

PART ONE

A WIND OUT OF
IRELAND



Nothing is more real than the women's superiority. It is they who really maintain the tribe, the nobility of blood, the genealogical tree, the order of generations and conservation of the families. In them resides all the real authority: the lands, fields and all their harvest belong to them; they are the soul of the councils, the arbiters of peace and war; they hold all the taxes and public treasure; it is to them that the slaves are entrusted; they arrange the marriages; the children are under their authority; and the order of succession is founded on their blood . . . The Council of Elders which transacts all the business does not work for itself. It seems that they serve only to represent and aid the women in the matters in which decorum does not permit the latter to appear or act . . . The women choose their chiefs among their maternal brothers or their own children.

—Father Joseph-François Lafitau,
*Customs of the American Indians
compared with the Customs of
Primitive Times* (1724)

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CHAPTER 1

WOMEN OF POWER

1.

It was the time of dream-telling.

In the Longhouse, in the ruddy glow of the new fire of Midwinter, the clanmothers dressed the heralds in buffalo robes and bearskins. The women crowned them with wreaths of cornhusks that fanned out around their blackened faces. They fastened braids of cornhusks, like dance rattles, to the Bigheads' wrists and knees. They knotted corn cobs into the thong ties of the animal hides. They armed the dream heralds with huge wooden paddles, shaped like corn pounders, to stir the ashes in the firepits and make the earth tremble under the elmbark lodges of the Upper Castle.

"Now you are complete," the clanmothers told them. "You will leave the Longhouse by the men's door and return by the women's door. You wear the skins the animal masters have given our men on the hunt and the fruits of the earth that the Mother has entrusted to the care of our women."

The women released the Bigheads, each chosen by his dreams, to the Speaker. They had supped at midnight and kept vigil until dawn, while the village dreamed. They had seen the last stragglers coming home from the hunting camps, threading the deep drifts on snowshoes.

"You will run through all the fires," the Speaker instructed them. "This is the time when minds are turned inside out. This is the feast of dreams." Island Woman's children had barely slept, for all the noise and excitement, although she thought they might have been worn out by now, because the Mohawk village had been astir for days. Even before the dream-prophet saw the Seven Dancers rise to the zenith in the night sky and announced the coming of the moon of Midwinter, the women had been busy sewing costumes, boiling up great kettles of cornsoup, pooling tobacco and crushed strawberries for the doings in the Longhouse. It was already four days since the heralds had raced through the lodges, kicking out the fires, and the new fires were kindled with a bow and a spindle, in the way of the ancestors. Day and night since then, the Upper Castle had vibrated to the thud of the

water-drum, the snap of turtle rattles, the high, nasal whine of the singers, the thump of dancing heels coming down hard on the frozen earth.

But Snowbird, Island Woman's seven-year-old, was fizzing with energy. He jumped out at his sisters in a grotesque clown face he had made with bark and old sacking.

Snowbird scared Bright Meadow, who had been walking less than a year. She put her fists to her cheeks and screamed until Island Woman caught her up in her arms and fed her a scrap of maple candy.

Swimming Voices, Island Woman's eldest, was all of thirteen and far too grown-up to pay attention to her little brother's antics. She seemed detached from all of them.

She's got something on her mind, Island Woman thought. *Maybe she has a dream to share. I hope it's not about a man.*

Swimming Voices had her mother's height and looks. The same high cheekbones and huge dark eyes, the raven hair. The child's face was rounder, but some of that was puppyfat that would wear away. The older boys, and some of the warriors, had started sniffing around since Island Woman had taken her daughter out to a cabin in the woods, when the moon-flux came on her for the first time.

That stuff can wait, Island Woman told herself, watching Swimming Voices wrapping a warm blanket over her doeskin kilt and leggings. *I still have many things to teach her, and she has many things to learn. If she is the one.*

Island Woman frowned, because even with the passing thought, a veil seemed to fall between her and her elder daughter.

She had felt this often, especially in dreaming. *There is something that separates us. Something that hides her from me. I must know what it is.*

But perhaps not today.

Bright Meadow fanned her fingers against her mother's bottom lip, making it give out a plopping, gurgling sound.

"Where is my father?" Snowbird demanded.

"It's a secret."

The truth was Island Woman had no idea what had happened to her husband. Blackbuck had been gambling wildly at the bowl game the day before. He had come blundering through the lodge like a bull moose in rut, trying to steal the beaverskin blanket off the children's sleeping mat so he could wager that too. She had hit him with a corn pounder. When that failed to stop him, she had hit him with a cast-iron pot. Blackbuck was a good man when he wasn't gaming or drinking, but that was not often, not when he was home from the trails and had something to trade. She guessed he had stayed up drinking with Hendrick Forked Paths, who had seemed to be piling up most of the winnings at the game.

