

AH-DIK DO-DAUN



Record of the
Reindeer Dynasty

Midewiwin Grand Council

Ah-Dik Do-Daun

Presented by

Midewiwin Grand Council

First edition. November 23, 2025
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Prologue: The Time of the Great Seeing

These are the words kept in the bundles of the Midewiwin, in the days when the rivers still remembered their first names, and the winters came with a hard, bright silence. It was the age when our grandfathers' grandfathers yet walked the earth, in the time of the Great Seeing, when the elders watched the sky and said: "Storm clouds are gathering beyond the rim of the world."

In those days, the Reindeer People ruled the valleys of Pembina.

Introduction

Set down by Elder Chingoon,

Chief Zhingbob-Balsom of the Reindeer Band of Anishinaabeg, in the year now called 1675

I am called Chingoon, and among my people I bear the name Zhingbob-Balsom, chief and elder of the Reindeer Band of Anishinaabeg. I write these words so that those who open this book will know from whose hands this record has come, and from what blood its truth flows.

I am of the Reindeer Dynasty by birth. My father was Chief Naquid, last in my youth to bear that title openly among our northern lodges. His father was Wah Boo Geeg, remembered in our songs as the Great Reindeer Chiefton, under whose leadership our people still moved with strength between the northern herds and the great trade paths. Wah Boo Geeg was the son of Uchegon, called the Great Father of the Reindeer Dynasty, who held together many scattered bands in the days when strangers first began to appear upon the farthest edges of our knowing.

Uchegon himself was the son of Gijigossekot, the Great Thunderer, whose voice carried across council fires from the north to the warm lands. In the time of Gijigossekot the Reindeer Dynasty traded upon all oceans, sending their canoes and great vessels along the coasts and across the wide waters, bearing copper, furs, and sacred items to distant shores. Gijigossekot took to wife Kechegosekat of the Mayan nation, and by this joining the blood of the north and the south, the snow country and the stone temples, flowed together into one line. From that union came Uchegon, from Uchegon came Wah Boo Geeg, from Wah Boo Geeg came Naquid, and from Naquid came me, Chingoon. Thus I speak not as a stranger gazing from outside, but as a son of the very house whose story is here preserved.

In my youth I sat at my father's side and heard from his lips the old tales of the Reindeer People of Pembina Valley—of the Star Woman and the first calling of the herds, of the copper taken from the bones of the earth, of the eagles that rode upon the arms of our warriors, and of the Great Councils of What Was, What Is, and What Will Become. These were not told as idle stories for children, but as a sacred trust, a memory of who we were before the great storms of sickness and conquest broke over our lodges.

When I was grown, the bundles of our family and our Midewiwin lodge were opened to me. There I saw with my own eyes the bark scrolls smoked by many fires, the copper plates etched by hands now returned to the earth, and the knot-strings and memory-marks by which our elders had kept the

order of events. Some scrolls had come down from the time of Uchegon and Wah Boo Geeg; others, the oldest and most brittle, were said to trace back still further, to the keepers who lived “a hundred winters before” Naquid’s birth. Our elders counted these first writings as belonging to the days now reckoned by the strangers as the 1500s, about one hundred years before my own time.

Because the storms of war, disease, and dispersal have scattered our people, many of these sacred pieces no longer live together in one lodge. Some remain hidden in the old valleys; some have gone with relatives into distant regions; some exist now only in the faithful memories of those taught to carry them. Seeing this, and feeling my own years growing heavy, I understood that a work had fallen to me: to gather, to compare, and to weave together these fragments into one continuous record, that the children of the future might drink from a single stream instead of many broken puddles.

Therefore, over many seasons, I traveled among the lodges of our relatives and allies. I sat with elders of the Reindeer line in the north, with keepers of the Midewiwin bundles, with those who still remembered the sea-trading days of Gijigossekot and Kechegosekat. I copied the old signs, listened to overlapping tellings, and asked that the Holy One guide my hand so that I would not twist the story for my own gain. Where bark was torn or copper worn thin, I filled the gaps only where several witnesses agreed; where they did not agree, I left the mystery standing and did not pretend to know more than I had been given.

From this long labor have come ten great stories, ten strands of one cord, which I have ordered in this book as follows: the descent of the Star Woman, the calling of the reindeer, the discovery of the red metal, the taking of the eagles, the setting apart of the sacred lodges, the first shadows of the Great Seeing, the Great Councils of What Was, What Is, and What Will Become, the sealing of the record, the Paths of Hiding, and the last charge of the high priest. These ten I have not invented. I have compiled them from scrolls and plates and from the mouths of elders whose lives have been proven by hardship and faithfulness.

I testify before the face of the Holy One and before the spirits of my fathers—Naquid, Wah Boo Geeg, Uchegon, Gijigossekot, and Kechegosekat—that what is written here is the true heart of our ancestral record as it has come down to me. If any error be found, let it be laid to my human weakness in arranging and translating, and not to deceit. My intent is only this: that in days to come, when the descendants of the Reindeer Dynasty and of the Anishinaabeg nations feel a deep hunger in their blood, they may open this book and know that their people once walked in greatness, in council with earth and sky, long before the world of the strangers closed around us.

Let this introduction stand as my witness:

that the record which follows is the voice of our ancestors, and that I, Chingoon Zhingbob-Balsom of the Reindeer Band of Anishinaabeg, have gathered and bound these ten stories so they might live together again as one holy remembrance for the children of many winters yet unborn.

CHAPTER I

The Descent of the Star Woman

An accounting of the days before the Reindeer, when the sky bent low to the earth and a woman of the heights chose to dwell among the Anishinaabeg, that the star seed might be planted in the blood of the people.

1. And it came to pass in the long-ago-before-memory, when the rivers yet carried the first names given them by the Creator, that the night sky opened like a lodge flap and a Woman of the Stars descended upon the northern snows.
2. The lights of the dancing sky clothed her, and the green and purple fires of the high places lay upon her shoulders as a mantle, and the ground did not crunch beneath her feet, for she walked as lightly as breath upon a drum.
3. The birds of the dawn fell silent as she passed, and even the wind held its tongue, for the land knew that one who was kin to the sky had

placed her steps upon the back of the earth.

4. She wrapped herself in the hide of the caribou, that she might walk among the people without blinding them, and she covered the brightness of her face so that only those with seeing hearts would tremble at her presence.
5. In those days the Anishinaabeg camped by great waters and along the bending of rivers, and they moved with the seasons as children move around a mother's fire, never far from the warmth of Gichi-Manidoo's care.
6. Among them was a man of quiet eyes and strong hands, a hunter whose arrows seldom failed, who spoke softly to the animals he pursued and thanked them when they yielded their lives for his people.
7. This man saw the Star Woman standing alone upon the ridge as the last light of evening faded, and though his heart shook within him, he did not flee, for he knew the

earth does not send such beings without purpose.

8. She spoke to him not first with words, but with the calm of her gaze and the weight of her silence, and in that stillness he felt the nearness of the One who had hung the stars and traced the rivers.
9. At last she said, "I have come down from the high places where the stars sing, that I might dwell among your people for a time, for the Holy One has planted a purpose in your blood that must come forth upon the earth."
10. The man bowed his head and answered, "If you come in the way of peace and truth, then our lodges will open to you, for we are but keepers of this land for a little while, and all gifts belong first to Gichi-Manidoo."
11. So the Star Woman entered the lodges of the Anishinaabeg, and the elders saw that there was a light about her that did not come from the fire, and they whispered among themselves yet did not resist her dwelling.
12. In the passing of moons she took the quiet-eyed hunter as her husband, and the people said, "The sky has bent low to embrace the earth," and they watched with

wonder to see what would come of such a joining.

