

Haida Gwaii

Kung: 11 May 2076

Raven Rocksong lulls in repose till sunlight tickles her face.
Eyelashes open; the glare overloads her retinas. She bolts upright,
kicks blankets aside and touches cold cedar floorboards. Goose
bumps appear on bare skin.

Cold enough to see my breath.

Voices outside are busy and about.

Way past dawn... I've overslept.

And breakfast has come and gone.

Crows are poking at fern shoots, scavenging for litter beneath the
spruce boughs. The view through the window glass is marred with
watermarks and splotches of grime.

Another of my errant chores.

If Headpa notices he'll say

I'm not grateful for glass that
cost four yellow-cedar carvings.

Oh well, the scrub can wait

for when I'm not so late.

She tiptoes to the dresser which has open shelves and broad top.
On it lies a comb, hairbrush and water basin. In the small mirror,
water splashes chestnut skin and wakens dark-brown eyes. Blood
pulses through arteries, senses reach quorum and she's ready for
another day.

She contorts facial muscles in ways that make her look older. She
hikes the nightshirt overhead and ogles her doughy adolescent

curves. This past winter two corms have blossomed. Welcome proofs of womanhood that won't be denied. Emergent breasts have sure killed the sweat-lodge gibes about "little girl" buds.

She combs snarls from hair and recalls yesterday when she watched the night sky with Jade. He pointed out constellations in the field of stars, but his eyes kept glancing at long black hair and her proud curves under the fabric wrap. His fingers strayed to her sidelong braids when he thought she wasn't looking.

He was aroused for sure.

Easy to see I've got what
it takes to reshape his goals.

She played on his desire to navigate by stars. She almost convinced him to take the astronomy course.

If Jade accompanies
me to the megadome,
it will be easier to get
Goodma onside, and she'll
help convince Headpa.

A big problem remains. She hasn't found the right study course for herself. The course has to be worthwhile. It must offer strong reasons to study at Tsawwassen. It must reap as many benefits as the horticulture course that Goodma took when *she* was a teenager.

Raven can't wait to wander among the skyscrapers, to speak English and practice the brisk vowels and crisp cadences. City folk speak with clear intensity; their words don't sound like the whoosh and hiss of Haida, its droll echoes of wind and sea. Folks in the megadome have other things to do than bake fish.

Jade Runner has strong arms, large hands and dark piercing eyes. Gals flit about him like homesick gnats. It's hard not to like his upfront style. Before he joined the fishers, Jade was her loyal companion and go-to buddy for dozens of childish pranks. Nowadays they've grown apart. He spends his time patching and hauling nets, while she helps Goodma in the garden or toils in the carver's hut. She rues the fishy smell that sluffs off his skin and clothes. The odor reminds her of life in Kung where everything centers around catching and cooking fish. It will take a month inside the megadome to get rid of his fishy scent.

Headpa is the band's chief carver, maker of icons of great value that are often traded for stuff the band needs, whereas Jade's headpa is the Kung's chief fisher. Goodma takes care of the village garden where she nurtures berries, fibrous plants and herbs for medicines. Jade is the eldest son of his family and Raven is the only child of hers. Both families are kingpins of the band, so a union between their offspring is carved in stone. She has been dangled as bait while Jade has been aimed like an arrow at a tender doe. Their partnership is as certain as November rain. Once she becomes his dutiful sidekick, she'll toil in Kung for the rest of her life. That's why she has to make her move before she's gone to earth like the roots of a Sitka spruce.

Raven tunnels inside Indian hemp leggings. The trousers fit snug at the waist and loose around the legs. She dons a mackinaw that has down-filled pads arrayed in checkerboard fashion. The mackinaw looks bulky and hides her emergent breasts, but there's no better armor for wet-slogged boughs in the woods. Likewise the

deerskin footwear staves off fungus between her toes. She fastens ankle guards to protect against snarly bristles. On her head fits a cone hat. Its all-around stubby visor wards off the high sun and spares eyes from dripping rain.

She scampers down the stepped ladder to ground floor, her bladder crying for release. She heads for the no-frills outhouse which is so typical of Kung. Dig a deep hole and then cover it with a wooden-platform with a circular opening. People straddle the hole and drop their crap in the pit. Every week, enzymes and herbs are added to kill the smell. But the stink never goes away.

Business done, she reaches for a handful of dried peatmoss. Yesterday's pile has dwindled to scattered crumbs. She scoops the last bits and realizes it's her turn to fetch more supplies.

Raven nears the longhouse and spots telltales of peatmoss between timbers. Last autumn she and several youngsters stuffed fresh moss in the cracks to keep the cold and wet outside. They must've done a good job, for the cracks still look stoppered after a winter of storms.

The longhouse has a slanted roof coated with thin-film solar panels. Its walls are made of redcedar logs, one atop another and each notched at the corners to fit tight. A tall mast rises above the roof on which three windmill blades spin quietly. At the crest of the roof, a cistern rises above a flat wooden platform. The cistern holds enough water for the dog days of summer, so long as nobody uses too much. Last summer a GREENS Keeper came and added a mesh screen over the top. The screen lets the rainwater in but catches twigs, dried leaves and remains of sunbaked bugs.

Everyone in the village fits inside the longhouse for meetings or indoor feasts. Otherwise the common room serves as nursery, storage and workspace. Across the ceiling are tubular lights which brighten the inside for users of the spindle, loom or needle bobber. Near the walls are rows of dried bark, fireweed and root fibers hanging from the rafters. When the weather turns mean, elder women will splice and weave the fibers into baskets or clothes. Fishers will collect the toughest strands of fireweed and then weave them together for fishnets.

Granny Warm Bear squats cross-legged on a floor cushion. She's knitting the 2nd-sleeve of a Cowichan sweater. The old woman looks up and shakes her head. "Wonders never cease. The princess has awakened."

