiences?” Instead, I approached it apologetically, whispered “writer”, blushed about my color and gender, while promising I was not one of “those people” who had unreasonably embarrassed these people. I just could not find the confidence to convey the positives as certainly as I conveyed my own anxiety over potential negatives. There is no doubt this severely hindered participant solicitation.

*Actual Demonstrated Inhibitions.* I approached people individually and tribally. I approached people that I knew and people I did not. In many indigenous cultures it is considered inappropriate to directly say no. Apparently this may be the case here, since responses were more often than not altogether silent.

I was particularly interested in gaining the participation of the two Western Oregon confederations, since the setting of the story was in the Western Cascades and also because several other participants were from an Eastern Oregon confederation near the High Cascades. RO’ and OC are the only members of these Western Oregon confederations who agreed to participate. Both spoke to other members of their tribes about participating in this project.
RO’s tribe was actively uninvolved. I spoke to many other members of her tribe. One member literally told me not to call her, she would call me, and the implied response of all others was the same. It distinctly felt as though there were a heavy wall against outsiders to which most if not all tribal members colluded. A visit to this tribe’s Cultural Resources Management (CRM) Department verified this feeling. I had a cordial but straightforward conversation with RD. She verbally hesitated and at length said that she would see what she could do. As she said this, though, I knew she meant to say no. RD gave me the understanding I needed to accept why her tribal members would not be involved.

As RD explained it, Oregon tribes, like other tribes in the U. S., have only recently begun to find sovereign and economic stability. With such development tribes are confronted by an increasing number of legitimate and illegitimate stakeholders in their newly achieved viability. The resources tribes have to share with their constituents, however, is often very limited. In the case of Western Oregon tribes, there is little or no land title to speak of, and so, as RD explained, their resources are overwhelmingly intellectual. Sure, all I was asking for was individual descriptions of their experience. What I failed to recognize before this meeting, however, was that descriptions of their experience as a people is the only significant resource they have, and they protect this resource fiercely. Of course this is their right and responsibility. Whether or not the reasons given to me were straightforward, I gained an appreciation that tribes have their own legitimate reasons for not helping.

This understanding was in itself influential on the draft and may also have bearing on the reasons why OC’s tribe was equally as inaccessible. This community also has very little land title and primarily intellectual cultural resources. The experience of their response, however, was subjectively different, however. OC’s tribe suggested less of a wall, more of a preoccupation. I was given to believe that participants were being sought, but participation just never materialized. OC is herself very involved in her tribe, and agreed to participate. I chose not to involve her as both her husband and she were experiencing poor health and medical treatment.

Other inhibitions were cited by other individuals. Though my interest was in any experience of any Native woman, estrangement from their Native culture discouraged many from participating. KV traces her ancestry to an Eastern U. S. tribe that remains federally unrecognized. One sister is a Native activist, the other actively Native. When I approached KV about participating, she declined because she felt she could not contribute since she was not personally active in her Native culture. There were two other people I approached who felt as unable to contribute since they were not raised on a reservation.

Finally, there were those cross-cultural moments that just defy my attempt to explain them. For instance, once I told an acquaintance that I wanted to interview Native Oregonian women, meaning of course, women who were Oregonian and Native American. She escorted me into what she said was “a whole room of ‘em,” and I did not recognize the mistake until after I had asked one woman if she was an active member of her tribe, and she replied that no, she was pretty uninvolved with German tribal roots.
Another time I contacted ED, to whom I had been introduced at a recent function, and asked if I could talk to her about the project. She invited me to meet with her at an upcoming powwow. I attended, saw her, and waited patiently for an opportune moment when I re-introduced myself to her and her husband. The moment was apparently not as opportune as I had hoped, and she told me to catch her the following morning. I waited the following morning until nearly noon for her to appear, and even then she did not acknowledge me. Perhaps I was not assertive enough. Perhaps she was preoccupied. Regardless, my attending that event solicited only good field notes.

It was from inexperience and odd experiences such as these that my year-long search for participants arrived at a final involvement of five people instead of the eight to ten I had hoped for. To be sure, the solicitation itself contributed to learned experience and field observations that not only influenced this project nearly to the same degree as the interviews themselves, but will also contribute to the improved formulation of future research.