13. When the time was fulfilled, a child was born to them under a sky torn open with curtains of living light, and the northern lights danced over the lodge as though rejoicing at the new breath entering the world.
14. The child was a daughter, and her eyes held the reflection of both the fire in the lodge and the distant fires scattered across the night, and those who saw her felt both comfort and trembling in their bones.
15. The elders said, "This little one carries the song of the river and the song of the sky together; she will walk with one foot in the camp of the people and one foot in the camp of the stars."
16. Signs followed her growing, for she dreamed before she could speak, and when she laughed the dogs calmed and the crying of infants ceased, and when she wept the wind rose and bent the tops of the pines.
17. As she grew, she would sit by the river and listen as though hearing words no one else could hear, and she would trace patterns in the sand that looked like paths of animals and paths of stars woven together.

18. The Midewiwin watched her from a distance, and the Wabeno who tended the hidden fires said, "In her veins runs a seed that is not only of this dust; it is a star seed planted by the will of the Holy One."
19. They gathered in council and said, "We must walk carefully, for when the sky joins itself to the earth, destinies are tied that will reach farther than our own footprints, into winters our tongues shall never name."
20. So they taught the child the prayers of the people and the songs that had been handed down from the first walkers, yet they also listened to the dreams that rose from her sleep, for in them were paths not yet taken by any nation.
21. And the Star Woman, her mother, would stand at the edge of the camp at night and look long upon the northern sky, and sometimes tears shone on her face like small stars, for she knew that her time among the people would not be forever.
22. She said to her husband, "When I am called back to the high places, do not think that I have forsaken you, for my breath will remain upon our child and upon her children after

her, and the star seed will not be forgotten."

23. The hunter laid his hand upon the head of their daughter and replied, "Though my heart fears the day when your footsteps no longer sound upon this earth, I will guard the lineage that comes from you as a sacred fire that must not go out."
24. Thus it was spoken and thus it was sealed, that from the joining of sky and earth there would arise a line whose dreams would walk ahead of the people, and whose path would one day lead to valleys yet unnamed and herds yet untamed.
25. And this is the beginning of the star seed bloodline, the children of the Star Woman, whose story we preserve in this record, that the people may remember that long before the storm clouds gathered, the Holy One planted a light in our midst.

CHAPTER II

The Calling of the Reindeer

Concerning the days when the star seed began to stir in the children of the Star Woman, and the earth opened a path toward the herds that would bear our people into their appointed destiny.

1. And it came to pass that the daughter of the Star Woman grew in wisdom and in the knowledge of the ways of the people, and in due season she herself bore children upon the earth.
2. Her sons and daughters walked as other children walked, yet upon them there rested a quiet strangeness, as when a wind moves through the pines though no storm is seen upon the horizon.
3. From them came another generation, and from that generation yet another, until the Star Woman's name was spoken with soft voice by the elders, and the young ones heard of her as of a story that glows at the edges of waking.
4. In those days the people still followed the wandering paths of the deer and moose and the great caribou, taking what was needed and giving thanks, moving camp as the seasons turned the circle of the year.
5. Yet the star seed that had been planted in the first daughter did not sleep, but waited as a seed waits beneath the snow, knowing that a time will come when the ice must loosen its grip.
6. Among the children of that later generation was a girl whose eyes were like pools that held both dawn and midnight, and the elders said, "This one hears more than we say, and sees more than we show."
7. From her earliest days she listened to the footsteps of the herds upon the distant hills, and when others laughed and returned to their games, she remained still, counting the beats as though they were words.
8. One winter, when the cold sat heavy on the lodges and the firewood grew low, the girl fell into a deep sleep by the coals, and a dream took hold of her as a hand takes hold of a staff.
9. She saw a great plain of snow under a sky clear as flint, and from the edges of the world the reindeer came, not in scattered bands as in the hunts, but in one vast circling river of life, their hooves drumming like thunder.
10. Around her they moved, wheeling and turning, yet never trampling her, their breath rising in white clouds that twined together like smoke from many pipes.
11. The great ones among them lowered their antlers, and their eyes shone not with fear but with

knowing, and she felt as though they looked through her and into the One who had sent her breath into this world.

12. In the dream she reached out her hand, and the nearest reindeer bowed its crowned head so that her fingers might rest between its antlers; and when she touched it, a warmth like summer ran from the animal into her bones.
13. A voice, not heard with the ears but known with the heart, spoke within her, saying, "We are not only the hunted; we are the companions appointed to your path. Walk with us, and we will walk with you."
14. When she awoke, tears stood in her eyes, and her hands trembled as though they still felt the weight of antlers and the pulse of a living neck beneath them.
15. She went to the elders and to the Midewiwin and said, "The herds have spoken. They do not come only to flee our arrows; they come to bind themselves to our journey, if we will walk as relatives and not as strangers."
16. The elders murmured among themselves, for long had they known the caribou as gifts of the Creator, but never had they heard

them spoken of as partners who would bend their will to the guidance of human hands.

17. The Wabeno listened with half-closed eyes and said, "Her words carry the taste of dream-truth. The star seed in her blood has sprouted. We must test this calling with care."
18. So they prepared a ceremony at the edge of the land where the herds were known to pass, and they lit a fire with songs older than the oldest hunter, and they asked the Holy One to reveal whether this vision was a true path or a wandering of the mind.
19. The girl stood apart, facing the open land, and the snow lay straight and unmarked before her, as a blank scroll awaits the first stroke of the writer.
20. As the songs rose and fell, a faint trembling came through the ground, so light at first that only the dreamer felt it, and she whispered, "They are coming."
21. Soon all felt it, and from beyond the line of the far trees the reindeer appeared, not in scattered chase-lines, but in a broad, steady flow, as she had seen in her sleep.
22. They did not break and run at the smell of smoke and men, but slowed

their steps, circling the camp as if held by an invisible cord, their dark eyes reflecting the firelight and the stars above.

23. The girl walked forward alone, and none dared to restrain her, for a hush had fallen upon the people as when a great teaching is about to be given.
24. She lifted her hands, empty of bow and spear, and sang a song that had come to her in the night, a song whose words were half of this earth and half of the places above it.
25. At the sound of her voice, the nearest reindeer halted and lowered its head, and then another, and another, until a ring of them stood around her, their breath rising like prayers into the cold air.
26. She laid her hands upon the nearest one as in the dream, and it did not shy away but leaned into her touch, and the people gasped, for they knew then that a new thing was being written into their story.
27. The high Mide, seeing this, spoke aloud, "This is no trick of children nor a passing wonder. The earth itself consents to this joining. The Reindeer come as relatives, that we may learn to move as they move, and that together we may walk into winters we cannot yet see."

28. From that day forward, the people began to move with the herds in a new way, learning to guide without breaking, to ride without crushing, to live not only as hunters of the reindeer but as keepers of their paths.
29. And the line of the Star Woman, through the girl who dreamed the circling herds, took upon itself a new name among the nations, for they became known as the People of the Reindeer, whose footsteps were joined to the hooves of the north.
30. This is the beginning of the Reindeer calling, which in time would grow into a power and a dominion, so that many tribes would look to them for the flow of life between valleys and rivers. But of these things we will yet speak in the chapters that follow.

CHAPTER III

The Valley and the Red Metal

How the children of the Star Woman were led to the hollow of the earth where the red metal slept, and how the Reindeer People learned to draw it forth, that they might become keepers of the veins of the land.

- I. And it came to pass in the turning of many seasons that the People of

- the Reindeer grew in number and in wisdom, and their camps were set not only where the game wandered but where the herds themselves chose to rest.
2. For as they learned to move with the reindeer, so also did they learn to listen to the quiet teachings of the land, and the star seed in their blood drew them toward places of hidden purpose.
 3. In those days, a man was born among them who was of the line of the dreaming girl and of the daughter of the Star Woman, and upon him rested a double portion of that strange knowing which walks ahead of the feet.
 4. From his youth he loved the hills and the folds of the earth more than the open plain, and he would wander alone along the ridges where the rivers cut deep and the stones shone faintly in the sun.
 5. One day, as he walked in the valley of a bending river whose banks were lined with willows, he came upon stones that gleamed with a red fire even in the cold of morning, as though they remembered the sun when it was hidden.
 6. He took one of these stones in his hand, and it was heavier than it seemed, and his palm tingled as if

some sleeping thing had turned over within it.