"Is my father one of the Bigheads?" Snowbird persisted.

"I told you. It's a secret. Go scare somebody. Go dream of something good to eat."

Snowbird ran out through the doorflap to find his friends and start collecting tolls around the village.

The rules of the dream-guessing contest were simple.

The dreamer mimed her dream, and the others tried to guess what she was showing them. Once the content of the dream was discovered, the guesser—and sometimes the whole village—was required to help the dreamer to enact it or, in rarer cases, to avoid it.

The Real People believed this was vital to the health and well-being of the dreamer, because dreams reveal the secret wishes of the soul. The soul speaks through dreams, and if its desires are not honored it may depart from the dreamer in disgust, producing sickness or death.

This was what had been taught from generation to generation.

But what was mimed in the public dream-telling was often what someone had dreamed while waking. Like Snowbird acting out a craving for popcorn or a new lacrosse stick. Or a woman miming her need for a new kettle. Or that shameless lecher, Dragging Antlers, playing out his desire to put a new woman in his bed.

This was understood by everyone, except the white men who sometimes came to the village when they were not wanted and hung about slack-jawed, round-eyed.

Big dreams are told in a different way. They come from spirit guides or from journeys of the soul. They come from the Real World, where all the events of the Shadow World of waking life are born. They are shared only with those who need to know, or whose counsel was required. With the *atetshents*, the one who dreams, or the *arendiwanen*, the woman of power.

Island Woman knew these things because she was a dreamer.

Before I even belonged to the Flint People, I dreamed of living here, in their Valley. I saw the Mohawks coming. I saw their warriors slipping across the frozen lake. I saw them scaling the palisades of our village in the hollow of night, when we were defenseless because the snowdrifts were as high as our walls. My grandmother heard me, but our elders did not listen. My grandmother took our women and children to the island, to keep us safe. But they came for us there, when they had finished with the village. I died that life. Now I belong to the Wolf Clan of the Flint People. This is what I am. Before this life, I dreamed it. Nothing happens that is not dreamed, before it comes into the Shadow World.

The day of dream-guessing mocked everything, including the dreaming.

It was not a day for big dreams. It was a day for people to let out their feelings, to be as stupid or greedy or obscene as they needed to be, to take the piss out of other people's pretensions. It was a big thing among the Real People—especially the men—to hide your emotions, never to get mad in public, never to show you were vulnerable. This was a day when it was fine to let go of all that. You could put on a mask if it helped; it was a day for a blow-out.

Island Woman intended to have some fun.



She had made herself a special necklace. She had made it with hickory bark and a snakeskin, and decorated it with little pinecones, broken shells and grayish tubular objects that proved, on close inspection, to be elderly dog turds.

She put it on over her oldest blanket, the one the dog that produced the turds generally slept on.

In case anyone failed to get the message, she added a crown. It was torn from a colored print, produced in London, that had been delivered to the village in large quantities when Hendrick Forked Paths came back from visiting Queen Anne. The print was taken from a portrait by Verelst, the court painter. It depicted Hendrick in theatrical garb, which was highly appropriate, since his outfit had been provided by a playhouse costumer. The accompanying text described the warchief as an Indian King and as Emperor of the Six Nations. These terms had not translated well into Mohawk, since the world of the Longhouse knew neither kings nor emperors. The chiefs of the Six Nations, the *rotiyaner* or “men of good minds,” were chosen by the clanmothers and served at their pleasure. And Hendrick Forked Paths was not among their number. He was a good talker and a seasoned killer and valued for both talents. But he was not welcomed home in his London dress as an “Indian King.” The ensuing stink had forced him to abandon his lodge in the Lower Castle and move up the Valley.

With a bit of Hendrick on her head and a pair of cornhusks—a crazy parody of a white society lady’s fan—in her hand, Island Woman sallied out among the lodges.

Her immediate target was not Hendrick himself, but the warchief’s daughter.

Hendrick’s daughter Redbird was the snootiest girl in the village. She thought she was better than the others, because her father had been to London and was courted by the Governors of three English colonies. Hendrick was soft on her, bringing her back expensive baubles every time he went to a council at Albany or Boston or Philadelphia. He brought her new calicos every spring, in the brightest prints. He even gave her a quilted silk gown, which she had worn until the brambles and spruce twigs ripped it to pieces.