Raven cringes, though the gibe is deserved. Granny has a whole basket of barbed hooks for slackers. They cut deep, but they're seldom mean-spirited. Her large hawk's nose looks intimidating, but laugh lines on either side betray a jovial nature. She treats every kid in the village as her favorite grandchild.

Nearby in an ornate basket, Crying Loud slumbers as quiet as can be.

Her lungs must be played out,
recharging for another wail.

The widow Ingrid is working on a swath of fabric, her foot prodding the drive pedal as she guides cloth under the needle bobber. Her face looks grumpy as a dried creek bed. Last winter she lost her husband to a hunting accident. She glances up from the stitch machine, her eyes vacant and withdrawn.

Centered in the room, a workstation sits on a small table cluttered with plastic reference cards. Her son Edgar peeks out from the computer monitor and offers Raven a dubious grin. She returns a venomous scowl that sends him ducking for cover behind the flatview.

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Raven hasn't forgiven Edgar. He's the reason she has lost computer access for a whole month. Edgar owns the best computer skills in Kung, and he conned her to join him for a misadventure. He'd found a forbidden game whose scenes took place inside a space colony. She couldn't refuse the chance to explore a soupcan any more than she could've spurned a handful of hazelnuts.

Most of Kung's webcasts are educational. The hokey games that got past the Haida elders are dull or stupid, or both. Edgar says they've been designed for kids in the megadome and then adapted for kids in outback villages. He claims the objects of the games must've got lost in the switchover.

Most of the webcasts aren't games at all. They feature teachers who drone on and on about cooking or fishing. Outside of English language classes, Raven finds the webcasts as annoying as raindrops. After sensing the first one, nobody hangs around for the downpour that drenches clothes to the bone.

There are public announcements such as storm warnings for fishers or forest-fire watches. Meanwhile elders discuss the best ways to bake fish, gather herbs, make clothes or preserve berries. As far as Raven can see, they harp about stuff that folks already know.

On one of the trips to the Masset store, a news crew happened to be visiting, and they asked Goodma to talk about herbal medicines. Raven was allowed in the studio to watch the interview. She felt thrilled and oddly proud of Goodma.

Still, the webcasts don't dwell on life in Tsawwassen or the soup cans. So when Edgar offered a chance to learn about the soups, Raven jumped in like a seagull after fish offal. She didn't even fuss when Edgar used *her* password for the session. "My ID could've gotten tagged when I scouted the site," he said. "It's better to use yours."

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Edgar stays hidden, unwilling to meet her gaze. A guilty conscience, she reckons as she glares at the flatview. Then she recalls why she entered the longhouse. "The outhouse needs peatmoss," she murmurs, more to herself than anyone else

Granny looks up from her knitting. "Ha! About time you got caught with the dregs. *You* know where the peatmoss is."

Raven heads for the bin of peatmoss. She tilts the bin and empties most of the peatmoss in a bentwood box. She hopes Granny won't notice the depleted reserve.

I'll get badgered into gathering
peatmoss along with the berries.

As she hoists the bentwood box and starts for the outhouse, Granny speaks up, "Whoa, Princess." Her knee joints crackle as she rises from the cushion of cedar boughs. "You forgot clubmoss spores."

Granny waddles to the wall cabinet and picks up a yellow-cedar

urn. She tilts the urn and sprinkles powdered spores over the peatmoss. "Don't wanna give folks a dose of fanny rash, do you?"

"No," says Raven as she grins at the thought of band members with itchy butts.

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She trudges to the outhouse and mulls over her grudge with Edgar.

The game itself fulfilled its promise. It showed the insides of a space colony from every viewpoint. She wasn't thrilled with game's purpose, which was to kill large alien lizards, but curiosity overruled. Nor did she fuss about the outfit her avatar had to wear. Edgar's stand-in wore long pants with metal shin guards and heavy boots, whereas hers wore long tight stockings, a leather skirt that just covered her upper thighs and goofy shoes with stilts under each heel. At least the upper-body armor looked as rugged as Edgar's, and it flattered her breasts.

They were given blasters and entry to a massive tower that rose many times taller than a tree until it vanished in a blaze of sunlight. The game master said the lifts had been shut down to keep the lizards from using them, so they had to climb stairs, looking for lizards who'd been spotted as far down as the 15th-floor. Her avatar seemed accustomed to the goofy shoes and had no trouble carrying the heavy blaster or keeping pace with Edgar.

Their flatview was split in halves, and she could adjust the viewpoint of her half to the left or right, up or down. She kept a sharp eye out, determined to kill as many lizards as Edgar did. The stairwell's ceiling and walls fit together as if carved from the same

log. The roof was coarse and white; the walls were mirrorlike gray. They climbed graystone stairs that were spotless without a speck of dust.

"Where are the spacer folk?" she wondered aloud.

Edgar shrugged. "Ran away, most like."

"Unless they were eaten first."

"Attacked without warning? Could've happened, I guess." He looked as if he'd bitten into something nasty. "No blasters to fight back with."

"Shouldn't we check each floor?"

"Why bother?" said Edgar. "No lizards down here. They're up ahead."

They climbed more stairs, their blasters at ready. When they reached the 15th-floor, Edgar refused to stop despite her reluctance. They went up another six flights before two lizards appeared at the top of the stairwell. Raven roasted one lizard to a flaming heap of charcoal; Edgar blasted the other. There wasn't time to utter a cheer of triumph, for she heard rapid thumps on the stairs below. Two lizards were galloping up the stairs, their jaws wide-open, showing dozens of sharp teeth. Raven blasted the nearest in the mouth; Edgar nailed the one behind it.

"Told you," she harrumphed. "We should've cleared the floors before going up. Now they're after us from every side."

"Doesn't matter if we stick together," he said after they reached the next floor. "Might as well continue up."

"Go ahead. I'm going to check this floor."

She took off to the left without looking back. After several steps

she turned the flatview rearward. Sure enough, Edgar was following behind.