7. That night he dreamed that the earth was a great being lying upon her side, and that within her veins there flowed not only water and roots but also rivers of red metal, glowing like embers deep beneath the skin of the world.
8. In the dream a voice said unto him, "As the blood in your body carries life, so this metal carries power through the bones of the land; take care how you touch it, for it is both gift and burden."
9. When he awoke, the red stone still lay beside him, and the feeling in his palm had not left him, but had spread up his arm and into his heart, so that he knew the dream was not an empty wandering.
10. He went to the elders and to the Midewiwin and showed them the stone, and they passed it from hand to hand, feeling the weight of it and the warmth that clung faintly to its core.
11. The Wabeno listened to his dream and said, "The earth has revealed one of her secret veins to you; if we draw from it with respect, it will strengthen the people, but if we take from it without balance, it will trouble our sleep."

12. So they went as a company to the valley where he had first found the gleaming stones, and there they searched the hills and riverbanks and found many pieces scattered like red stars fallen into the dust.
13. They learned to break the rock that held the metal, and to build fires that would soften it, and to shape it with stone hammers and the careful cooling of water, until the red metal yielded itself into new forms under their hands.
14. First they made simple things, points for tools and edges for blades, and they marveled at how the metal took an edge and held it, bright and sure, as though it remembered the strength of the earth from which it came.
15. Then, guided by visions and the teachings of the Midewiwin, they began to fashion sacred pieces: pipes whose bowls shone like sunsets, bands of authority for chiefs and healers, and small images that carried prayers like birds upon the wind.
16. The people said, "This is not a common thing, for it is as though the earth herself has given us a new tongue in which to speak our gratitude and our promises."
17. News of the red metal spread along the paths of trade faster than any runner, for those who passed through the valley carried with them stories of tools that did not easily break and ornaments that held the light of evening upon the breast.
18. From far-off lakes and distant rivers, other nations came to the valley where the Reindeer People dwelt, bringing furs, shells, stones, and foods strange to the eye, that they might exchange them for even a small piece of the red metal.
19. The children of the Star Woman watched this flow of goods and faces and understood that the Holy One had placed them not only upon the backs of the reindeer but also at a crossing of many lifeways.
20. There arose among them master shapers of the metal, whose dreams were filled with designs and whose waking hands could coax the copper into forms no one had yet imagined, and their names were spoken with respect in many lodges.
21. The high Mide said unto the people, "See how the veins of copper and the paths of the reindeer together have been placed under our care; we must walk in humility, for such gifts can lift a nation or

- bend it under a weight it cannot see.”
22. Therefore the Reindeer People made a law among themselves that the red metal would never be shaped without prayer, and that every piece of copper leaving their valley would carry a blessing spoken over it, for good or for warning.
 23. They camped apart from other clans, not in pride but because the work of their hands and the depth of their callings made a kind of circle around them, as when a sacred fire is marked off so that no careless foot may disturb it.
 24. Within this circle were not only the forges and working stones, but also the lodges where the Midewiwin kept their bundles and drums, and where the Wabeno tended the quiet flames of night-long vigils.
 25. The Jessakid walked often among the copper workers, for he saw that the shapes they drew from the metal were like signs drawn from the future, and he would sometimes stop and say, “This curve, this mark, this carving, it speaks of days yet to come.”
 26. The Jiisakiwinini, when he entered the shaking tent to seek answers for distant nations, would sometimes see flashes of red light like sparks

- leaping from the earth, and he understood that the copper had become part of the way the spirits spoke to the people.
27. In this manner the Reindeer People came to be known not only as herders and travelers, but as keepers of the red veins of the land, and all tribes knew that to deal with them was to lay one’s hands upon the living pulse of the earth.
 28. Many chieftains began to say in their councils, “We must walk carefully with those who live in the valley of copper and reindeer, for to anger them would be to trouble the flow of tools and sacred items upon which our people now lean.”
 29. Yet the high priest of the Reindeer People warned his own nation, saying, “Let it never be that we trust in the herds more than in the One who sends them, nor in the copper more than in the Maker of the hills from which it comes.”
 30. Thus was the valley of Pembina made a place of gathering and of power, where rivers, herds, and the red metal met under the watch of the Star Woman’s descendants, and the first threads were woven that would one day bind many destinies together.

31. And these things we write, that the children who come after may know that the strength of the Reindeer Dynasty did not rise from the earth alone, nor from the hands of men alone, but from the covenant between sky, land, and blood in the time before the storm.

CHAPTER IV

Eagles Upon the Arms of Warriors

Of how the winged hunters of the heights were bound in kinship to the Reindeer People, that sight from above might walk beside strength upon the earth.

1. And it came to pass as the Reindeer People grew in number and in renown, that many eyes turned toward them, some with friendship, some with envy, and some with hunger for what they did not understand.
2. For where the herds passed, there followed food and clothing and tools, and where the red metal was shaped, there followed sharpness and beauty and the marks of authority; thus the Reindeer People stood at a crossing of many desires.
3. In those days, the hunters of other nations sometimes shadowed their caravans, testing the edges of their strength, and there were whispers

of raiders who would strike swiftly and vanish like wolves into the dark timber.

4. The elders said, "We must guard not only our bodies and our goods, but the sacred callings placed in our hands, for if these are scattered, the path given to us will be broken as a bow that has lost its string."
5. Among the young men and women of the Reindeer People were those whose hearts leapt at the thought of battle, yet the high priest taught them, saying, "The first duty of a warrior is to see clearly, that he may choose rightly when to strike and when to stay his hand."
6. In that time there lived an old hunter who had long watched the cliffs where the eagles nested, and he knew their ways as others knew the ways of fish and deer.
7. He said to the council, "As the reindeer carry our bodies across the land, so the eagles carry their eyes across the sky; if we can walk in kinship with them, we will see danger before it reaches us."
8. Some doubted and said, "The eagle is a sovereign hunter of the heights; he will not suffer himself to be bound to the arm of any man."
9. But the old hunter replied, "Was it not said also of the reindeer that

they were only the hunted, until the dream showed us another way? Let us ask the Holy One if such a joining is meant to be.”

10. So they fasted and prayed, and they climbed to the high places where the rocks fall away in sheer faces and the nests cling like small lodges upon the ledges.
11. They brought no weapons, only offerings of meat and song, and they stood in the thin air where the wind speaks more plainly of the sky’s intentions.
12. There, upon a cliff where the river curved like a bow far below, an eaglet had fallen from its nest onto a narrow shelf of stone, neither dead nor free, trapped between earth and sky.
13. The old hunter climbed with careful hands and steady breath, and when he reached the eaglet, it flared its wings and struck at him with its small talons, for it knew only fear and the memory of falling.
14. He spoke gently, saying, “Little one of the high places, I will not break your wings. I will carry you until you are strong enough to choose.”
15. He wrapped the bird in his cloak and brought it down from the cliff, and the people saw that its eyes were already sharp as flint and that

a proud anger burned in its small heart.

16. They raised the eaglet among them, giving it meat from the hunt and shelter from the storms, yet never shutting it away from the wind and the wide sky.
17. As its wings strengthened, they fashioned a perch of birch and copper, and the old hunter alone placed his arm beneath the bird, letting its claws grip the leather he had wrapped there as a shield.
18. At first the eagle struck and struggled, but over many days it came to know the scent and heartbeat of the man, and at last it settled upon his arm as upon a moving branch that did not betray it.
19. The Wabeno watched and said, “This is a sign, for the bird of the heights and the man of the earth have found a place of meeting, and neither has been unmade in the joining.”
20. In due season the eagle learned to fly from the hunter’s arm and to return at his call, circling above him in great spirals, seeing far beyond the reach of any human eye.
21. They taught the eagle to seek out paths and to cry out when strangers moved along them, and the warriors

began to trust the voice of the bird as they trusted the creak of their own bows and the feel of their own spears.