And he gave her the Necklace. It had been the buzz of the village girls for two whole seasons and was still the focus of envy. The necklace was sterling silver, encrusted with gemstones. Hendrick said he had taken it from a Frenchman, but it was widely believed the necklace was part of the booty from London that he had reserved for himself and his family, instead of turning it over to the clanmothers for the benefit of all.

Redbird wore the necklace on the Sundays when she went down to Fort

Hunter to attend Anglican services in the little stone chapel inside the stockade. They called her by a newcomer's name in church. The minister had written in his book. They called her Margaret. It wasn't even a name Mohawks could say without screwing up their faces. English was full of sounds Mohawks didn't make. Real People spoke with their mouths open. They did not make sounds like M or P, which required you to close your lips. Yet because the newcomers complained they couldn't get their tongues round Mohawk names, Mohawks like Hendrick and his daughter were quick to oblige them by borrowing white men's names.

Island Woman did not have an English name. She had changed her skin name once, when the Mohawk family that adopted her had decided to call her Tawatokwas—She Comes From The Water. Changing your skin name once in a lifetime is enough. Unless a dream tells you different.

Now, where were Hendrick and that fat-assed Margaret Redbird?

The village was in an uproar. Sun Walker, a warrior about the same age as Island Woman's husband, ran up making violent motions with his arms. He looked like he was paddling a dugout through white water.

"A new canoe?" she guessed, laughing.

Sun Walker scowled and blew a hard spray of water into her face. The droplets froze at once, forming tiny icicles on her skin and hair.

Island Woman laughed again when she saw Fruitpicker, her own clanmother, waddling about clutching her belly, with her cheeks puffed out. She was the image of a fat-bellied pot, big enough to feed the whole women's council. How like Fruitpicker to ask only for something simple, something to be shared with the rest of her clan.

Fruitpicker's plump cheeks collapsed in hoots and giggles when she noticed what Island Woman was wearing.

"Bad!" the clanmother whooped. "Bad, bad, bad!" Then, with a wriggle of uncertainty, "Are you really going to do it?"

Island Woman twirled the frozen dog turds as if they were the brilliants the newcomers' fancy women wore at New York and Philadelphia. Or the gemstones in Redbird's silver necklace.

"It is my *ondinnonk*," she announced solemnly. "It is the secret wish of my soul."

Fruitpicker spluttered, and a knot of enthusiasts began to form. Clowns and beggars capered and postured around Island Woman as she continued her search, making it hard for her to see everything that was going on.

She was drawn by another crowd to the clearing in front of the council house, where a big man was whirling and stamping. She thought the crazy man was Hendrick, but as he wheeled, she saw it was White Owl, a younger warrior who had already brought home many scalps. White Owl was stripped to a beaded breechcloth and a slick of bearfat, indifferent to the chill. Now he was cupping his hand over his eyes, as if trying to see something far off, on the other side of the river, in the glare of the sun. Now he flapped his arms

like a warbird, beating pinions. He snatched up a stick and stabbed the snow, outlining a triangular, headless figure with stick limbs.

He wants a war party, Island Woman thought. Maybe he wants to go south, against the Flatheads. Or north, against the French and the Bark-Eaters. There is always an enemy to kill when the blood-frenzy is on a man. When he is ridden by the hungry ghosts.

The bignose clown who was bouncing along in her entourage turned a cartwheel and screamed, "I am the upside-down, inside-out, backward-forward, yes-and-no man, and I am the wisest of the wise!"

That was part of it, Island Woman recognized. The Feast of Dreams was not only fun, sometimes not even fun. It was the overthrowing of everything right and proper, everything you were taught about how to behave and what to expect. There was terror in that too.

She strutted on, swinging her rump, still on the lookout for Hendrick and his daughter.

Her entourage got bigger and bigger. When people got a look at her necklace and paper crown, they ran along whistling and crowing, clapping their hands.

She beat her fan faster. The bignose clown sniffed the dog turds and cooed.

You had to expect the unexpected during the Feast of Dreams, but Island Woman was still shocked by what came crawling towards her through the moving legs. A little old woman, the age her own grandmother would have been. Island Woman knew her, but had never seen her like this.

Deermouse had thrown off her winter blanket. She was as naked as White Owl, with just a rag between her legs and a coat of fish oil or bearfat on her skin.

The old woman clutched at Island Woman's ankles, babbling like a baby. She made wet sucking noises, begging for her dream to be told.

A new granddaughter? Island Woman knew she was right, but did not speak the thought, because this was a dream she could not—*would not*—undertake to fulfill.