The walls looked smooth as water in a windless cove. Some white patches with colored icons were engraved on the walls. She reckoned the icons were spacer names or signals, but she had no clues what they might mean. Nowhere did she find anything that resembled the burred-tan qualities of wood. Nor did she spot the forest greens that evoke the moist scents of growth. The spacers favored stuff that wasn't made from living things.

She glanced inside open doors and saw chairs, cupboards and desks with electric appliances. She tried to guess the purposes of the gadgets, without much luck. Her thoughts chewed on the spacer puzzle: how they lived, how they went about their business.

Oh, how I thirst
to learn everything
about this soupcan.

In one of the rooms a spacer's body sprawled on the floor, half-eaten by lizards. She ignored the corpse, for it was just another cartoon. Edgar had turned his half of the screen to the rear. She heard a loud poof and saw him blast a charging lizard to smoked charcoal. Glancing forward, two lizards jumped out of opposite doorways. She fired twice and got them both. It gave her four kills to Edgar's three. Not that it mattered, she was more anxious to explore.

"Those lizards move awful fast," grumped Edgar.

"What'd you expect? They got four legs."

She prowled ahead until she came to a fork in the corridor. A

lizard appeared in the left fork, and she fired till it burst into flames. At the same time, Edgar nailed another one advancing from the rear.

She glanced at Edgar. "Should we take the right fork?"

"Sure. I'll cover our backs."

Raven marched down the corridor for at least 200 paces. Her sense of scale grew with each step she took. Lots of spacers should be around, going about their business, but no one could be seen. They must've gotten scared and run off. She longed to meet someone who was able to answer her questions.

Ahead the corridor led to an open walkway enclosed by tall windows. If Raven had ever gone on a cruise ship, she would've called it a promenade deck. Four lizards advanced from the left side and another bunch from the right. "Lizards! Take the ones on the right," she cried and pointed her blaster.

"Holy smokes," said Edgar, as he scrambled out and took aim.

They fired till the charging monsters became eight piles of charcoal.

"They knew where we were going," Edgar grouched.

"Whoever spots us must tell the others."

Before Edgar could respond, another thought occurred. Raven swiveled the flatview and saw two lizards charging from the corridor. "Lizards behind us," she warned.

They swung blasters around and roasted the attackers. Their blackened lumps simmered less than two paces from where they stood. The line of windows curved inwards, swinging out of view 75 paces away. If she was standing on the slice of a circle, the size of the floors would be greater than the whole village of Kung.

"They're getting closer," said Edgar. He checked his blaster. "Mine has 95% of its reserve. How's yours?"

"Same here."

He grinned. "We oughta make lots of charcoal before we're through."

Raven turned her eyes to the scene outside the windows. Her sense of scale took a wild leap before she realized she was looking at the insides of a gigantic barrel. The details were smudged, for they were so far away. Like seeing the distant shoreline from a warrior canoe where tree branches splotched together and came out as a ruffled blanket of green.

The closest stuff was down below. She made out hundreds of gardens. Some of them were tended by gardeners the size of mice. The plants grew in straight lines, and rows of squat trees surrounded each of the gardens. These trees had sidewinding branches and sported floppy leaves like those of berry bushes. The garden patches continued to the left and right and up the sides of the barrel.

Such odd behavior seemed too strange to reckon. She looked instead to the distance and found something like a windmill, though the blades didn't move. Then she realized six blades were rounded like muscled arms that spanned to the surface of the barrel in six places, as if the arms supported the barrel's shape.

The arms were joined at a bulging ball. From its center shot a glare of brilliance as if the sun had been squeezed into a long glowing snake. On either side of brilliance, the top of the barrel showed more of the garden patches, though these were tiny

compared to those below. She expected to see clod of dirt falling from above, but none did. Plants, soils and trees stayed in place all along the curve of the barrel. It didn't make sense.

"Centrifugal force," said Edgar who stood beside her, gazing out the window.

"What?"

"The soupcan spins and creates centrifugal force that keeps everything stuck to the rims."

"I don't see no spinning," huffed Raven. There were copses of trees hedging the garden plots and an odd duck pond.

"Of course not," he sniffed. "You're spinning like everything else."

"No way. I'd notice."

"You don't even notice when the earth turns faster than a shot arrow. All you see is the sun and moon rising in the east and setting in the west."

"They sure don't move faster than arrows." She hated it when Edgar put on his smarty-pants and talked about weird stuff like "sentrugal" force.

"They're too far away and the earth is huge."

"Humph." There were rows of windows wrapped around the six arms. She realized the arms were towers, same as the one where she stood. "This place is so big."

As she turned her view toward Edgar, she spotted lizards charging from his backside. Before she could swing the blaster, a huge gaping jaw engulfed her half. There were loud crunching sounds. The flatview blanked, turned ominous blue and showed

white English letters...

GAME OVER. YOU LOST.

19 Kills is One Shy of the 20
Needed for a Bonus Round.

This Game will be Charged.

"It's your fault," sniffed Edgar. "I killed ten lizards."

"No way. I was one ahead of you."

"You miscounted. Mine added to ten."

From the look on his face, she could see Edgar was bound and determined to shift the blame. A week later, she knew why.

The game fee had been deducted from Kung's account. Such a small amount wouldn't buy enough sticklebacks to feed the village dogs, but it was never approved. Headpa managed Kung's account, and he spotted the markdown. When he learned it came from a forbidden game site and was recorded under Raven's name, he scolded her in front of the whole village and revoked her computer privileges. Edgar never said a word, never owned up to his part in the escapade.

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His betrayal has come at the worst time. It gives Headpa another reason to block her efforts to study in Tsawwassen.

Raven spreads peatmoss for others who'll use the outhouse. She twirls the empty bentwood box. The 1st-chore of the day is done.

Headpa fears I won't come back.

I'll join the other young folk

who've drifted away and

found jobs in the megadome.

But I just want a chance to study

unless I get invited to the soups.

Who knows? I may just go.