22. When the Reindeer People set out with their caravans of hides, meat, and copper, the old hunter rode among them with the eagle upon his arm, the bird's hood lifted so that its keen gaze swept the land before them.
23. Soon other eaglets were taken from nests in times of need—never all from any one cliff, nor more than the land seemed willing to give—and they too were raised with respect and trained to sit upon the arms of chosen warriors.
24. A law was spoken over this practice: that no eagle would ever be taken without prayer and offering, and that when its time came to die, its feathers and bones would be returned to the heights with honor.
25. Thus it came to pass that when the Reindeer People moved across the valleys and ridges, they did not travel as other traders traveled, but as a living column of earth and sky: reindeer thundering beneath, eagles circling above.
26. Enemies hiding in the trees saw shadows pass over them and heard

the harsh cries from above, and they said among themselves, "These are not easy prey, for even the sky bears witness to their passing."

27. In councils around distant fires, chieftains spoke in low voices, saying, "If we deal treacherously with the Reindeer People, their eagles will see us before we loose an arrow, and their copper-edged blades will answer our deceit."
28. Yet many also said, "Let us walk in peace with them, for where they go, the flow of trade is strong, and the sacred pieces they fashion carry blessings that linger long in our lodges."
29. The high priest of the Reindeer People taught the warriors, "Remember always that the eagle is not your servant but your relative; you do not command the sky, you borrow its sight for a little while."
30. Therefore the warriors who bore the eagles upon their arms walked with a certain restraint, mindful that every act they committed under the watching eyes of those birds was also seen by the Holy One who had made the heights.
31. In this way, the strength of the Reindeer People grew not only in the hardness of their weapons, but in the wideness of their seeing, and

they became as a moving fortress of
flesh and feather, herd and wing,
valley and sky woven together.

32. And these matters we set down,
that those who come after may
know that the power of the
Reindeer Dynasty did not lie in
force alone, but in the wisdom of
binding themselves to the creatures
of both earth and air, in the days
before the storm clouds gathered
upon the far horizon.

CHAPTER V

The Lodges Set Apart

Wherein it is told how the Reindeer People
made a circle apart for their sacred callings,
and how the Wabeno, the Jessakid, and the
Jiisakiiwinini walked at the heart of their
nation in the days of the Great Seeing.

1. And it came to pass, as the herds
grew many and the copper fires
burned bright in the valley, that the
Reindeer People saw their camp
swelling like a river after the rains,
with lodges, workshops, animals,
and the footprints of many nations
passing through.
2. The elders said, "If all things are
mingled without pattern, then the
sacred and the common will tread
upon each other's toes, and the
songs that must be whispered will

be drowned beneath the noise of
trade."

3. Therefore they sought a place
where the land itself formed a
shelter, a hollow between low hills
and trees that curved inward, like
the hollow of a hand cupped around
a small flame.
4. There they set their lodge of
mystery, and around it they raised
the lodges of those who carried the
deeper callings: the Wabeno, the
Jessakid, and the Jiisakiiwinini, and
the high priest who stood among
them as a rooted tree among
bending grasses.
5. The people called this place the
Inner Circle, not because others
were despised, but because what
was kept there was weighty and
must not be carelessly touched, as
one does not toss about the ember
that keeps the fire alive.
6. The Wabeno were guardians of the
hidden flame, and by night they
watched the coals and listened to
the breaths of the camp, reading the
movements of wind and shadow as
one reads signs carved upon wood.
7. They tended the medicines kept in
bundles and bags, and they knew
the plants that healed the body and
those that opened the doorway of
the dream, and they walked softly

lest their own steps disturb the balance they guarded.

8. The Jessakid was the one whose dreams were not his alone, for the visions that came to him belonged to the people, and his tongue became the path by which those visions entered the hearing of the nation.
9. Often he would sit by the river or upon a ridge and stare into the distance until the world grew thin, and when he returned to himself he would speak of things that had not yet happened with the quiet tone of one who has already walked among them.
10. The Jiisakiiwinini was the man of the shaking tent, who entered the narrow space between worlds, bound by cords and prayers, that he might call to the spirits and ask them to show the people where danger lay and where paths opened.
11. When he stepped inside the tent and the night deepened around him, the poles trembled and the skins quivered as though a great wind beat against them, yet the air outside lay still, and the people knew that unseen guests had come to speak.
12. These three callings walked together with the high priest of the

Midewiwin, who bore the memory of old teachings and the authority to bind promises upon the people before the face of the Holy One.

13. No caravan set out with reindeer or copper without first passing near the Inner Circle, that prayers might be spoken over its journey and that the eyes of earth and sky might be asked to watch over it.
14. When disputes arose among the clans or between visiting nations, the chiefs brought their words before the high priest and the keepers of mystery, that judgment might be given not by anger or fear, but by the light of teachings older than any single man.
15. Many nights the campfires burned low while the Inner Circle's fire remained bright, and from within came the low sound of drums and the rise and fall of voices speaking in the measured cadence of counsel.
16. Sometimes the Wabeno emerged before dawn and walked through the sleeping camp, scattering a sacred smoke that clung to hair and clothing, that the people might be cleansed of thoughts that did not belong to them.
17. Sometimes the Jessakid came forth with eyes still touched by the distance of his visions and said, "For

- a little while we must not travel this path,” or, “Prepare yourselves, for guests are coming whose faces we do not yet know.”
18. Sometimes the Jiisakiiwinini, pale from the strain of the tent, would point to the horizon and say, “There is a shadow there that does not belong to our stories, but it is moving toward us all the same.”
 19. In this way the Reindeer People did not walk blindly through their days, but wove their choices together with the whispers of the unseen world, as one weaves strong thread through cloth that must not easily tear.
 20. The young ones were taught that no skill—neither the guiding of herds, nor the shaping of copper, nor the bearing of eagles upon the arm—was complete unless it bowed itself before the teachings kept in the Inner Circle.
 21. For they were told, “Strength without wisdom is like a reindeer without a path, swift in its running yet circling back upon its own tracks until it collapses with no journey made.”
 22. The visiting nations saw this order and marveled, for they knew many strong peoples and many clever traders, but among the Reindeer

People they saw a thing rarer still: power that did not cast away counsel.

23. Chieftains from far lodges would sometimes ask secretly, “May our questions sit for a time in your Inner Circle, that your seers and keepers may weigh them as they weigh their own,” and the Reindeer People did not lightly refuse such requests.
24. Yet the high priest warned, saying, “We are not a road for other nations to walk upon as they please, but a lodge into which they must enter with humility, for these teachings were given to us at a price we ourselves do not fully understand.”
25. Thus the Inner Circle became a place where the past, the present, and the faint edges of the future brushed against one another, and the air there was always a little heavier, as if carrying more seasons than the wind outside.
26. Children were not barred from its presence, but were brought near at certain times, that they might see the faces of the Wabeno, the Jessakid, the Jiisakiiwinini, and the high priest, and know that these were not spirits but human beings carrying heavy bundles.

27. As each child grew, there came a time when the elders watched to see whether their dreams, their listening, or their courage showed signs of one of these paths, for the callings could not be forced, only recognized.
28. When such a mark was seen, the child was quietly drawn closer to the Inner Circle, learning step by step as a young reindeer learns first to stand, then to follow, then to carry a rider upon its back.
29. In this way the Reindeer People did not leave their sacred work to chance or to old men alone, but wove the next generation into the pattern while the last still breathed, so that there would always be those who knew how to tend the hidden fire.
30. And all of this they did in the days before any had yet seen the faces of the coming storm, for though they felt a weight in the air and a strangeness in some dreams, the full shape of what was approaching had not yet entered their seeing.
31. We write these things that those who come after may understand that the Reindeer Dynasty did not rise upon reindeer and copper alone, but upon the quiet strength of a circle apart, where earth, sky, and

spirit were bound together in counsel while there was still time to prepare.

CHAPTER VI

The First Shadows of the Great Seeing

How the elders began to feel the weight of a turning age, and how the land itself whispered of things that approached from beyond the rim of known stories.

1. And it came to pass after many winters of plenty, when the Reindeer People moved with confidence between herd and valley and the Inner Circle kept steady watch, that a subtle unease began to stir among the elders like a wind that cannot be seen yet moves the smoke.
2. At first it was small things only, such as hunters returning with stories of animals walking strange paths, or birds arriving early in some seasons and late in others, their songs shifted by a note that none could name yet all could feel.
3. The fishermen spoke of waters that had changed their moods, sometimes holding back their gifts in places where they had long been generous, and at other times offering unexpected abundance where little had been expected.