She knew that Deermouse had lost her daughters and their children to the white man's plague of spitting sores. They had died like rotting sheep, their skins faded to the color of burned bones. Now Deermouse depended on her surviving brother for food and skins to clothe her. But her brother lived in his wife's lodge, as was expected, and his wife had no use for extra mouths. The brother's wife drove Deermouse away from her fire with her curses, leaving the old woman to scrounge for leftovers from other fires.

I can't give you a granddaughter, old woman.

Only the warriors could do that, if they brought back a captive for adoption no one else claimed. *A child as I was.*

Only the warriors can give you your dream wish. Only the Burned Knives.

Maybe you and White Owl are dreaming the same dream. Maybe that is why you are naked together in the snow.

She saw a cocked hat, trimmed with silver lace, bobbing above the heads of the dream-guessers and clowns.

Hendrick Forked Paths was a hard man to miss, even without the hat. He was the biggest man in the village, bigger even than White Owl. He cut off his hair in all seasons, leaving only a ridged scalplock—now hidden by the fine beaver hat—to show he was always ready for war. The white scar of an Abenaki hatchet ran from the corner of his mouth to his ear. He was solid muscle, apart from the hard round belly that stuck out like the ball-head of his killing club through the folds of his scarlet mantle.

Hendrick was smoking a pipe, watching the revelers without joining in.

Island Woman spotted Redbird behind him, peeking out through the doorflap. Redbird's flat face vanished the moment she saw Island Woman moving toward the lodge, at the head of her retinue.

Hendrick creased his face in a sociable smile, but his eyes were cold. He had not forgotten that Island Woman had been one of those who had jeered when they showed the magic lantern pictures of his visit to London. Maybe he had heard that she had spoken against him before the women's council, accusing him of selling the land the women tilled for the white man's hard liquor and of leading Mohawk warriors to their deaths to fight wars that profited only the newcomers.

Whatever his feelings, Hendrick did not move to deny Island Woman and her troupe passage as they skipped toward the entrance of his mother-in-law's longhouse. No house was spared from the Feast of Dreams, no place—except the burial grounds—was taboo.

But Redbird was not playing the game by the rules.

"What do you want?" she hissed. Her fingers stiffened into claws when she saw the things Island Woman had hung around her neck.

Rolling her hips, flapping the cornhusks in front of her face, Island Woman tripped through the firepit, scattering hot coals across the floor of the lodge. Redbird squealed and rushed about, stamping out flames, rescuing baskets and rush matting.

Island Woman saw a gilt-frame mirror and pounced on it.

She blew kisses at her own image, fondling the circlet of dog turds and broken shells.

"Tell the dream!" the bignose clown screamed right in Redbird's face.

"Tell the dream!" they all echoed.

Redbird's mouth tightened as if drawstrings had been pulled. She looked ready to claw Island Woman's eyes out.

But they were all tormenting her, poking and prodding.

"Tell the dream," came the clown's singsong.

Redbird was bound by the custom. She pulled down the beaded pouch

that hung from the pole behind her sleeping place. She wrenched it open and took out the silver necklace.

She held it in her palm for a long moment, until it began to seem that the cold had grafted the metal to her skin.

Then she made a fist and flung the necklace into the firepit.

Island Woman snatched it up, sudden as a hawk, impervious to any surface burns.

"*Tsitak!*" Hendrick's daughter spat at her. "Eat shit."

"You eat." Island Woman dropped the mock-necklace on the dirt floor of the lodge, and Redbird's dogs ran to slaver over it.

□

Island Woman had not made Redbird tell the dream because she coveted silver. She had done it because Hendrick Forked Paths was selling out their people to the newcomers who were killing the forests, driving the deer and the beaver away. And because Margaret Redbird needed to be pulled off her gilded perch, brought back to the earth where Real People lived.

It was not right to keep the necklace, Island Woman knew; it would make a path for Redbird's evil thoughts to follow.

She could trade it. She could fill her larder against the starving time ahead, when the corn in the bark silos ran low and the hunters could not follow the deer through the melting snow, before the pigeons came back and the maples started to give sugar again.

Then she saw Deermouse. The old woman was shaking and wailing in earnest now. The chill was eating into her marrow.

She pulled the old woman's thumb out of her mouth and pressed the necklace into her palm.

"Here, Aksotha. Let this be your granddaughter."

□

Though her Anglican minister would not have approved, Redbird found a way to get even before the Feast of Dreams was over.

Night came down like a shutter, over a day that had never seen the sun, and Island Woman took her children back to the lodge to eat. She had fried up a heap of cornbread, sweetened with dried blueberries and a little maple sugar. There was jerked venison and a fat slab of bear meat left over from the hunt. She had thawed out a goose from the snow barrel and boiled it up. Real People did not use a lot of seasoning. A little ground sumac in place of salt, a blade of mint.