Participant Description. Ultimately, five Native women from Oregon expressed willingness to participate. EN is the eldest, recognized as an elder by her community and nationally recognized storyteller of her Eastern Oregon tribal community. EN actively participates in the Culture and Heritage Language Program. LO, though younger than EN, is also recognized as an elder of the same tribe, and also active in the Language Program as a teacher. Her vocation is involved with traveling to schools where tribal children are in attendance in order to conduct language classes. SN is the youngest participant from this same tribal community. At the time of this interview she worked for the university 4-H extension as a community educator on dietary nutrition. She is also involved as an apprentice to certain ceremonial functions of her tribe. Since this interview she has changed vocations.

TW and RO are both students at the university. TW is a member of an Eastern tribe that has been relocated to Oregon and is active in research relevant to that community. RO is a member of a tribe in Western Oregon and conducting research relevant to traditional ecological knowledge.

First Interview Themes

The participants and specific events described in the initial interviews were not to be appropriated in this fictional work. The themes described in both individual and collective interviews were used to influence the novel and were to some degree apparent in the initial four chapters that are included in this thesis. I will describe each interview theme followed by examples of how they were incorporated into the novel. These themes include: authentic experience, discrimination, equilibration, anxiety, indifference, anonymity, language, reactions to interruption, reactions to language, and reactions to interviews.
**Authentic Experience.** First, this project is not scientific in nature; in other words, I do not want to make generalizations. Each individual interview is not particularly generalizable to Native experience. One participant’s description of their experience proves nothing more than a Native woman’s ability to describe such an event. However, if one Native woman describes her experience as being a certain way, then there is the possibility that other Native women could feel the same way.

The nature of scientific inquiry requires multiple repeatable results to prove an idea, but only a single result for uncertainty. If multiple studies suggest that Native women will react a certain way to an experience, but one Native woman is found who does not, then it follows that not all Native women will react the same way. The testimonials of Native women to the great diversity represented in their experience attests to the reality of this hypothetical (cf. Mihesuah 2003).

The goal of this project was to share power to authenticate a novel about Native women with Native women. A single theme in a single description represents a potential authentic experience. This being the case, descriptions both individual and collectively shared are relevant. A single theme described by one participant carries as much value, if not significance, as a broad theme described by all participants. Both suggest that a Native woman may have that experience. A sample of those themes most relevant to the development of the first draft and most apparent in the first four chapters of that draft follow here.

**Discrimination.** LO, TW, RO, and to some degree SN indicated a relationship between experienced discrimination and perceived difference. LO was directly taught difference in relation to discrimination. TW talked about how discrimination was both because she was different and that it reinforced this feeling of difference. RO experienced discrimination resulting from the difference between her population group and that of the discriminatory agent. In SN’s accounts there was always distinction between her and those from whom her feelings of discrimination originated: her family versus their family, her versus the other one’s children, from there versus not from there. In these participant’s interviews reactions to difference were closely associated with their reactions to discrimination.

There were several sources of discrimination discussed in the initial interviews. LO, SN described, then EN and TW inferred discrimination from their own people. In fact, a significant portion of LO’s descriptions and all of SN’s descriptions concern being made to feel little or no human value involved perceived mistreatment by her own people. LO experienced discrimination from other Natives primarily for her interaction with whites. She also experienced discrimination from Whites who were new to the area. She differentiated White newcomers from those who had settled there previously with whom they largely got along. She also cited discrimination inter-tribally and between regional locals and newcomers.
In *A Black Water Creek Mythology*, Shaw is a predominately white community, though there are several Native families who live in the area. There is, however, a dichotomy between non-Native locals and non-Native newcomers. Traverse Wertz, Kellye Stoddard, Micah Boden, and the twins (not present in the first four chapters) are all non-Natives well-established in the community. Characters like the woman in Traverse’ Place who is discussing the conundrums of “Indian-ness” loudly over the phone are recent or passing through.

Discrimination experienced by both SN and TW was fostered by their financial hardship. LO suggests that both intra- and inter-group discrimination is a result of asymmetry fostered by economics and assimilation. Her descriptions were of the haves discriminating against the have-nots even among children, where the haves were those who spoke English, dressed Western, or had money and the have-nots were those who did not. Both RO and LO described this asymmetry as associated with place on the reservation: the North end of the reservation versus the South end, those raised on the reservation and those raised off.