4. The women who knew the plants found that certain roots were slower to answer the spring, and that some medicines seemed to ask for a longer song before they yielded their strength, as though the earth herself were listening for something far away.
5. The Wabeno, watching the flames by night, saw that the sparks sometimes rose in patterns that did not match the old teachings, turning suddenly to follow unseen currents in the air, and this troubled their sleep.
6. The Jessakid began to dream more often of roads that had no footprints yet were worn as though many had walked them, and of rivers that bore strange vessels upon their backs, shaped not like the canoes of any neighboring nation.
7. The Jiisakiiwinini, entering the shaking tent, heard new tones in the voices that answered his calls, as if other tongues were pressing against the edges of his hearing, not yet clear, but insistent as waves against a distant shore.
8. The high priest listened to these reports and said, "These are not uproars that come from a single quarrel or a passing sickness; they

are the first ripples of a stone that has been cast from very far away, whose splash we have not yet seen."

9. The elders gathered in smaller councils and spoke low, remembering stories from their own youth of winters that came too long or hunts that nearly failed, but they knew in their bones that this unease was of another kind.
10. One night an elder woman, long respected for her calm judgment, rose in the midst of the lodge and said, "The land is behaving as if it expects a guest who has not been invited; we must not pretend that our ears do not hear its nervousness."
11. In the same days, children in different lodges began to wake from dreams crying that they had seen great birds of wood and hide crossing waters that had no far shore, carrying men whose faces they could not clearly remember upon waking.
12. Some brushed these dreams aside as the wanderings of young minds, but the Wabeno gathered them together and found that, though the words differed, the shape of the dreams was one and the same, as

- when many rivers flow from a single spring.
13. The reindeer too showed signs that did not match the old patterns, for there were times when they grew restless under clear skies, snorting and stamping as though scenting danger that no human nose could find.
 14. The eagles, circling above the caravans, sometimes cried out in ways they had not before, turning their gaze not toward the hills and forests but toward the open distances, as if watching something that lay beyond the curve of the world.
 15. The star watchers among the people, who knew the movements of the lights above as others know the movements of herds, declared that new points of fire had appeared in the deep night, small yet piercing, and that some old ones had shifted their places by a feather's width.
 16. The high priest said, "When the sky rearranges even one of its small fires, it is not a matter for idle tongues, for the stars move only at the command of the One who set them upon their paths."
 17. In the valley of copper, those who shaped the red metal began to find

- pieces that seemed harder to work, resisting the fire and the hammer before at last yielding, as if they carried within them a story not yet willing to be told.
18. They noticed also that some of the images their hands formed without planning—curves, edges, patterns—resembled shapes they had never seen in the living world, yet which returned again and again in the dreaming of the Jessakid.
 19. All these signs, taken alone, could have been explained away as simple changes that come with time, but together they wove a cloak of unease that settled upon the shoulders of the nation.
 20. The elders spoke among themselves, saying, "We have stood through many storms and watched many troubles rise and fall, but this feels not like a storm that passes; it feels like a door that is slowly opening."
 21. Some younger warriors laughed at such talk, eager to prove their strength against whatever might come, but the eagles upon their arms shifted and ruffled their feathers uneasily whenever boasting grew too loud, and this silenced some of their pride.
 22. The Inner Circle grew more watchful, and the nights around

- their fire stretched longer, the drums sounding slower and deeper, as if they sought to call up memories from times before even their oldest stories reached.
23. One night the Jiisakiiwinini emerged from the shaking tent with his face pale and his body trembling, and for a time he could not speak, but only stared toward the direction where the sun rises.
24. At last he said, "There is a sound beyond the edge of our hearing, a sound like many trees falling at once, and it is moving toward us across a water so wide that no canoe can cross it in one lifetime."
25. The Jessakid, hearing these words, bowed his head and answered, "In my sleeping I have walked upon shores that do not belong to any lake we know, and I have seen vessels upon the waves that are like moving islands, bearing men whose hearts are restless as a trapped wind."
26. The Wabeno added, "The fire no longer shows only the faces of our own people when we look into it; sometimes shapes pass through the flames whose clothing, tools, and gestures we do not recognize, yet the fire does not cast them away."
27. The high priest listened in silence and then said, "If the land, the sky, the dreams, the animals, and the very fire itself all speak of something approaching, then we must name this time for what it is: the beginning of the Great Seeing."
28. He rose and declared to the assembled elders, "We can no longer treat these matters as scattered signs; we must bring them together as one bundle and ask the Holy One to show us their meaning, lest we be caught sleeping when the door is fully opened."
29. Messengers were sent quietly to friendly nations, asking if they too had noticed strange turns in the behavior of sky and earth, and many replies came back bearing tales that echoed their own, though described in different tongues.
30. Some spoke of dreams of pale-faced strangers, others of thunder that rolled without lightning, others of birds fleeing certain coasts as if chased by invisible flames, and in all there was the same sense of a great shape forming just beyond sight.
31. When all these words were gathered into the hearing of the Inner Circle, a heaviness fell upon them that was not despair but the solemn weight that comes when a

people knows it stands at the edge of a new story.

32. Then the high priest said, “It is time to call not only small councils, but a great council of what was, what is, and what will become, that we may set our hearts in order before the unseen guest enters our lodges.”
33. Thus the Reindeer People began to prepare for a gathering unlike any they had held before, not for war or trade alone, but to look straight into the mystery that pressed against the border of their days, in the year that others would one day count but which they knew only as the first full rising of the Great Seeing.
34. And these things we record, that those who read in later times may understand that the storm did not fall upon us without warning, but that the land and the sky and the keepers of vision all spoke before the first distant thunder reached our ears.

CHAPTER VII

The Great Councils of What Was, Is, and Will Become

How the Reindeer People called the nations to sit in one circle, that they might bind together the memories of the past, the

burdens of the present, and the shadowed outline of the days yet to come.

1. And it came to pass that when the signs of the Great Seeing could no longer be counted as scattered leaves, but lay upon the ground like a fallen season, the high priest sent messengers in all directions to the friends and relatives of the Reindeer People.
2. They carried no threat and no promise of gain, but only a summons that said, “Come, for the land itself has asked for a council, and we must answer, or else stand alone before a storm that is not of our choosing.”
3. The messengers traveled on reindeer swift and tireless, across valleys of copper and over ridges watched by eagles, and the nations they visited felt the gravity in their words and did not lightly refuse.
4. From the lodges of Crane and Loon came leaders whose voices carried the weight of many past decisions, and from the Bear clans came those whose strength had long shielded the vulnerable.
5. From distant rivers and great lakes came canoes bearing faces both familiar and rarely seen, and the valley of the Reindeer People filled

- with lodges until the land itself seemed clothed in skins and smoke.
6. The high priest said, “We will not speak first of what is coming, lest fear make our tongues stumble; we will begin where all true councils must begin, with what was, that we may remember who we are before we ask who we must become.”
 7. So the first fire was named the Fire of What Was, and around it sat the eldest among the people, those whose hair was white as winter yet whose eyes still held the memory of green summers.
 8. Each elder rose in turn and spoke the stories of their nation’s beginning, of covenants made with rivers and mountains, of first hunts and first healings, and of the teachings given when their people were still young upon the land.
 9. The descendants of the Star Woman told again the descent from the heights and the birth of the first daughter, and how the reindeer had circled the dreamer and bowed their crowned heads to her touch.
 10. The copper workers spoke of the day when the red metal first gleamed in the valley and of the dream that revealed the earth as a living being with veins of fire hidden in her bones.