What Snowbird liked best about the meal was the *okarita*, the popped corn. That was something you got only at festivals. So part of Snowbird's dream had been fulfilled. He wasn't too happy about the other part. He had mimed his dream wish to White Owl, his hero. White Owl was the best

lacrosse player in the Upper Castle, a man who could shoot the ball so hard and fast it would take your head off if you didn't get out of its way. White Owl had guessed the dream, of course. But instead of rewarding Snowbird with a full-size lacrosse stick—Snowbird was hoping for the one he had used to beat the Senecas when they played the Mohawks at Onondaga—White Owl had fobbed him off with a miniature bat, a toy for infants. White Owl said it was a charm that would make Snowbird a champion player. Snowbird was not consoled; he was grumpy, munching stolidly through the popcorn, staring into the fire.

Fruitpicker had joined them, with her young husband Swampduck, a River Indian only recently adopted by the Flint People. Island Woman wondered how the old clanmother always managed to get a younger man. It wasn't her looks, though Fruitpicker was a striking woman. She was stocky, but moved with a confident, exuberant rhythm. Her face was broad and flat and oily, with a dusting of freckles like scattered pumpkin seeds. She could have been as homely as a hunk of cornbread, but wasn't because of her vibrant energy. She was full of *orenda*, full of soul. You could see it in the shining intensity of her eyes, in the way her broad shoulders shook with laughter.

Fruitpicker was eating soup from her own ladle. Its bowl was as big as a white man's soup dish and the handle was a carved figure of a she-wolf suckling a man.

Fruitpicker licked the ladle clean, belched contentedly, and lit up a pipe.

She then asked Island Woman, "Where is your husband?"

"I haven't seen him all day. He won't be in a hurry to see me. He stole my copper kettle and lost it on the bowl game."

"It wasn't him," Swampduck spoke up for his fellow male. "He was drinking the hard water. I saw him. He went away and an *otkon*—a wild spirit—got into his body. He doesn't know anything about it."

"Don't talk shit." Fruitpicker nipped her husband's neck, like a she-wolf calling an unruly pup to order. "Every time a man makes a mess," she said to Island Woman, "he makes out it's not his fault. He doesn't remember. Something got into him. *Whooo-ooo!*" She let out a spooky noise that made Snowbird laugh and set Bright Meadow howling again.

Island Woman had not seen her eldest all day. Well, that was natural. Swimming Voices was thirteen. She wanted to explore the no-man's land between childhood and getting settled. Island Woman had been just the same at that age.

She heard shouts and drunken laughter just outside the lodge. She jumped up from the fire, recognizing Blackbuck's voice. She was going to give him hell over that kettle. She would have hit him harder with the cast-iron pot if she had seen it was missing the day before.

She found Blackbuck sprawled in the snow, half-covered by a filthy buffalo robe that stank of piss and spilled rum. A woman was on the ground with him. She was down on all fours, shaking her butt like a bitch in heat.

“Get away from him!” Island Woman yelled.

Her anger grew white-hot when she saw that the woman who was throwing herself at Blackbuck, in the eyes of the whole village, was Redbird.

Hendrick’s daughter rose to her feet, a twisted leer on her face and eyes of pure hate.

She had something in her hand. Long and silvery, pink on the underside. What was it? A rainbow trout, from one of the snow barrels.

Redbird pointed the frozen fish at Blackbuck, then slid it between her legs. Squalls of laughter were coming from Blackbuck.

When Island Woman flung herself on Redbird, wrestling her for the fish, Blackbuck laughed so hard he almost choked.

“Tell the dream!” cackled the bignose clown, who came skipping around them. “Tell the dream!”

Island Woman broke from the grapple, with flakes of Redbird’s skin under her nails.

The clown was right.

Redbird was claiming Island Woman’s husband according to the same rules that had allowed Island Woman to claim the silver necklace.

It had happened before. Island Woman had seen it. Dragging Antlers had done it three years running, claiming a night or a whole season with another man’s wife or daughter. Until some of the men followed him out in the woods and left him too sore to think about his fish for a while.

Island Woman rushed back through the moosehide doorflap. She ran past the three firepits of the longhouse, out the sunset door. She worked the lid off the smallest of the snow barrels. There were a few carp and walleye inside. She picked them out of the ice, breaking a nail.

She ran back round the side of the lodge and found Blackbuck shambling along after Hendrick’s daughter like a dog on a leash.

Island Woman let out a long, wordless howl.

Redbird and Blackbuck stopped in their tracks. When the howl died, the whole village was silent.

“You want fish?” Island Woman did not need to shout, in that sudden calm. “You want fish?”