Headpa is a throwback to the old ways. He champions the Changeover because it has isolated Kung from the city folk. He's thick with the elders of Masset, Sandspit and Haida Town.

Changeover may've brought villagers closer together, but it's a double-edged gift. It has restored the old ways, traditional lands and fishing waters, but primitive tools make it harder to do everyday chores. Canoe makers have to fell trees with axes, not power saws. There are no cars, no diesel boats or highways. The store in Masset doesn't stock the fine wares that city folk take for granted. On its shelves there no ready-made clothes, no alcoholic drinks, no miracle pills, no sweets, no throwaways like diapers.

Worst of all, Headpa is overprotective which is so typical of adults. It's why he blocks the news from Tsawwassen. He thinks outsiders are a bad influence for youngsters. Whatever his aim, it hasn't worked.

I've asked Goodma of things she saw

when she spent six months in Tsawwassen.

I've asked GREENS of Langara Island

who've showed me the outside world.
I'll never forsake my native roots,
for I've learned the ways of the forest.
I know which plants are good to eat
and which plants will help cure woes.

Headpa hasn't gotten over the death of his older brother Squirrel Ears. Ten years older than Headpa, he earned his name from the odd shape of his ears and his acute sense of hearing. He found work as a lubber on a trimaran that brought supplies to coastal communities like Masset. For a while Squirrel Ears worked at a fish farm, then he went and found work in the megadome. His occasional letters gave no signs of unhappiness or distress. It was a shock for everyone when word came that Squirrel Ears had died of a drug overdose.

His tragic fate burns like a fire-pit stone in Headpa's mind. He reckons the same fate will befall anyone who leaves Haida Gwaii. He distrusts outsiders, especially city folk. He begrudges GREENS keepers as if they're no better than the poachers, smugglers, foresters and diamond drillers, all of which have quit poking around since the Changeover. He won't acknowledge the good things that have happened in recent years, such as the removal of open-sea fishfarms and the disbanding of commercial loggers and fishers. Instead he rants about the young who've left their bands and joined co-ops in Tsawwassen or Big Island.

There's more to the world
than what's on a pond's surface.
I've gotta plunge the depths

and see the city for myself.

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Raven spots Headpa entering the longhouse. She ducks in behind him.

Headpa waves a battered teapot. "Warm Bear," his deep voice booms, drawing everyone's attention, "haven't you finished that sweater yet?"

"Humph!" hoots Granny. "Would've finished two moons ago if folks wouldn't barge in so often. I s'poze you want hot tea." Granny struggles to her feet. "Gimmie your pot, Long Hand. Go take that fresh one off the stove."

Headpa relinquishes the empty pot and follows her to the Franklin stove.

"Before you go, you might share a cup with your daughter." Granny nods to the space behind his shoulder. "She missed breakfast and has lots of gathering ahead of her."

Nonplussed, Headpa pivots full around. "Raven!" he exclaims. His vocal tone mellows as he scans her face. "You stalk like Raccoon in Bear's shadow." He retrieves the warm pot and holds it out. "Grab a cup, Daughter. I'll pour."

Raven grabs a tall wooden mug. It has Edgar's mark, and she grins at the irony. Once filled the mug is warm in her hands. She gulps down half of its contents.

"More?"

"I'm solid," she blurts in English. She regrets the slip as soon as the words are out. Livid anger shows in his eyes and stark frown.

"City-slicker talk," he growls loud enough to sting her ears.

Raven doesn't flinch. "Someone has to read English, so we can mix the right varnish for canoes."

"That's different," he grumps. "Just as well you're barred from the computer. You might do your chores for a change. Help prepare the evening feast..." He sighs. "Though I don't hold much hope. The older you grow, the worse you get."

Raven has grown accustomed to his harangues. He's so wrapped up in the symbolic pantheon of eagles, orcas, ravens, black bears, beavers and salmon that he ignores everything else. If it isn't Haida lore, it must be bad.

Headpa loves to load her down with extra chores. Last winter he asked her to sit all afternoon in the carver's hut, painting colored lines on bentwood boxes. After a week she was bored to death. She couldn't see how the boxes would be more useful with colored lines or not. She gathered the paints, went outside and painted eagles and ravens on new baidarkas. Headpa chewed her out for wasting pigment, but everyone else said her emblems looked cool.

"Something kept you awake last night," Headpa is saying. "What was it, Daughter? Tell the truth."

"I went star gazing with Jade," says Raven, knowing it's the last thing he expects.

Headpa is speechless for a good three seconds. A new record, she judges and files the lapse for future reference. The bewilderment on his face changes to the simple joy.

"Star gazing with Jade?" he echoes. "That's good, Raven."

He takes a deep breath, his eyes filling with proud determination. "A fine young man. Jade is a clever fisher. Let's hope you showed

respect, behaved like a young woman worthy of his home."

"Jade showed me how Big Bear circles around but always points at the North Star. We tracked two Frisbees and spotted Jupiter and Mars. It was fun."

He nods absently as if the details don't matter. "I'm proud of you, Daughter. Keep at it. Other young women in the village aren't so choosy as you. They've taken a liking to young Jade."

She crinkles her nose. "How's the orca coming?" It never hurts to feign interest in his work

"Another month before it's finished. There are small details to add. Delicate work yet very important, otherwise the orca would be dead stone, a mere shadow of itself, not the proud swimmer who's our spirit guide."

"Some spirit guide. One of those orcas scared me half to death. Its tail splashed my face and almost overturned the baidarka."

"Nonsense, Daughter," he booms. "We don't hunt orcas, so they no longer fear us. When they swim close, it's out of curiosity and friendship."

She has her doubts. Even Jade has shared her concerns about the danger of a large sea creature swamping a small craft.

Headpa turns to leave. "I'm back to the carver's hut. I wish you a good day's gathering, Raven."

She watches him go, thinking he's wrong to put all his faith in the old ways.

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Crying Loud awakes. She thrashes in her crib and lets out a piercing wail that befits her name.

"Headpa's loud voice wakes her every morning," laments Granny.