TW, RO, and SN all discussed discrimination from the misattributions of others. TW talked about her Native grandfather being called Hispanic. RO shared how her brother was derided with all the usual stereotypes when his ethnicity was admitted. SN was attacked for behavior that was not her own.

Tifani’s experience of discrimination in the context of her own Native community is not present in the first four chapters. The beginning of this plot development, however, can be seen in Ria’s initial slander of Tifani as being one of those “pretty girls” who thinks “they’ve got it all together.” Tifani’s education, financial security, and being raised away from Black Water Creek is opposed to Ria’s lack of education, financial hardship, and being raised on the reservation, which are the factors that continue to develop and incite Ria’s later discriminatory behavior.

**Equilibration.** In terms of psychological functioning, equilibration is maintained by new information (disequilibration) being incorporated in one of two ways. The individual either accounts for the new information with existing schemas (e. g. assimilation), or else they accept the new information as a new schema and make the necessary reassociations (e. g. accommodation). It is evident in TW’s descriptions that she accounted for discriminatory experiences with pre-existing schemas. She assimilates the negative relationship on the basis that her part in it challenges the agent to change.

In several other passages, the participants describe moments that look very much like assimilation, and would be identified as that here, except that the schemas used to account for the discriminatory behavior did not exist at the moment of discrimination. For instance, in her descriptions of discrimination, LO attributed discriminatory behavior to the agent’s mixed heritage, but says that she made this association later. In psychology this tendency to attribute negative behavior to static internal factors is known as the fundamental attribution error (cf. Kunda 2002: 525; cf. 525-533). SN
also made a fundamental attribution in her description of perceived failure by stating the discriminatory agent had no right to discriminate based on his ethnicity.

TW reacts differently to intra-group discrimination. She seems to attribute the discriminatory behavior of an in-group member to external factors; they were just angry about other experiences that she experienced later herself. TW also accounts for educational discrimination as a quid pro quo relationship. After a time of enduring the discrimination, she decided that both the agent and she benefit from the relationship. SN rationalized her feelings of discrimination that stemmed from her perceived failure with the justification that the failed role was not her responsibility to begin with.

The goal of equilibration is to match self to surrounding environment, to balance skills and challenge. Disequilibration, or the inability to account for new information, represents a state of psychic entropy, or in these cases anxiety. In their descriptions of discrimination, TW, LO, and SN all apparently accounted for the discriminatory behavior well after the event, which suggests a level of psychic entropy and associated anxiety existed until the participants were able to make this rationalization. The conclusion here is that moments of experienced discrimination may defy equilibration and subject the discriminated to an anxious state until satisfactory rationalization can be made (cf. Csikszentmihalyi 1990).

In A Black Water Creek Mythology, Tifani battles with the childhood discrimination she received from her adoptive parents, whom she now refers to simply as the Hunters. Tifani was unable to account for Mr. Hunter’s abuse and Mrs. Hunter’s criticism of her, neither is she able to account for her experience of this discrimination since discovering they were not her parents. The anxiety she feels over this is apparent in her thoughts on the airplane and the flashback to her fascination with horses. Her behavior is also representative of this when she is careful to assess the details of her surroundings, her access to the door, her eagerness to please.

Anxiety. Latent anxiety underlies emotional reactions that participants referenced. TW and SN had the most to say about their emotional reactions to discrimination, but TW, SN, and RO all associate experiences of discrimination with anger. LO and SN associate their experiences of discrimination with feelings of hurt, TW and SN with feeling ugly. For TW experienced discrimination resulted in insecurity over looking Native, feeling Native. On the other hand, it re-associated her with those other experiences of discrimination she had already experienced. It intimidated her and disconnected her from other people. Discrimination was embarrassing for SN and encouraged her to feel fault for things that were not her responsibility.

LO, TW, RO and SN all described moments of fear in response to their environment when it was associated with difference. For TW and SN this fear was facilitated by stories they had heard in association with the difference between others and themselves. All four participants described a process of emotions beginning with fear. For LO and SN explicitly, TW and RO implicitly, they experienced a
procession from fear to no fear in relation to this difference. RO experienced a procession from fear to anger.

