

Chapter Six

With the haunted house behind her, Lucia tried hard to step into Omar's left and right snow depressions.

After two failures, she gave up and matched all she could. At the wire strung with the alligator teeth, she asked him, "You think Miss Wetherill strung these?"

"She's a house spirit to me," replied Omar. "So, I'd say no."

Protected by the adjacent spruce trees, the seven teeth hung motionless, no clunk or chatter excited by the overhead breeze.

Lucia inched closer to the wire. "We should've taken these teeth inside when we knew we'd meet Miss Wetherill."

"Why?"

"Joined us closer to the Miscah people."

Omar grunted. "If they were so powerful, they'd be alive."

Lucia shrugged. "Guess . . . guess you're right."

She touched the center tooth. It vibrated. Her right-hand fingertips tingled, ten times greater than her actual contact.

"You okay?" Omar asked.

"Yeah. Maybe a little dizzy." Lucia glanced left and right. "You see anyone?"

Lucia's body wobbled. Hands on her shoulders steadied her. A cloudy wraith appeared three feet in front of her, above the teeth. It reminded her of a dream she'd sketched, an image of her twenty years into the future dressed in fine brocade blue silk.

"Breathe, Lucia," pleaded Omar. "Please."

"It's not you," she whispered.

Who then? Lucia struggled to piece everything together. There

existed a cute cafeteria laugh, an agility on the sledding hill, a magnetism whenever she was unintentionally brushed against. Of course, she understood this to be superficial, but Johnny's name on the B honor roll image was far from happenstance.

"Lucia, you're scaring me."

Two strong exhales released her from whatever gripped her.

"I'm okay. Did you see any of the alligator teeth gyrate?"

"No." Omar released his grip on Lucia's shoulders. "Did you?"

Lucia tried not to question her own reality and then wavered, but so as not to lie, she spoke without conviction. "Thought so."

Omar altered his stand from behind to be alongside her.

"There's no breeze now. The sharp teeth points hang straight."

"We should leave."

With a left-handed reach, Omar grabbed the wire.

"Stop," said Lucia. "Leave them. They don't belong to either of us. Not right, if we disturb them."

"What about bringing them to Miss Wetherill?"

Lucia cleared her throat to allow time to both answer Omar and calm her nervous desire to challenge the energy the alligator tooth vibrated into her finger. Yet, Miss Wetherill also scared her, a spooking invoked by incense religiously stronger and greater than the threatened, unexplained rituals of an ancient people.

"Changed my mind. That okay?"

"She's probably not available in the house, anyway. Whatever we do won't matter. You're right. Stupid teeth."

She half-believed Omar, at least as to the alligator teeth. Lucia tried to brighten her facial expression to garner Omar's agreement. "If we walked in one way, let's walk out another row."

"You know something?"

Lucia shook her head.

Omar's sheepish smile signaled his agreement. He then added, "What harm can we cause if we walk side-by-side?"