Laughing Bough, the infant's goodma, is nowhere around. She leaves her infant daughter at the nursery whenever she goes out with the fishers. Ingrid remains absorbed with her stitching. She has become withdrawn since her husband's death, wrapped in her sorrow. Granny shrugs and then returns to her knitting.

Raven finds herself elected. She approaches the ornate basket and lifts Crying Loud in her arms. Sniffing for odors, she feels the infant's swaddled bottom. Thankfully it's dry.

She rubs the infant's back and tender scalp until its yelps subside, then shifts from foot to foot, rocking gently. After a while, she returns the infant to her basket and shows her a colorful driftwood rattle. Crying Loud clasps the rattle in her tiny hand and begins to warble happily.

"I guess Laughing Bough is out fishing again," says Raven,

"She needs extra fish for her family while she's away," Granny replies. "Have you forgotten? Laughing Bough will ride with Elder Sophia when she goes to the megadome for laser surgery."

Raven recalls cataracts that have made Sophia almost blind. "That means an extra stop at the lighthouse before we paddle to Masset." She's supposed to gather enough salmonberries to go with the dried fish that will serve as snacks during the voyage. The added jaunt to the lighthouse means she'll need to gather twice as many berries. "I better start or I'll never fill a basket."

"Check the sunny places; you'll find plenty. And don't forget to forage for yourself."

"I ain't my goodma's daughter for nothing," quips Raven.

"Have you noticed we need more peatmoss?"

"Yeh."

"You'll need a digging tool." Granny gestures at the cabinet. "You can use the same tool for harvesting a bark wedge."

This added chore is Granny's punishment for sleeping late. Raven resigns herself to the inevitable and gulps the last of the tea. "One basket for salmonberries, another for peatmoss. I'll hook-up a back-harness for the bark wedge."

Granny's nods approvingly. "Don't forget to warn the bears."

"I'd rather sneak-up on 'em." Raven smiles impishly. "I'll bring you a fresh bear tongue."

"Crazy girl! Behave and come back in one piece."

Kung: 11 May 2076

Spruce canopies throw lazy shadows over wooden huts. Raven pays no heed. Her thoughts are stuck on the trek beyond the village.

She follows a crooked path, its surface cobbled with rocks sunk in damp clay. Jagged edges pinch her soft moccasin soles. Sprouts of pale-green grass line either side of the path. She reaches a moor that's seeded with gravel and fist-sized crags. The flatland jogs between wooded hillocks and the inlet's scraggly shoreline.

She winces at starbursts dancing on rippled water. The inlet spans thrice as far as a long-flighted arrow. Then it broadens to Virago Sound, before merging to a vague cusp of sea and sky. Wing-flapping seagulls cry out as they fly in search of unclaimed spoils. Two bald eagles soar high above the noisy foragers.

As her nose acquires the sea breeze, familiar odors bring back moments from childhood, wondrous discoveries of tidewater spoor.

Her bentwood basket, digging tool, back harness and deerskin pouch weigh heavy on arms and shoulders. A long forage looms ahead, and Raven psyches up for the challenge. Her gathering skills are the best in Kung, outside of Goodma. No use blaming Granny for the added chores. Someone has to gather more peatmoss and tree bark.

Just my dumb luck
for the stocks to run dry
on my berry-picking day.
Trouble is the extra load
will prove awkward, once
I'm deep in the woods.

At her back, Kung's dogs are squabbling over bones and fish scales. She ignores their yelps and trains her eyes on four baidarkas whose sides are painted with eagles and ravens, their wings outspread in heraldic flight. The birds look bold and stark as the day she painted them.

They're slick, though Headpa
scolded me for wasting pigment.
I don't care if fishers' canoes
count more than baidarkas.
The birds are done well,
and they make me proud.

Headpa remains the biggest obstacle in her quest to study in Tsawwassen. He's too set in his ways to give her the break she deserves. For him it's always "doing your part for the good of Kung." If it were possible, he'd set the clock back to the good old days when young Haida warriors paddled war canoes and raided coastal villages as far south as California. He refuses to believe the world has changed over the years. He distrusts anyone who lives outside Haida Gwaii. To win him over, she needs Goodma's help.

Behind the baidarkas there are seiner nets draped across forked posts. Once dried, woven cords of tree bark will strengthen the outside grips. Two overturned war canoes sit on wooden struts. The best canoes have gone out before sunrise. Fishers start early, so they can get back with a load of fish and spend the afternoons chewing the fat.

"Lazy oafs," she mutters.

Lifting a palm to shade her eyes, she pans the water and sees

flashing sparklers all around. No signs of fishers unless they're hidden in the glare, but she doubts they could vanish in thin air. They've either gone out to sea or headed inland. She hopes they struck seaward. It would mean the run of oolakons has finished at last. Her stomach revolts at the thought of another oolakon feast.

Last night she spotted a large red snapper in the fire pit and wasted no time cutting out two chunks for herself. It was the best meal she's had in weeks.

Farther along the plain in the shade of a large boulder, Deer Horn enthralls a clutch of youngsters with one of his tall tales. Deer Horn tells fabulous stories of Haida lore that summon the craziest creatures: wise-cracking ravens, weeping trees, stones that ignite at the touch and bears that climb skyward on ladders of raindrops. Five-ten years ago she might have sat with the youngsters, hanging on his every word and believing the yarns truly happened in some distant past. Nowadays she knows better. Haida lore is a mix of fact and fiction, and the stories are about lessons of good and bad behavior.

Ha! My behavior is mine alone.

I don't need highfalutin tales
to freak my conscience into
hopping like a crude bunny!

She angles away from Deer Horn's boulder and mounts the ridgeline. Her pace slows as she approaches the forest, letting the shore breeze cool the sweat on her skin before thirsty insects alight.

She moves quietly among the moss-slathered boles. Insects cloud around, but few of them perch for a bite since the foliage

offers more moisture. She pays them no mind, except for one lousy gnat that buzzes her eyes. A quick slap sends the bugger to the netherworld of storytellers.