The beginning of a parallel process of fear to anger with Tifani can be seen in the first two chapters and is considered by Anna’s character when she says, “When you first come in here I seen the look of fear on you, like you was afraid of what you might see, or afraid of what we might...you... we might see in you, or something.”

To portray Tifani with the appropriate emotions and not typify women as “emotional” was difficult to do. She’s obviously hurt and confused by experiences described before, and feelings of ugliness and devaluation are exhibited when she looks at herself in the mirror or when she is nonplussed to hear Ria call her a “pretty girl”. Disconnection is present in her reluctance to call Sean, Anna, and Ceri “her family” or even accept their hospitality. Tifani also feels disconnection from her past that is exhibited in her reluctance to speak of it much and her cognitive distancing from the Hunters.

Potentially out of place is Tifani’s spontaneous anger. The question of her aggression was introduced in the secondary interviews. Why does Tifani become aggressive when confronted? This explanation will be given later.

Indifference. Anxiety and emotion, however, contrast the overwhelming experience of the two elder participants. EN and LO both demonstrated a definite indifference to discrimination. Not in the sense that they did not care about it, but that they had no reaction to it. EN dismissed concern over her own experience of discrimination based on the reputation that she held in her community. LO dismissed it on the basis of how she was raised.

LO was taught difference by her mother and grandmother in the context of discrimination. “They got their own world they're living in. You got your own.” She was taught concern for others’ feelings, so when confronted with discriminatory behavior, her reaction was to wonder what was wrong with them, but not to feel intimidated by it. LO talked about how she could perceive other’s discrimination of her and distinguished this from actually experiencing discrimination. To her a lack of experienced discrimination did not equate with knowing that others were discriminating against her.

Since LO was speaking of traditional teachings, these may have also been EN’s upbringing and explain her indifference as well. TW and RO also described an understanding of difference, but this did not prevent their own reactions to discrimination. It is possible that LO and EN’s indifference was more likely exercised restraint from verbalizing reaction to discrimination.

SN’s descriptions, however, seem to reinforce traditional indifference toward discrimination and give it further context. She told of three incidences of experienced discrimination. In all three she expressed that there was a desire to react toward those from whom the behavior originated, but in none of the episodes did she react. During the second and third events she expressed pride at her self-control. The reasons she cited for this was that it was not the place for anger. During the third occurrence her
mother encouraged her, “This is not the place.” There is a distinct difference between SN’s experiences and those of the others. Namely, SN’s experiences of discrimination occurred in a considered sacred place. Nevertheless, her restraint and her mother’s teaching of restraint parallel the experiences relayed by LO.

The plot of A Black Water Creek Mythology had not progressed enough within the first four chapters to include the difference between Tifani’s reaction to discrimination. The last moment included here was Tifani’s confrontation with Sheriff Thurston Brisbane. Later in the story, Tifani’s reaction is subtly corrected by Anna and Ceri, and their teaching will follow the same lines of indifference to others’ discriminatory behavior.

Anonymity. There is one final passage in TW and SN’s initial interviews that is important to note in context of discrimination. In the following passage TW discusses her desire in response to feelings of difference.

[I’m] sort of wanting to make... everybody feel safe, and not having this disconnectness between us to fall into. Not wanting... not wanting there to be something that makes other people look and say, “You’re different. You’re bizarre. You’re...” whatever that is. Sort of wanting that to go away.

This description corresponds to another description gathered from another person I approached (NH) who did not officially participate in this project. NH experienced an inability to feel anonymous during her three-year service as a Peace Corps volunteer in Kenya. As a White U. S. woman, NH would nearly forget herself among Kenyan friends, but Kenyans would draw attention to her difference, making her feel distinct. NH related this experience to a Black U. S. woman, who responded to NH that her own constant experience in the U. S., despite her citizenship, was that she never experienced anonymity in the States.

TW’s desire echoes this idea. TW’s reaction to difference is a desire for anonymity not only for herself, but also for differentiated others with whom she identifies. SN described her own response to a particularly embarrassing experience of discrimination as a desire to collapse, crumble, and cry. Taken with her horror that people’s attention was on her when she experienced this discrimination, this could also be understood to be a desire for anonymity. NH suggested to me that this would be Tifani’s experience as a displaced Native woman. She would finally find a measure of anonymity among her own people that she was never able to experience before.