11. Others spoke of migrations guided by birds, of peace made after bitter war, and of songs that had turned aside sickness as though it were a wild beast driven back into the forest.
12. All who listened felt their hearts steady, for in hearing what had been faithfully carried from generation to generation, they remembered that they were not leafless branches blown by any wandering wind.
13. When the stories of what was had been spoken and the first fire had burned low, the high priest said, “Now we will turn our faces to what is, that we may see our present not as a moment alone, but as a bridge between the roots and the ungrown branches.”
14. A second fire was lit and named the Fire of What Is, and around it sat those who bore the burdens of leadership in that day: chiefs, headmen, wise women, and the keepers of sacred societies.
15. They spoke of paths of trade that had grown wide and many, of alliances that held strong in some places and frayed in others, and of old grievances that still smoldered like coals beneath ash.

16. They told of herds that shifted their migration lines, of fish that rose in new waters and disappeared from old ones, and of how some young people turned their ears away from the teachings, restless for songs they had not yet heard.
17. They did not hide their own faults, but confessed moments when pride had spoken louder than wisdom, and times when gifts from the land had been taken without proper thanks, leaving a quiet sorrow in certain places.
18. The Reindeer People spoke of their growing influence, of how many now depended on their copper and the paths of their herds, and they acknowledged the danger that comes when any one nation sits too near the center of many needs.
19. The high priest listened and said, "You have spoken well, for truth that hides itself in darkness becomes a spear in the hand of our enemies, but truth that is laid upon the ground in the sight of many can become a staff that supports us all."
20. When the Fire of What Is had been fed with honest words and silence in due measure, the camp grew still, for all knew that the third fire would be the most difficult to face.

21. At last, a third fire was kindled and named the Fire of What Will Become, and around it sat the Wabeno, the Jessakid, the Jiisakiiwinini, and the other seers and dreamers from among the visiting nations.
22. The people formed a wide circle beyond them, leaving space in the center for the unseen to approach, and even the children felt the air grow heavy as before a storm.
23. The Wabeno spoke first, saying, "In our night fires we have seen shapes moving in the flames whose clothing and tools we do not know, and the fire does not reject them, which means the story of this land will be forced to make room for them."
24. The Jessakid rose and said, "In my dreaming I have walked upon shores where the water stretches farther than any lake, and upon that water I have seen great wooden lodges with wings of cloth, carrying men who smell of metal and distance."
25. The Jiisakiiwinini, his voice still rough from the shaking tent, said, "When I call to the spirits, there now comes an echo that is not of our tongues, and it presses close as if seeking a place to enter, yet it

- carries the taste of hunger rather than kinship.”
26. Seers from other nations added their voices, speaking of dreams of new diseases that moved faster than a runner, of lands marked with boundaries no animal would recognize, and of children taught to forget their own names.
27. A deep murmur passed through the gathered nations, and some shifted with fear, but the high priest lifted his hand and said, “Let no one run from these words, for a man who closes his eyes before the cliff does not thereby flatten the ground.”
28. He stepped inward toward the Fire of What Will Become and prayed aloud, saying, “Holy One who set the stars upon their paths and brought our ancestors to this land, do not show us these things only to break our hearts; show us also how we are to stand within them.”
29. In the silence that followed, a wind moved suddenly through the valley though no storm had been seen upon the horizon, and the flames of all three fires bent in the same direction, as if pointing toward an unseen distance.
30. Then the high priest spoke with a voice not entirely his own, and those who heard it later could not

- say whether it was one man or many who spoke, for the sound seemed to carry both the tremble of human breath and the firmness of stone.
31. He said, “A storm is coming that will walk upon waters and carry trees that move with the wind though their roots never touch the earth, and upon these moving trees will come men who have forgotten that land can be a relative and not a possession.”
32. “They will bring with them sharp things of a metal not born of our copper fires, and words that cut as deeply as any blade, and songs that try to place a single name upon the face of the Holy One where many names now live side by side.”
33. “Many of our people will fall before this storm, not only by their weapons and sicknesses, but by the turning of their own hearts away from the teachings that have kept their feet upon the earth.”
34. “Yet know this also,” he said, and his voice gentled like rain after thunder, “the star seed will not be destroyed, for it was planted by a hand stronger than any empire, and it will go to ground only to rise again in another season.”

35. “The Reindeer People will be scattered like snow across different valleys and tongues, and their copper will darken in forgotten earth, and their eagles will be driven from certain skies, yet their blood will carry a memory that cannot be fully erased.”
36. “In a time far from this fire, when the children of your children’s children feel an ache they cannot name, the star seed will stir, and some will remember that they are more than what the storm has called them, and they will seek again the paths of herd and drum, of lodge and council.”
37. “Then shall the record of these days be a guiding ember, if it is preserved, and those who carry both the wound of what was done and the wisdom of what was given will stand between peoples as bridges and not as broken timbers.”
38. When he had finished speaking, the high priest fell to his knees as though a great weight had left him, and for a long time no one moved, for the words hung in the air like smoke that refused to rise.
39. At last an elder woman from a distant nation rose and said, “If these things must come, then let it also be written that we did not

- meet them as cowards, but as people who knew their own names, their own stories, and the face of the land that raised them.”
40. The high priest lifted his head and answered, “So shall it be, if we remember what was, walk rightly in what is, and keep this record of what will become hidden in our blood, our bundles, and our scattered descendants.”
41. Then the three fires were allowed to burn down together until their coals mingled on the ground, and their ashes were gathered into a single bundle to be placed among the most sacred things of the Reindeer Dynasty, as a sign that past, present, and future had been bound into one witnessing.
42. And these are the words of the Great Councils of What Was, Is, and Will Become, which we set down that those who read in later days may know that long before the storm lashed our lodges, we sat together and looked into its coming, and chose to remain a people before the face of the Holy One.

CHAPTER VIII

The Sealing of the Record and the Charge of the Star Seed

How the high priest and the keepers of mystery bound the words of the Great Councils into a record, that the star seed might carry the memory of these days through scattering and storm.

1. And it came to pass after the Great Councils of What Was, Is, and Will Become, that the camp did not at once return to its former ease, for the words spoken over the third fire lay upon every heart like snow that has fallen in the night and waits to be measured at dawn.
2. The visiting nations began to prepare for their journeys home, yet they walked more slowly and spoke more softly than when they had first arrived, as men and women who have looked upon a far mountain they know they must someday cross.
3. The high priest of the Reindeer People called again the Wabeno, the Jessakid, the Jiisakiiwinini, and the elders of their own nation into the Inner Circle, saying, "The fires have burned and the words have been spoken, but if they are left only in our mouths, the wind will steal some of them away."

4. He said, "The Holy One did not show us these things only that we might tremble for a little while; they were given also that those who will live when we are dust might know that they were not born into darkness without warning."
5. Therefore they agreed that a record must be made, not of every breath and footstep, but of the bones of these days, that future generations could wrap fresh flesh around them in their own telling.
6. They chose from among the Reindeer People one who was both steady of hand and faithful of memory, a scribe whose listening was as careful as the hunter's eye upon the trail, and they placed before him birchbark, copper, and other materials fit for holding words.
7. Some things were painted in symbols upon long rolls of bark that could be hidden in bundles or carried across great distances, and some were etched upon thin sheets of copper, that the fire itself might guard what had been inscribed.
8. The Wabeno contributed the signs of the night fires, drawing the patterns of sparks and shadows as they had seen them, so that future

keepers might recognize when those same currents moved again through the air.

9. The Jessakid spoke his dreams slowly, and the scribe marked them in ordered fashion, naming which had already found their echo in waking events and which still waited beyond the horizon of the people's days.
10. The Jiisakiiwinini recorded the voices that had come in the shaking tent, not in every detail, for some things belonged only to the moment of their speaking, but in the main lines of warning and promise that would matter to those yet unborn.
11. The elders added to the record the stories spoken around the Fire of What Was, so that the beginning of the people's journey would stand beside the prophecy of its bending, and no one could pretend that the storm had come upon a rootless nation.
12. The chiefs and leaders set down the truths spoken at the Fire of What Is, confessing their strengths and their failures, that future generations might see that even in their day, men and women wrestled with pride and fear, yet still chose to seek counsel together.