Raven isn't worried about missing breakfast. There ought to be lots of edible plants where she's going. Too early for berries, but the forest is bound to have Indian spinach, rice root, edible camas and tender fern sprouts in the dark places. If she's lucky she may run across a patch of black-cod grease.

At the ridge crest the ground opens to a level field. She feasts eyes on the mishmash of crops. Goodma's garden is home to many of the useful plants that grow in Haida Gwaii. The bounty adds a welcome change to the endless helpings of fish. The plants in Goodma's herbarium could be poisonous if ill-prepared or treated for the wrong ailments. The right tinctures have brought the sick to health, in some case from their deathbeds. Goodma's know-how carries well-earned respect among the villagers of Kung.

Raven has learned some of Goodma's arts, though she's proud of what she *does* know...

Yarrow can be dried, chopped and ground, then used as a poultice for colds and sore throats. Wax-flower is a good tonic for summer tea. Sundew makes a powerful cure for coughing spells, stuffed noses and raw throats. Indian hellebore can be applied as a poultice for bruises and sprains. Special concoctions of it ease kidney troubles and bladder problems. The roots and bark of devil's club are used to treat sore bones and stomach ailments, while narcissus roots make soothing paste for cuts and wounds. Stonecrop works as a female tonic. And childbearing women chew

on owl-berry roots to help them through difficult births.

The herbarium is a small part of garden, since most of the ground supports edible crops or plants that yield fibers for tools or clothes. Elsa is down on her knees in the fireweed patch. She's snipping off the tender shoots for dinner greens and leaving old fibers for cords. Next she'll remove dandelion flowers and stow them in her garbage pouch to wither and dry. Later in the year, dandelion roots make tasty additions for the evening feast, but no one wants their spores flying all over the garden, taking root and choking other plants.

Raven greets Elsa with a smile and passes on to groves of big leaf, common rush, silverweed, wild carrots and licorice ferns hiding in the shadows of cranberry shrubs. Most of the garden is devoted to cranberries, gooseberries, crowberries and blueberries.

At the outer edge she spots Goodma who is eyeing her wooden cage that protects cloudberry and strawberries from marauding deer. Raven would've never thought to come up with such a neat idea. Goodma got help from Deer Horn and his young fans. Together they stripped leaves off branches then bent and tied them together to make a kind of skeleton igloo.

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As Raven draws near she signs a greeting. "Those greedy deer will go hungry till the moon turns blue."

"Think so?" Goodma stands up and adjusts her cone hat. "Come here, and look at this."

Raven follows Goodma who squats down, their eyes on a side of the igloo where level branches circle round. The upper slat has been pushed away from the lower, as if a bear's paw has forced them

apart. But bears wouldn't bother to rummage inside when there's easier fare right out in the open. Besides, the berries have just started to bud. There's no reason to go through so much trouble.

Then Raven gets it. "A deer poked his snout in there?"

"Damn rascals. They must be drawn to the smell." Goodma frowns darkly. "Fruits aren't even out yet. What'll I do come summer?"

Raven shakes her head in sympathy and wonders if deer are still hanging around in the woods that extend beyond the garden. "You could add more wooden slats."

"No. Never work. More wood blocks too much sunlight, and the berries won't grow at all. What's needed, I think, is metal fencing. But we'd hafta pay for it, and your headpa will choke on the cost."

"Talk to the elders."

"Ha! They're ten-times worse than Headpa. Who d'you think keeps pushing for the old traditions?"

"The women's council made them back down when they banned the purchase of denim and dungaree from Masset store."

"One small victory. Men won't listen to women till there's a full-blown crisis." Goodma sighs. "I'm afraid we won't get fencing till next year at the earliest. By then, we may lose our cloudberryes."

"Pick some more next year."

"Easier said than done, Raven. I had a very hard time finding these few."

"There must be lots somewhere. Deer Horn speaks of cloudberryes like they were as plentiful as salmon berryes."

"You believe his tall tales?"

"No. Not the stuff about talking trees. But cloudberry just grew there for folks to gather. They never acted strange or spoke to the pickers. Why would he mention them if they weren't for real?"

"Smart thinking, Raven. But there's more to the tales than meets the eye. Deer Horn learned from elder storytellers who learned from their elders. The original tales go back many generations, hundreds of years before Europeans came to Haida Gwaii. In those days there were no blacktail deer on the island."

"No deer?"

"Not a-one."

"How'd they get here?"

"Settlers brought mating pairs in their tall ships. Those deer found plenty of food and few natural enemies. They multiplied like crazy till they're everywhere now with a ravenous hankering for my cloudberry."

Raven tries to wrap her mind around this new twist in a world that had seemed solid and predictable. "Folks must've gone hungry in the winters without fresh meat."

"Oh, they likely ate caribou meat."

"Caribou?" Raven is nonplussed. She glances to the forest beyond, which is thick with underbrush. But everything grows darker as her eyes probe deeper among boles of cedar, hemlock and fir. "How'd *they* get here?"

Goodma looks stumped for a moment. "I guess they walked from the mainland."

"Walked on water? You're pulling my leg."

"Many years ago the temperatures were much colder. Glaciers

came down from the mountains as far south as Tsawwassen. Deep snow and ice covered everything, even in summertime. Glaciers moved very slow, maybe a stone's throw in ten years. Animals had enough time to move south and survive, but plants just froze and died. Ice sheets spread offshore and across the ocean. Caribou came down from the north and walked over the ice sheets. They might've swum short distances between ice floes to get all the way here."

Goodma pauses. "You've seen vids of Antarctica?"

"Yeh."

"OK. Y'know that glaciers spill onto the sea and form thick sheets."

"Must be supercold down there."

"Well, it was cold around here many years ago, but Haida Gwaii escaped the worst of the glaciers. The snow melted in the summer and yielded food for caribou who thrive in cold weather. Some say our ancestors followed the caribou across from the mainland. Others say our folk came from Asia in warrior canoes."