She bounded forward and started throwing the frozen fish. The first whipped across Redbird’s mouth, cracking her lip. The second was deflected by the huge bulk of Hendrick Forked Paths, thrust between his daughter and Island Woman.

Hendrick said, “We will dream no more tonight.”

Island Woman was asleep, her feet to the fire, when Blackbuck pressed his body against her, under the beaverskin blanket. The sight of the women

fighting over him had excited him. He grunted, trying to shove his thing into her without asking.

“*Sehnekakeras*,” she growled. “You stink of liquor.”

He kept on butting, so she hit him where it got his attention.

He did not fight back. He whimpered and coaxed, trying to get round her another way.

She told him, “You owe me a new kettle.”

He complained that he would not have any more peltries to trade until the spring.

“*Iotkennisotsen*,” Island Woman said, nestling her head in the crook of her arm. “May your fish rot right off.”

It was about the worst thing you can say to a man in Mohawk.

2.

Dreams that are wishes of the soul (when they are true dreams as well as wishes) can tell you that you need something you didn't know you needed or something you denied wanting because you felt ashamed for wanting it.

Big dreams tell you more.

When you go walking in your dreambody, you can see things that are many looks away, things that can save your life. You can find where the deer are yarding in the starving time. You can see where your enemies are lying in ambush along the trail.

When your dreamsoul goes flying, it visits the future and brings back memories of things that haven't happened yet, in the Shadow World. Sometimes you can stop those things from coming to pass. Sometimes you just have to live them out. Blackbuck dreamed once that he was captured by enemies and burned to death at the stake. He woke up terrified. He went to the elders and asked for help. One of the grayhairs dreamed on it. He told them to tie Blackbuck to a stake and burn him with red-hot knives and hatchets. They hurt him a lot, but did not kill him. They thought that by playing out Blackbuck's dream, but changing the ending, they were taming the future he had seen.

Life is filled with crossroads. Often you don't even notice them until they are behind you, unless you know how to dream. Dreaming, you can scout out the different trails you might follow and see where they lead. Dreaming, you are already choosing the events that will take place in your waking life.

The more conscious you are, the more practiced in hunting and catching dreams, the more you can accomplish.

You can even find out who you are.

Without a big dream, it is impossible to know this. In the day world, you are mostly asleep. In big dreams, you wake up. That is when your dreambody goes wandering and your guides can speak to you.

You might visit your teachers, or one of them might drop in on you, which is usually the way it happens the first time. Your guide might send an animal or a bird to get you out of your body so you can start to *see*. You might be called to a place of power, a place in the dreaming to which you can return, to learn and receive counsel.

You will start to learn that you have counterparts in the Real World. These powerful beings appear in different forms. When you have changed your eyes and your hearing so you can see and hear the great ones as they truly are, they will give you power songs to help their energy to flow through you.

When you start living with that energy in waking life, you are no longer like other people. You see their second bodies. You see the colors of their feelings. You see when a part of their soul is missing, or when something has been shot inside them that is causing pain and sickness. And then you want to help them. Because, although you are no longer like other people, you know that everything is connected.

Orenda—soul-energy, the power of life—flows through everything, it binds the universe. It gathers in some places that are natural accumulators: an old oak tree, or a mountain, or a stone. Some people are charged with it; they light up a whole lodge. You can feel their energy fields before you see them. They are not blocking themselves, their power centers are all connected. They can put the day mind, with all its noise and clutter, on one side, and let the great ones through. They can make themselves hollow bones for the spirit to work through.

This is what Island Woman was told by her teacher, the dream-prophet whose name was never spoken aloud:

“You must visit the upper and lower worlds. You must journey to the Land of Souls and speak with your ancestors. You must know your spirit guides and your animal guardians, and how to summon them. You will be required to confront and overcome many powerful opponents. You must never forget that the Real World cannot be seen with ordinary eyes, and that in the Real World there is only *now*.

“When you have done this, when your courage is proven, you will be an *atetsents*. One who dreams.

“When you know *who you are*, you will be an *arendiwanen*. A woman of power.”

3.

The palisades of the Upper Castle were formed by three rows of stripped pine logs, sharpened to spearpoints at the top. They had been hammered down deep into the hill, angled so they crossed each other nearly twenty feet above the ground, forming a bristling rampart that could tear out an

attacker's entrails if he fell on it with any force. Native ladders—unstripped pines with the stubs of the branches left on—led up to the platforms from which warriors could shoot down at an approaching enemy.