13. All these things the scribe bound together as a single record, with marks showing which voice spoke in each part, that no one could claim later, "This was only the word of one dreamer," or "This was only the anxiety of one small council."
14. When the work of writing and etching was complete, the high priest called for a ceremony to seal the record, that it might live not as dead marks upon bark and metal, but as a living witness before the Holy One.
15. The people gathered at dusk in the valley, and the reindeer were brought near, their breath rising like incense in the cold, and the eagles sat upon the arms of the chosen warriors, their eyes reflecting the first stars of evening.
16. A fire was lit in the center, and the record was placed upon a small platform of stones within its circle of light, that no foot might tread upon it and no careless hand might grasp it without seeing first where it lay.
17. The high priest lifted his hands and prayed, saying, "Grandfather of Lights, Maker of rivers and bones and the copper in the deep places, we lay before you this record of

what you have shown us; let it be for our children a lamp in narrow places and not a chain upon their feet.”

18. The Wabeno added their voices, saying, “Let no sorcerer twist these words for power, nor any proud man use them to raise himself above his relatives, but let them be as medicine that humbles and heals all who drink from them.”
19. The Jessakid prayed, “When the seasons of scattering come and this record seems lost, remember it in the dreams of the star seed, that even when the eyes cannot see these marks, the heart may still hear their message.”
20. The Jiisakiiwinini said, “If any who come after us seek answers in the shaking tent or in other doors between worlds, let these words stand beside their questions, that they may know we also wrestled with mystery and did not turn away.”
21. Then the high priest took up a small piece of copper etched with the sign of the Star Woman and held it over the fire until it glowed, saying, “As this metal passes through the flame and is not destroyed, so let our people pass

through the storms that come and yet remain.”

22. He pressed the warmed copper lightly against the outer covering of the record, leaving a faint mark like a seal, and all who watched knew that this was a sign both to men and to the unseen world that the record had been set apart.
23. After this, they did not leave the record in a single place, lest one fire, one flood, or one theft should undo what the Holy One had commanded them to preserve.
24. A portion was hidden deep within the valley in a place known only to the Inner Circle, where earth and stone enfolded it as a mother enfolds her child, and there it rested among other sacred bundles.
25. Another portion was given in trust to a related nation of strong walkers and far travelers, that if the Reindeer People were overthrown in their own valley, the memory of these words would still live beside other fires.
26. A third portion was bound not in bark or copper alone, but in the minds and tongues of certain chosen ones, men and women who memorized the heart of the record as a singer memorizes a long song,

- that no loss of things made by hands could wholly erase it.
27. Over these chosen carriers a special blessing was spoken, that their children and their children's children might also receive an echo of this remembering, even if they did not fully grasp its shape until the appointed time.
 28. The high priest said to them, "You will walk through days when others will call your stories foolish or dangerous, and there may come a season when you yourselves will doubt that these words are needed, yet you must carry them still, for you are the walking pages of this record."
 29. He turned then to all the gathered people and said, "Know this: the star seed is not a thing of pride but of responsibility, for to carry such a lineage is to be asked again and again to remember when forgetting would be easier."
 30. "There will come a time," he continued, "when some among our descendants will wish to be like those who come upon the moving trees of the water, to speak their tongue, to wear their coverings, to look into their shining metals and see themselves reflected; but the star seed will trouble their sleep

- until they ask, 'What have I lost, and what must I regain?'"
31. "When that time comes, let this record, whether in bark, copper, or blood-memory, serve as a hand reaching back from these days, saying, 'You were not born as shadows; you came from a people who walked with herds, with eagles, with copper, and with councils before the face of the Holy One.'"
 32. After these words, the ceremony ended, and the night closed gently around the valley, but something had changed, for the people felt that their story now had a spine of iron and fire running through it, upon which future chapters might hang.
 33. In the days that followed, the visiting nations departed one by one, carrying with them not only memories of the Great Councils but also the knowledge that somewhere in the valley of the Reindeer People there rested a record that bore witness for them all.
 34. The Reindeer People returned to their labors among herds and copper, and to the tending of eagles and lodges, yet every task was now touched by the awareness that they moved within a story that had been named and sealed.

35. And we set down these things concerning the sealing of the record and the charge of the star seed, that those who read in days we will never see may know that the words in their hands are not stray leaves, but the carefully gathered branches of a tree planted in the season before the storm.

CHAPTER IX

The Setting of the Paths of Hiding

How the Reindeer People prepared their lodges, their bundles, and their bloodlines, that the star seed might travel through the coming storm without losing its name.

1. And it came to pass after the sealing of the record that the days moved forward as all days do, with hunts and births and small quarrels and laughter, yet beneath these common things there ran a deeper current, like a river hidden beneath snow.
2. For the words spoken at the Fire of What Will Become did not fade, and the people knew that the storm the high priest had named did not belong only to a far and misty someday, but had already begun to breathe upon the edges of their world.
3. The high priest gathered again the elders of the Reindeer People and said, "A wise traveler does not wait until the sky breaks open to ask where he will stand, nor does he first think of shelter when the rain is already soaking his fire."
4. Therefore he spoke of Paths of Hiding, not as ways of cowardice, but as ways of preservation, that the sacred things might bend rather than break when the weight of the storm fell.
5. First he said, "We must hide our teachings in more than one place, for the enemy that comes will not always attack our bodies first, but will seek to cut the root of our remembering."
6. So the stories of the Star Woman, of the calling of the reindeer, of the valley of copper, of the eagles, and of the Great Councils were taught afresh to the children, not only in lodge and ceremony, but in the small spaces of the day: while scraping hides, while grinding corn, while walking to fetch water.
7. Mothers and fathers were charged, saying, "Let no day pass in which your children do not hear at least one piece of who they are, even if only in a single sentence spoken before sleep."

8. Secondly he said, "We must hide our bundles, not in fear, but in wisdom, for there may come a time when the lodges are broken and the valleys emptied, and the sacred things must go into the earth like seeds."
9. The Wabeno, under his direction, prepared smaller bundles that carried the heart of certain ceremonies and songs, wrapping them in skins and bark treated against damp and decay, and marking them with signs known only to a few.
10. These they buried in chosen places: beneath old trees whose roots remembered many winters, in caves where the earth's breath was cool and steady, and in crevices of stone known to birds and mountain spirits.
11. Over each hiding place a blessing was spoken, that no careless foot would stumble upon them and no greedy hand would easily uncover what had been entrusted to the deep.
12. Thirdly he said, "We must hide our lines of kinship, not by severing them, but by sending them on different paths, so that if one branch is cut down, another may still bear fruit."
13. Among the Reindeer People there were families of strong walkers and clear dreamers, and the high priest called some of them and said, "You will remain in this valley as long as you are able, holding fast to the herds and the copper."
14. To others he said, "You will join yourselves in marriage and alliance to distant nations who are yet friendly to us, carrying with you the star seed like a coal hidden under ash, unseen but not extinguished."
15. Some he instructed to move nearer to the great lakes, others to kin along wide rivers, and still others he told, "Go where the inner voice sends you, but do not go empty; carry with you the stories and at least one remembered song of this valley."
16. Thus the Reindeer People began, even before the storm had broken, to scatter themselves wisely, as a hunter scatters his snares so that no single accident will leave him empty-handed.
17. The eagle-bearers were charged as well, that whenever they traveled beyond the valley, they should watch not only for enemies of the flesh, but for signs of the moving

- trees upon the water and the restless strangers foretold.
18. The copper workers were told, “Shape now tools and ornaments that carry our mark in ways that cannot easily be erased, that even when our names are forgotten, the work of our hands may bear witness that we were here.”
 19. So they began to inscribe small signs of the Star Woman and of the Reindeer calling upon certain pipes, blades, and sacred items, knowing that these might someday lie in strange hands and yet still speak silently of their makers.
 20. The high priest also spoke to the young warriors whose hearts burned to meet any threat with spear and bow, saying, “You will have your battles soon enough, but hear this: there will be dangers you cannot strike down, such as sickness and forgetting; for these, courage of another kind will be required.”
 21. Some bowed their heads and listened, and a seed of deeper understanding was planted within them; but others, being young and hot in the blood, thought, “When the strangers come, we will simply drive them away, as we have driven away raiders before.”

