

Seven suns had risen and set since Black Moon left for the agency. If the soldiers knew that the Oglala war leader was within their midst, there was no telling what they would do. But it was more than that which stirred Katie's anxiety. For years she had watched him ride off to fight. Whether it was Crows, Pawnees, or soldiers, whether he returned with stolen ponies or with a gash across his face like the one he received in the Wagon Box fight, she had never felt the dread that now so often kept her awake at night.

She was afraid of losing the man she loved to an enemy that was not even human. More and more these days messengers came riding into the Oglala camps along the Tongue telling of the white men who laid down an iron road for a new rail line north along the Elk River, right through the heart of Lakota country, to carry the great iron beast that belched plumes of smoke.

Katie thought of her father sitting in his pine rocker, smoking his pipe in their little cabin along the Laramie and lamenting, "These're uncertain times, what with those whites pushin' harder every day and the Sioux not willin' to give up an inch of land. Once progress is set in motion, there's no stoppin' it."

What would Tom McCabe think if he could see what was happening now? Not even he could have foreseen the coming of the railroad, the vast number of settlers it would bring into the territory, and the upheaval it would cause to the Indians, the very people upon whom his trade had once depended.

The first time Katie heard about the railroad was back in sixty-six, when the trader Jasper Gillette told her about the Union Pacific. At the time, it was hundreds of miles to the south of Lakota territory. Since then, messengers reported that the last rail had been laid and the final spike had been driven into the ground on the Pacific Railroad. The headmen claimed it was a long way off and nothing to worry about, but news of a new rail line, this one called the Northern Pacific, rumbled like thunder through Lakota land. Already, it had pushed as far west as the Missouri River and was creeping its way along the valley of the Yellowstone.

For the past five years Black Moon had been leading war parties against the survey crews sent out from Fort Rice and Fort Ellis under military escort to survey the placement of the railroad through the Yellowstone country. A skirmish at Arrow Creek caused the survey crews to move north to the Musselshell, but Katie knew they would be back, and with the Union Pacific to the south of Lakota territory and the Northern Pacific along the Yellowstone, the Lakota would be trapped.

Katie was afraid. The railroad was an enemy unlike any other Black Moon had ever fought. This enemy did not fight with fifty-caliber rifles like the Long Knives or with bows and arrows and lances like the Crows. This enemy's weapon was progress, and like Tom McCabe had warned, it could not be stopped.