Language. LO said that her native language held “more power” than English to intervene in moments of discrimination. The role of language in describing the experience of being a Native woman also held significant power in the development of plot and characters. Personal observations of Native communities during this project made me feel that writing on Native women without writing about Native language would be unrepresentative of reality. A literature review also underscored the

So it was somewhat surprising that only two of the participants mentioned the experience of their Native language in their initial interview. Nevertheless, the content of what both had to say about their Native language validated my concern for including Native language in the novel. It is notable that EN is involved with a language program as an elder informant, RO as a teacher, SN as a student, and I as an intern and database consultant. It is very possible that had I interviewed as many people with no involvement in their Native language and if I had not been involved in a language program, that I would have drawn very different themes from the interviews.

Be that as it may, both LO and SN’s experiences agreed that native language was a stage for discrimination, mostly from within their own culture. For LO this was the result of some on the reservation having had accelerated assimilation into dominant Western culture and acquisition of the English language. This asymmetry became a source of competition and antagonism between those who had assimilated more and those who had assimilated less. SN’s experience of discrimination stemmed from her supposed acquisition of Native language in a way that another deemed inappropriate. LO also included examples of how the teaching of Native language became a source of contention and feelings of discrimination between Natives and the dominant school system.

Both SN and LO associated understanding of Native language with understanding of culture. SN spoke of her disconnection from her own culture and the sense of connection she found in the understanding of her culture through learning her own Native language. In particular she cited an ethic of sharing she learned in association with her acquisition of Native language. This process was helping her develop a more integrated identity within her culture. LO spoke of her childhood when immersion in her Native language was equivalent to immersion in her people, way, and values. She shared her husband’s loss of culture as subsequent to his loss of Native language. Revitalization of Native language was associated by both SN and LO with a renewed knowledge of their culture.

LO went into specific deterrents and facilitations to Native language that she experienced in her life. For her, language acquisition effort and difficulty was particularly associated with a critical mass immersion. In her past, speaking English was difficult and she would avoid it when she was immersed among people who spoke her Native language. Today, speaking her Native language is difficult and effortful as she is immersed among people who mostly speak English. Her marriage to a man who had been raised to assimilate into the dominant culture facilitated her abandonment of teaching her Native language to her children as well as her own loss of her Native language. LO described her mother-in-law as having an experience that was very much the same.

LO experienced three things that facilitated the use of her Native language. Today she finds particular solace in her ability to use state law to facilitate and protect her ability to teach her Native language. There are relatively recent state laws that insist on the ability of Native peoples to teach their
children their Native language, and LO put special effort in knowing them. In the past, surprisingly, it was the community church that facilitated both LO’s acquisition of English and her ability to speak her Native language. Churches and missions are often considered degenerative of indigenous culture, particularly of language. In LO’s case, however, services were well attended by the community and held in both English and the Native language. So LO was exposed to both through the weekly community event. LO lamented the closure of that local institution as a marked step toward a loss of language and culture among her people. Finally, grandparents were cited as having a particular role in fostering Native language and cultural knowledge.

The building of language into this novel became a major undertaking. To maintain consistency with the idea of a completely fictional novel, I fictionalized the language. To continue my goal of realistic descriptions of Native women’s experience, I used phonemes and structure of languages historically local to the setting to inform and develop the fictional language as if it had been present and synchronistic with those languages. To the reader this development is well represented in the first four chapters present here. Tifani encounters her Native language immediately in Anna Manuel’s greeting and responds with expected confusion but demonstrated noncommittal. The continued exposure to the language from several Native characters continues, and will continue to build through the story until Tifani commits to learning her own language in order to better understand her culture.

Second Interview Themes

One question that was considered was whether the participants’ reading of the draft would elicit further response from the original inquiry, since only 2 participants were available for the second interviews. However, the second interviews were compared to the first interviews of the same participants just to ascertain what differences existed here.