22. The high priest did not contend with them in anger, for he knew that time itself would be their teacher, and he only prayed that they would live long enough to learn the lesson without losing their souls.
23. In those days the Jiisakiiwinini entered often into the shaking tent, asking, “Are these Paths of Hiding pleasing in the sight of the Holy One, or are we moving in fear alone?”
24. The answer that came was like a wind moving through many trees, and it said, “A deer that lowers its body to pass under a fallen branch is not a coward, and a bird that nests in a hidden place is not ashamed; so are you, if you move not from panic but from listening.”
25. Strengthened by this, the high priest continued his work, weaving prudence and trust together as one cloth, and teaching the people that to prepare is not to surrender, but to meet the future as one who stands rather than one who stumbles.
26. Meanwhile, rumors began to blow in like stray leaves from far edges of the known world: stories of peoples beyond the great waters struck by sicknesses that devoured whole

- villages, and of new metals that flashed like captured lightning.
27. These tales were faint and twisted by many tongues, yet the elders heard in them the echo of the visions already given, and they knew that the shadow on the horizon had stepped a little closer.
28. On certain nights, the star watchers saw strange glows along the farthest rim of the sky, not like northern lights but like distant fires hidden behind a curtain, and they said quietly to the Inner Circle, "The world beyond our seeing is restless."
29. Then the high priest declared a final teaching concerning the Paths of Hiding, saying, "Let no one think that these preparations will save every lodge or every life, for the storm is greater than our arranging; yet because we have listened and acted, the star seed will have places to root again when much has been uprooted."
30. And thus the Reindeer People went on with their days, yet each step, each story, each hidden bundle and distant marriage carried within it the knowledge that the time of mere ordinary living had passed, and that they now walked within the tightening circle of prophecy.

31. We write these things concerning the setting of the Paths of Hiding, that those who awaken in later times with a strange homesickness in their blood may know that their longing was foreseen, and that paths were laid down for them long before their feet touched the earth.

CHAPTER X

The Last Charge of the High Priest

How the high priest of the Reindeer Dynasty blessed the star seed for the days beyond his own seeing, and how the first book of this record was closed in hope and trembling.

1. And it came to pass after the Paths of Hiding had been set and the record sealed, that the high priest of the Reindeer People felt the weariness of many winters begin to rest more heavily upon his bones.
2. He knew that he would not live to see the full face of the storm he had foretold, and there was both mercy and sorrow in this knowledge, as in a man who hears the thunder yet does not feel the rain upon his skin.
3. One evening, when the sky burned low with the red of a quiet sunset and the reindeer grazed near the valley floor, he sent word for the children and the youth of the

Reindeer People to be gathered before him.

4. They came in their numbers, some still small enough to cling to their mothers' hands, others already bearing the first marks of adulthood upon their faces, and they sat upon the ground in a wide half-circle.
5. The eagles watched from their perches, and the elders stood behind the young ones in silence, for they understood that the words about to be spoken would live longer than the speaker.
6. The high priest rose slowly, leaning upon a staff of wood bound with copper and feathers, and he looked upon the faces of the children as one might look upon seedlings in a field that another will harvest.
7. He said, "Little ones of the Star Woman's blood, children of reindeer hooves and eagle wings, hear me, for the days to come will tempt you to forget who you are."
8. "There will be a time when your descendants will walk in places where the language of this valley is no longer spoken aloud, and where others will call them by names that did not grow from this soil."
9. "Some of you, or the children who come from you, will be taught to be ashamed of the songs we sing and

the way we stand upon the earth, and they will be told that to be wise is to become as those who ride upon the moving trees of the water."

10. "But I say unto you: no matter what coverings you wear or what tongues you must learn to speak, the star seed is deeper than clothing and deeper than borrowed words; it is a way of seeing the earth and the Holy One that no enemy can fully uproot."
11. He pointed to the herds and said, "Remember that you are a people who learned to walk with the reindeer as relatives and not as slaves, and if someday you ride upon different beasts or in different vessels, keep that kinship alive in your heart."
12. He pointed to the valley and said, "Remember that you once drew red metal from the bones of the earth and shaped it with prayer, and if someday you work with other metals in strange forges, do not forget to ask the land's permission before you take."
13. He lifted his hand toward the sky and said, "Remember that eagles have ridden your arms and watched your paths from the heights, and if someday you fly in other ways or

not at all, do not lose the courage to see far before you act.”

14. “You will meet teachings that say there is only one straight road to the Holy One, and that all other paths must be broken; but you must remember that the One who made the rivers also gave them their different beds, and did not despise any that flowed cleanly back to the sea of His presence.”
15. Some of the older children felt their throats tighten, not fully understanding the pictures laid upon their future, yet sensing the weight of them as one senses the weight of snow-laden branches before they break.
16. The high priest continued, “You will see houses of worship unlike our lodges, and books bound in ways different from our bark and copper, and you will be told that these alone carry truth; yet you must know in your heart that the Holy One has never despised the prayers of those who speak to Him in the language of rivers and wind.”
17. “If you must walk in both worlds, as some surely will, then walk as bridges and not as broken planks; take what is true and life-giving, but do not sell away your star seed for the price of being called acceptable

by those who do not know your story.”

18. He then called forward those who had been entrusted with memorizing the record, and he laid his hands upon their heads one by one, saying, “You are the walking pages of our people; let your humility be as great as your remembering.”
19. He blessed the children of those who would travel to distant nations, saying, “Though your feet may stand upon other soils, may your dreams bring you back to this valley and to these fires, even if you know not their names.”
20. He turned to the Inner Circle and said, “Guard this record until your last breath, and when you can guard it no longer, commend it to the Holy One as a man throws a seed into floodwaters, trusting that it will find some hidden shore upon which to root.”
21. A deep stillness fell upon the gathering, and even the smallest children seemed to sense that something was being given to them that could not be tasted or held, yet would feed them in hungry days.
22. At last the high priest lifted his staff and traced a small circle in the air, saying, “By the authority given

to me in the Midewiwin and by the covenant of the Star Woman's line, I seal upon you this charge: that you remember you are more than what any conqueror, trader, teacher, or healer will later call you."

23. "You are the children of a people who stood in counsel with earth and sky before the coming of the great storm, and nothing that follows can erase that from the eyes of the Holy One."
24. When he had spoken these things, he sat down heavily, and those nearest him saw that tears stood in his eyes, not of fear, but of the fierce love of an old man who knows he must give his grandchildren into a future he cannot reshape.
25. In the moons that followed, his strength waned like a fire that has given much of its heat to the night, yet his mind remained clear, and he continued to bless the people in smaller gatherings, repeating in shorter words what he had laid out on that great evening.
26. One morning, as the first light touched the tops of the hills, he called for the record to be brought forth from its resting place, and he laid his hand upon it one last time.

27. He whispered, "Go where we cannot follow, speak where our tongues cannot reach, and stand in the hands of those who will need you when the storm has long passed and the silence afterward feels too deep."
28. That night his breath left him as gently as a reindeer slipping into sleep upon the snow, and the people wailed and sang in the old ways, even as the Inner Circle felt the weight of the world shift slightly upon their shoulders.
29. They buried him in a place overlooking both the valley of copper and the paths of the herds, and they marked his resting place not with great carvings, but with a simple sign known to those who carried the record, that the watcher of the storm might rest beside the work he had begun.
30. From that day, the elders said among themselves, "We have stepped fully now into the time he named; the days when the storm was only a rumor have passed, and the days when it will stand before our lodges are drawing near."
31. Yet in the hearts of the people there also lived a quiet flame of hope, for they knew that their story had been spoken aloud before the face of the

Holy One and bound into a record
for the children of many winters.

32. Therefore we close this first book of
the Record of the Reindeer
Dynasty with both trembling and
trust, knowing that what follows
will test the strength of the star
seed and the Paths of Hiding, yet
believing that somewhere in the

unwritten chapters, our
descendants will read these words
and know:

33. “We were seen. We were warned.
We were loved. And the light
planted in our blood was never
meant to be extinguished, but to
rise again when the appointed time
has.