Only a single sentry was posted today, although there was word of new raiding parties of Mission Indians, moving on snowshoes through the Endless Mountains with their French advisers. It had been almost a generation since an invader had dared to attack one of the strong-walled Mohawk Castles. It would take a bold attacker to try it, unless he was marching with white men's cannon or was certain the bulk of the Mohawk warriors had left the village. The Flint People did not treat defeated enemies gently. And the caresses of the Mohawk women were more feared than the warclubs of the Burned Knives. Mohawk women had been known to slit open a captive's belly and measure the length of his intestines; they always left a captive alive to return to his own people and tell what had happened. Every enemy deterred by the terror of what he could picture was an enemy who did not need to be killed.

The village was only half awake, when the lone guard gave a hoarse cry at the sight of a slim figure loping along the top of the palisades.

The cloud-roof was gone. Beyond the Noses, where twin limestone cliffs pinched the Valley, the eastern sky was red as a cock cardinal. The fading moon hung pale at the sunset end of the world. The juxtaposition was powerful, but the horns of the moon were turned down, which was a bad sign. Island Woman noticed as soon as she came out of her lodge, pulled from her dream by the sentry's cry.

The runner was half way round the palisades when she halted and squatted, her arms dangling between her knees, like the wolf's.

Then she tipped back her head and opened her jaws. Her howl changed pitch and then hovered in the air in a long tremolo. All the dogs in the village joined in. From somewhere beyond the hemlock ridge, a timber wolf answered.

Island Woman walked through the snow in her calf-high moccasins, stuffed with dried moss, and stared up at her daughter.

Swimming Voices watched her for a long moment, making sure she understood. Then she made her spring, landing lightly in the snow on all fours. She greeted her mother with a high squeaking noise, then rubbed her nose against Island Woman's neck.

Tell the dream. Swimming Voices spoke with her eyes and her body, hitting her mother with flanks and shoulders in a kind of rolling dance. She was wearing a wolfskin and the snout lolled over her head.

Island Woman seized her daughter's wrist, to make sure of the dream.

This was not another game, for the Feast of Dreams. This came from the beating heart of their lives.

Island Woman felt the tides of her daughter's blood under her fingers.

The *atetsents*—the one who dreams—does not interpret other people's dreams. She enters them and explores them. She can even find dreams you lost.

Island Woman picked up her daughter's trace. She followed its scent, moving faster and faster, through landscapes she knew to a place in the dreaming.

I do not know this place. It is a clearing in the woods, no wider than a little-used trail. Hot coals are glowing in a line that runs all along the center. On both sides of me, women are drumming. I smell cedar and sweetgrass and the real tobacco. I throw off my blanket. I stand naked before my sisters. I was born for this.

Now I am running. My muscles are firm, my blood is strong. The pads of my feet are hard. They have been toughened by long seasons of running over flints and stinging nettles. My mother made me do this. To run like a wolf, you must be intimate with pain.

I am running on fire. I touch the coals and feel only joy. I run so fast I become something other. My shape is no longer that of women.

The pack is waiting for me. I run with them, over the mountains. We hunt together. With their eyes, I see the one who is ready to give me his life. I know pride when they offer me the heart of the fresh kill.

Now my mother will know me. Now I am Okwaho.

Island Woman released her daughter's hand.

Swimming Voices was trembling, waiting for her mother's word.

"*Wakateriontare*," Island Woman confirmed. "I know this matter. I will speak with our clanmother."

4.

Fruitpicker prepared a fresh pipe. She added a few pieces of dried sumac to the native tobacco, lit the mixture with a splint from the fire, and passed the pipe to Island Woman.

We ride to the skies on a cloud of tobacco.

After long silence, in the smoky lodge, the clanmother said, "Your feelings are not clear."

"This is true."

"Speak to me from your heart. You are a gift to us, my daughter. The power of dreaming has been reborn in us through you. It is natural that it should be passed on, through your bloodline."

Island Woman said nothing.

"Swimming Voices is young. She is proud. Life has not yet taken her by the throat. Is this the root of your misgivings?"

"There is something more. Something I cannot see."

"What is it you fear? Your child has the gift. We knew that when she was still inside your body."

"It is the use she could make of it." Island Woman did not need to complete the thought. Both women knew that the power to heal is also the power to harm.

The clanmother spoke, "My daughter, we have shared many things, many hardships. Don't bite me if I speak as I must. Is it possible that a part of you is afraid to relinquish something of your own power?"

"It is possible," Island Woman agreed.

"We will wait until the Sugar Moon," Fruitpicker ruled. "We will wait until the maple leaves are the size of a squirrel's foot. Then we will make the tests that are necessary. But Swimming Voices is impatient. Therefore we will bring her before the women's council. She will learn what she might become. And what will be required of her."