Participant TW discussed 49 themes during the first interview, 36 in the second. Only 15 of these themes were discussed in both of her interviews. Of the total 70 themes covered in both interviews, 21 were covered for the first time in the second interview. Of these newly mentioned themes, 12 were reactions to the book and not relevant to the inquiry of the first interview. So TW’s second interview produced 9 new themes not specific to the critique of the book, accounting for 13% of the themes coded. Participant LO discussed 46 themes during the first interview, 26 in the second, 6 in both. Of the total 66 themes, 20 were novel in the second, 19 irrelevant to first inquiry. So LO’s second interview produced only 1 theme that was not discussed in her initial interview.

This single new theme, however, spoke to the fact that there is a certain way of speaking in a reservation environment that may only gradually be acquired by those introduced to it. This was a significant critique of the dialogue in the novel.

LO’s themes included important information, including the idea that fidelity strengthens Native bloodline, her considered irrelevance of blood quantum in matters of desire for Native ethnicity,
and her concern about the lack of cultural transmission in younger generations of her community. All of these were important themes that had not surfaced in initial interviews, and were significant because I thought they were important themes to include in the novel. In this project secondary interviews did not elicit a significant amount of supplementary information, but they did elicit significant supplementary information in terms of relevance.

Reactions to Interruption. In the secondary interview LO generally reacted to Tifani as “real life today,” even where she distinguished her from the way she was raised. She identified Tifani’s experience of interruption and reintroduction as believable. In this context she spoke to another conversation she had about care and politeness with children because “we don’t know what children has come through already”. For LO this time of interruption and reintroduction also made sense of certain behaviors of Tifani that were not consistent with Native culture. LO said she reminded herself how Tifani had just returned to Black Water Creek.

Tifani’s desire for her culture that motivated her to return to Black Water Creek was chosen by LO to explain her believability. She related this reality in a poignant passage.

That's natural with Indians. I don't care how you might... have a... tribe and then have something else, you know. Other races. And if you leave your ways, you know, or don't grow up with it, it'll still be there. It'll still pull you back. You'll always want to, still want to know about it regardless of how, how assimilated or far away you might be from your Indian side of life.

So I tell people like that. Cause—and it's true—you will always desire your Indian side of life. I don't care how little bit it might be. That's why you hear these people, and you laugh at 'em. “I'm Cherokee,” and, “I had a Cherokee grandmother,” and they might not have drop, drop of blood of it anymore. But see there's still desire in that side of their life, even if they might not have a drop of blood of it.

To be a member of this tribe and many others an individual must have at least one confirmable quarter of Native blood quantum. There is a mother-to-daughter admonition that has become commonplace in contemporary Native communities. Their children or grandchildren may not be members of the tribe if they marry someone who is not Native. People with whom I have spoken defend blood quantum requirement as a necessary protection of their heritage. LO infers a similar perspective elsewhere, but here she also asserts that desire for culture is static and regardless of blood quantum.

As much as LO reinforced Tifani’s believability, TW stumbled over her personality. She spoke of Tifani in the same context, as one who had been gone and was now returned, and felt that it was unrealistic. She struggled with the difference in Tifani’s temperament. She agreed with the appropriateness of Tifani’s behavior as one raised away from her culture and only now coming back to learn it, but she did not think this experience of “two worlds” was evident enough. On the other hand, TW felt that Tifani assimilated too quickly back into her Native culture. But it was mostly Tifani’s language that was her biggest critique of the draft.
Reactions to Language. One of my concerns in sharing this draft with participants was over the presence of vulgarity. I was particularly worried that the draft would offend the elder participants, EN and LO. I was not especially worried about the reaction of younger participants. I received two completely different perspectives, from the exact opposite age than I would have expected.

Both discussed profanity without being solicited. TW felt there was too much profanity. LO did not. The elder of the two specifically stated that the profanity was realistic and just right so that the story did not turn her away. TW specifically stated that the profanity was over the top and created two impressions of the Native heroine that were conflicted. Initially, TW said that it was only Tifani’s language that bothered her. She felt that Tifani too quickly learned to speak like other Natives in the area, and too quickly spoke informally with them. In the end she said all of the vulgarity bothered her.

This response may be more appropriate for Tifani. If she is portrayed as completely reintegrating with a culture that she has not experienced since infancy, this may be too out of touch with the experience of many Native women. While the desire to return home may be the way it is with Native women, the relatively easy and entire reintegration may be unrealistic.