Raven is speechless. This new history is a far cry from Deer Horn's nursery tales. "Where are the caribou now?"

"In time the temperatures warmed, and the glaciers retreated to the mountain tops. But the caribou were trapped here on the island which was getting too warm, so they went inland to the hills and highlands where it's cooler. After the deer came, hunters didn't bother hunting caribou. Why go on a long trek for caribou when you could kill a deer closer to home? I guess the caribou are still in the hills, but nobody knows how many are left. You could ask the GREENS keepers when we visit the lighthouse."

Raven savors the new facts. "How'd you learn about this?"

"The lesson was part of my horticulture course."

"That's what I mean... I need to get to the megadome or I'll end up dumb as a rock."

Goodma smiles. "You needn't go that far to learn about glaciers. Just look up glacial epochs on the computer and read how they affected Haida Gwaii."

"You forget I'm barred from the computer."

"And whose fault is that?"

Raven says nothing, for her plan lies dead in the water. She needs Goodma's support, but there's no chance of getting it when her errant behavior is front and center.

How do I fall in these traps?

No thanks to Edgar whose
neck is ripe for my payback.

"I'm sorry about the online game. The money could've gone toward metal fencing. But I'll support you, whatever my say-so is worth."

"Not much, I'm afraid."

Raven hangs her head.

"Always sorry, after the fact. You oughta pay more heed to the consequences *before* you act. But in this case, the cost of your game barely counts. It wouldn't buy more than one-chain link of fencing."

Raven wastes no time using reprieve to change the topic.

"Caribou must've eaten some cloudberryes."

"Some, yes. But they don't crave them like blacktails do."

"How'd the bears get here?"

"They swam. Bears are great swimmers y'know, and they've got plenty of fat to protect them from the cold."

"Couldn't the deer and caribou swim as well?"

Goodma shakes her head. "Too far for them. Y'know how long the voyages are to the Tsimshian places."

She does. Kung folk always stayed overnight since it took too long to paddle there and back in one day. Headpa gets raw jade from Tsimshian villages on the mainland. That's also where Jade Runner got his name, after he was chosen to run between the bargainer's camps, bearing rock samples, bid offers and counteroffers.

"I'd probably act better if I knew more about how everything works," Raven says. "That's why I need to study in Tsawwassen."

"Don't be so anxious, Raven. You've lots of time. You're still young."

"I'm as old as you were when you studied in Tsawwassen."

"If you wanna compare yourself to me, consider this... I didn't argue, talk back or start pranks. I did my chores without complaints, so my parents and the elders of Kung found me trustworthy. Show your best behavior for a whole year. Then maybe the elders and Headpa will support your aims. You still haven't chosen a worthy course of study. You haven't convinced me you can learn a skill that benefits Kung."

"I help in the garden. I'm the best young forager. You've said so yourself."

"I know, Raven. You're very quick, and you surprise everyone when you try things that strike your fancy, but you're never around

for everyday chores. When was the last time you helped with the dinner feast?"

"Ah, umm... I'm allergic to fish."

Goodma raises her brows. It's not a kindly gesture. "Allergic is a big word," she says. "A word you've picked up online, I'll bet. Had you learned more about allergies, you would've found that very few people have problems with fish. None whatsoever among wayward girls who live in fishing villages."

"Who says I'm a wayward girl?" Raven hates it when grownups count youthful ideas as foolish nonsense. She wraps arms under her breasts to show them off and look for like a grown woman. "I'm no child."

"Oh Raven! I wasn't speaking of your physical maturity. I meant another kind of maturity. What gives you the idea you're allergic to fish?"

"I hate the smell."

"Well, get used to it. Fishing and eating fish are what Kung is all about."

"I know," Raven grouses.

"Hold your nose long enough to help with dinner."

"The cooks always ask me to fetch oolakon grease. Eww!" She crooks her eyes at her nose. "The stink makes me puke. Why should I help with the evening feasts when I seldom eat fish?"

"Something else you've picked up online. You eat brownrice and sprouts to imitate the vegetarians of Tsawwassen."

"They eat fish."

"Farmed fish," Goodma scoffs.

"What's the difference? Fish are fish."

"Farmed fish are coddled, overfed and twice as big as wild fish."

"So what? Lots of mouths to feed in the megadome."

"You're missing the point. Wild fish swim long distances in hostile waters. Only the strongest survive, and they carry the heroic spirit of their species, unlike farmed fish who live pampered lives. It's a rare treat to eat fish caught by our fishers."

Raven isn't sold on fish being different. "Teachers online don't mention anything like that. If you let me take the scuba-diving course, I could check firsthand what's different between farmed fish and wild fish.""

"Raven! We've discussed before. The scuba-diving equipment costs more than Kung can afford."

"Fishers could send me underwater to see where the fish are. Soon they'd make bigger hauls than ever before."

"You're counting still-buried clams in your basket, Raven. The income from fish is small compared the cost of scuba gear, so it would take years for your scheme to even out. Besides, how d'you plan to pay for tanks of compressed air? They don't grow on trees, y'know."

"I'd make better counts of fish. GREENS are always looking for more accurate totals. They oughta help pay for the air tanks. If there was a shipwreck off Langara Island, I could help with the rescue and recovery."

Goodma shakes her head bemusedly. "At least your scuba-diving scheme isn't as far-fetched as your plan to become a dirigible pilot."

Oh, I knew she'd bring that up.

Airship pilot was something
I hatched years ago when I was
too young to know better.

"You're still hunting for summer snowflakes, Raven. Kung can't afford scuba gear any more than it can afford to buy an airship. If you paid more attention to the course description, you'd know the scuba course is supposed to simulate tasks in..." She grapples for the English word. "...freespace. The diving lessons take place in a pool of clear water where you learn to make repairs in a weightless environment. The lessons wouldn't prepare you for the murky waters of Virago Sound or its dangerous undercurrents."