□

"Fruitpicker looks different," Swimming Voices whispered to her mother.

"She *is* different."

The girl had seen Fruitpicker hoeing the cornfield, picking lice out of a child's hair, rooting for the Wolf Clan boys in a lacrosse game, trading bawdy jokes while she smoked a pipe or added a pinch of potash to a pot of cornsoup to make it good and slick.

Now Swimming Voices saw Wahiakwas—She Who Picks the First Fruits—as *ka'nihstensera*. Clan mother.

Fruitpicker was wearing her cleanest doeskins and holding a fourteen-row wampum belt. The white and purple shells had the patina of great age. In one of the designs Okwaho—the she-wolf—was suckling a pair of human figures, male and female. Swimming Voices could not make out the other designs clearly and might have wriggled deeper into the circle for a better look, but she was daunted by the voice in which the clanmother began to speak.

Fruitpicker's voice was quite soft, as she chanted the thanksgiving. She started, as always, by returning thanks for the living, and thanks to the Mother for the blessings of earth.

The power was in the rhythms, with words washing back and forth like waves, carrying her audience deeper into the meaning beyond the words. Her voice was more song than speech.

This was the voice of power.

And it seemed to Swimming Voices, as Wahiakwas went on and on, that the clanmother was speaking to *her*.

This is what Fruitpicker said:

"Women give life. Men can only take it. Women are the life-bringers, and we must always be revered. Before male and female, there was She.

"She Who Fell from the Sky danced this world into being, on the turtle's back.

“Women must always *choose*. We choose our husbands. We choose whether to return a soul to this earth. We choose the land that we plant so our people may be fed, honoring the Three Sisters and all of our life supporters. We raise up the men of good minds to wear the living bones of the Confederacy. We remind them that a chief is to live as a walking stick that the people may lean on. We teach them that they must consider the consequences of all their thoughts and actions, down to the seventh generation. When they forget, we de-horn them. We bring them down very close to the earth, so they may recover the Mother’s wisdom.

“You see how the newcomers use their women. They use them as slaves, or like trade women to be bought and sold.

“The Peacegiver taught us that all the races of humankind are related. That Sonkwaiatison, our Creator, made all of us. That when he forged us, with clay and sunlight, with the foam of the waves and the wind of his spirit, our Creator gave all of us the same songs and the same drums, so we could speak with him. So we would remember.

“My grandmothers told me that we, the Real People, are the youngest of all the races of humankind, and that our Creator made us because he was not satisfied with the others. My grandmothers said that because we are the youngest of the races, we remember better than the others how our Creator wishes us to live.

“The newcomers have forgotten. They say that woman was made from the bone of a man, and lives only to serve him. They say that the bird tribes and the animal nations do not have souls. Instead of honoring the Mother, they rape her body.

“Now they have come among us, and we walk where the earth is narrow.

“When Forked Paths crossed the great water, to visit the court of the English Queen, I gave one of his companions counting sticks. I wanted him to count the Tiorhonsaka—the People from the Sunrise—so we would know how many of them we have to face. He broke the counting sticks. He returned sick in his soul. He told us that the People from the Sunrise are as many as the leaves of the forest. We knew then that we could not fight all of them. We had to find a way to live beside them.

“It is hard, because the newcomers move among us like Whirlwind. They spread madness with their hard water. They send death among us with many faces. They kill us with the plague of spitting sores that our medicine cannot heal, because it comes from a different dreaming. They make our men greedy for their rum, and for things we cannot make for ourselves. They set brother against brother, bribing our warriors to fight our kinsmen in wars between white men.

“Because of this, the Dark Times are returning. I have seen this. The Real People will come close to dying this life. But the shadow falls over all. The elms will die. Then the maples. The fish will float belly-up in poisoned

waters. Then the strawberries will begin to die, until we have only a few leaves and scrapings for the sacred rituals that restore the earth and call back our brother sun."

"This world has died four times before.

"It will die again, within seven generations.

"But our greatest dream-prophet has told us it can yet be saved. For this to be done, dreamers and women of power must rise among all the nations. They must recall the peoples to the songs and the drums our Creator gave us all. They must bring back the dreaming.

"We who remember are charged with a duty beyond all others. We must keep the fire burning within our lineage, so that the souls of the great ones will return to us and a great dreamer will walk among us in times to come.

"We must reach out in dreaming, even among our enemies, to those whose souls can be awakened.

"We can do this, as long as we can dream, as long as we can think with the heart.

"We are keepers of the earth. We are the life-givers. We are one heart, one mind. This is our power. This is the only power that is true."