Reactions to the Interviews. What influence did the second interviews have? Much. The second critiquing interviews both corroborated accuracies and challenged inconsistencies. Unexpectedly, they also highlighted intentional contradictions and unintentional accuracies. The practical experience of the interview method is that the ethnography can turn about and the writer becomes the one interviewed. Throughout one interview I was questioned about why this was done and what was the purpose for that. The old school perspective of the ethnographer asking questions and then analyzing their answers went right out the window. The interview became a dialogue where we talked together about where the book was and where it should go with the recorder serving as a mechanical over-the-shoulder observer of our dialogue. In the old school way the ethnographer got to have all the positive emotions: empathy, educated distance, novel experience. In this experience I was as much under the microscope as the participant. We were both participants. In the case of this project, ethnology was an approach employed not only to write a good story, but also to share power of the writing with those about whom I was writing. That power was shared through interviews. The practical experience for me was one of being involved with as opposed to involving others. I was building relationships through this process, not just getting Native review for my writing. I gained a number of long-term friends who are as aware of my life as I am of theirs. We shared stories with each other. We’ve shared gifts with each other. During the initial interviews these relationships were young and awkward. During the secondary interviews, with one friend in particular, she was so comfortable that she felt a certain amount of freedom to make me uncomfortable. I was suddenly being asked more questions than I was asking, and left to defend why I’d written certain things. That was as it should have been.
Both participants who completed both interviews stated that they were not offended in the end by reading the text. Both had moments where they were hesitant with the text. Participant LO was struck by the difference between “today’s woman” and the woman she was “raised to be”. She was also struck by the sexuality of the characters. In both cases she rationalized that these conflicts were the “way the world is”, and concluded that the text was an accurate depiction. Participant TW also described moments of conflict with the text that were resolved when she kept reading. Both commended the process of including them in the influence of the novel.

Discussion

There are two participants remaining to be interviewed. They expressed their interest in this project and invested in the initial interview. Although their life experience did not match the timeline of this agenda, their involvement is still important to the development of this novel. At their convenience, these interviews will be finished and their involvement continued. Another draft of the novel will be completed as a response to the secondary interviews and, potentially, a third interview will be conducted.

The lack of response received from the confederations in Western Oregon does not negate the importance of their knowledge. At this time a letter will be drafted to these tribes, updating them on the project’s progress, and giving them the opportunity and my willingness to meet with them if they have any questions about the publishing of the novel. If nothing else, it is important to me that they have knowledge of the work I have done and how I conducted myself.

Recommendations for Other Novels. This project was a good first attempt at shared writing. There are a number of areas that I would do differently and a number of areas that I would repeat again. Initially, I would approach another project by arranging informing meetings with invested population groups. If I was working again with Oregon Native tribes, I would visit each of them impromptu, meet with a cultural resource management representative, and leave them a copy of my project summary. I would continue to update them about the progress periodically, whether or not they were involved. I feel that whether or not they are directly invested, they are due the communication.

There is a concern about participants feeling like you are making money off of them. What do these recommendations mean if the relationship is based on marketing? This is a difficult question to answer. For myself, I had no money to offer my participants. I was a graduate student and have not yet published any major work. What I did offer my participants was my help with their own projects and a share in whatever profits I may eventually make off the book. What I was careful to demonstrate whenever I could was that my friendship with them was more important than whatever information they could give me.
Developing friendships with people and then asking them to participate if they are willing is the best way to proceed. The researcher should find out what is going on in the community and show up when appropriate. Hang out, observe, talk to people, make notes, and be real. This means a lengthy time of pre-project development, but the level of commitment and involvement is dependent upon it. The long-term relationships are priceless. I would give this a year. Really.

Finally, a handful of committed participants is enough. Multiple interviews with a few committed participants is more worthwhile and will reveal more influential information than a plethora of participants with whom you cannot keep up. The sharing of control over the novel is frightening for a writer, but it was my experience that my fears were for the most part unrealized. No one tried to steal my idea. No body told me I had to change the whole format. Everyone appreciated the opportunity to have a say.
Endnotes

1 Initials are used as pseudonyms for participants, while actually names refer to characters in the novel.