"That's why I need your advice for choosing a course."

"I won't choose for you. It's gotta be something you figure out for yourself. Else your study efforts would be wasted. You'd come back to Kung with new ideas in your head, but you wouldn't have the will or enthusiasm to put them in practice. You hafta decide for yourself the role you fill in the village."

Raven lets her shoulders slump. She's hit rock bottom. Nothing is going right this morning. "If *you* won't help me, who will? I know for sure that Headpa won't."

"Don't give up on Headpa. He's more sympathetic to spacer know-how than he lets on. He rants against the spacers, but it's only to protect you youngsters from the dangers of urban living."

Raven makes a face. "I'd have more luck teaching a bear to dance."

"Remember the big argument you two had last winter?"

"How could I forget? I asked to join the hunting party, so I could

try out my bow. But Headpa refused 'cuz I'm a girl. Then he chased me out of Kung."

"That's your version. Headpa says you threw a tantrum when he refused. And he says you ran off, all by yourself."

"Well..." Raven shrugs. "Maybe."

"Kung has always reserved hunting for fishers as a kind of reward. If you worked with the fishers all summer, they would've let you join the winter hunt."

"The fishers treat newcomers like dogs! I would've spent all my time mending nets, washing out canoes and cleaning fish."

"Dear, dear! There's more to life than going on adventures. Your heroes in orbit spend hours, sometimes all night long, to decompress before they leave their shelters. I doubt you're capable of sitting still for twelve hours."

Raven shuffles her feet. "Why do they do that?"

"I'm not sure... Something about nitrogen bubbles. It also happens to scuba divers if they swim too deep."

"Y'see? I knew scuba diving was important!"

"Not here in Kung."

A squirrel ventures out from the forested underbrush and stops. Goodma stomps her foot, and the squirrel bolts for safety of the underbrush. "Squirrels aren't so bad. It's the rabbits I worry about. They dig right under my shelters."

Raven sighs. "Y'think I'm a hopeless case? A greedy rabbit?"

"Not entirely hopeless." She grins thoughtfully. "After your quarrel with Headpa, I was really worried about you. I begged Headpa to send out a search party. He wouldn't 'cuz he wanted to

teach you a lesson. He expected you to come back wet, cold, hungry and repentant.

"Surprised him, didn't I."

"You surprised *me*. After five days Headpa organized a search party, and I dreaded the worst. I certainly didn't expect to find you cooking squirrel stew. Even more surprised to see your tree shelter in which kept you safe and dry. You showed everyone in Kung how resourceful you can be."

"Headpa wasn't so happy."

"You made him look bad in the band's eyes. He had no choice but give you a tongue-lashing. I know better. Deep down, he was proud of you."

"Really?"

Goodma nods. "He might even consider letting you study in Tsawwassen, but he'll want someone trustworthy around to keep an eye on you. Maybe you can get Jade to study with you."

"I've almost convinced him to take the astronomy course."

"Oh?" Her eyes wide in surprise.

"Last night we looked at the stars. That's why I slept so late this morning."

"I see."

"We spotted Jupiter, Mars and one of the frisbees."

"So you're keeping in touch."

"He's too shy for that, but he was thinking about it."

"Hmm."

"I still need to find a course for myself."

"Hmm."

"I s'poze you won't gimme a hint?"

"I make no promises, but there's something that may suit. And you'd have an excuse to go out with the hunters. Are you interested?"

"Do ravens fly?"

"Kung doesn't have a true medic. Tending to wounds is mostly common sense. Yet there are times when a little knowledge can go a long way. Ingrid's husband would be alive today if the hunters hadn't moved him out of the ravine. GREENS keepers told me he'd fractured a vertebra in his spine. As the hunters carted him uphill, the fracture broke open, and he died of a broken back. If they'd placed him on a flat board, he could've survived and maybe had a chance for a full recovery. A trained medic would've warned the hunters about spinal injuries."

"Is this course in Tsawwassen?"

"Yeh. A very difficult course. You'd have no time to fool around. You'd hafta work day and night."

Raven almost jumps out of her shoes. "I can do it, Goodma! I'll study real hard."

"Hold on to your hat. You still hafta show your best behavior around the village. For instance, lend a hand with the dinner feast. Offer to do chores for the elders. And there's more to the course than just physical know-how. You'll have to earn the trust of those you treat. That means developing more sympathy for others than you've shown so far. It has to come from your heart."

"Like the help you lend mothers during childbirth?"

"Yes. Medicine always works better if folks believe that it helps.

Bearing children is the hardest thing we women do. It's like running for hours without stopping to catch your breath. When the child comes out, it's the most wonderful thing there is. It's something we make that men cannot."

Raven recalls a recent scandal when Happy Eyes gave birth to a toddler with a strange nose and hair colored not at all like her husband's. "And hope our baby looks like his headpa."

Goodma's eyes grow wide before she closes them shut. Raven can't imagine what caused the sudden change of mood. Moments pass before Goodma opens her eyes, and she looks normal once again. "I'd like you to coax Ingrid out of her funk. Take her with you when you go out foraging."

"Ingrid? She's won't talk to anyone. It's like asking a tree."

"Never said it would be easy, Raven. Medics are s'posed to deal with all kinds of sickness. I expect you to make some progress with Ingrid. By next fall, we'll see about sending you and Jade to Tsawwassen."

"If that's what it takes..." Raven sighs. "I'll try my best."

Goodma nods, though her eyes remain skeptical.

Honkers sweep overhead, Canadian geese skimming the treetops. They move swiftly with synchronous wing-beats like paddlers in a war-canoe. The flock zooms past in ragged V-formation and then veers toward Virago Sound.

"Loud bunch, aren't they?" says Goodma. "Time I got back to weeding. You'd better start foraging if you wanna return before dark. We'll discuss this again later." As an afterthought, she adds, "Don't forget to *warn the bears*."

"I won't," says Raven, and waves goodbye.