

Cedar Woman

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Chapter One

Hear Me

Hear me, four quarters of the world – a relative I am! Give me the strength to walk the soft earth. Give me the eyes to see, and the strength to understand that I may be like you. With your power only can I face the winds. Great Spirit, all over the earth the faces of living things are all alike. With tenderness have these come up out of the ground. Look upon these faces of children without number, and with children in their arms, that they may face the winds, and walk the good road to the day of quiet. This is my prayer. Hear me!

Black Elk



Slowly, slowly, Grandfather Sun began his ascent. Gliding, floating, he moved above the horizon as blue and lavender and mauve filled the sky.

Birdsong married with fragrant air, as Wakan Tanka stretched His fingers across the sky, pushing back the night, heralding the dawning of a new day. (Wah-kah Than-kah – Mysterious Creator)

July 18, 2010

6:00 a.m.

Sonny Glass walked briskly along the slowly awakening street. He enjoyed the sound of the heels of his cowboy boots against the hard concrete of Uptown Westerville's sidewalks. Soon the area would be busy, as the small but vibrant Central-Ohio city came to life.

Home to just over 35,000 citizens and the birthplace of the Anti-Saloon League, Westerville was a charming family oriented town with several parks, the Inniswood Botanical Gardens and Nature Preserve, and Otterbein, the private liberal arts college founded in 1847.

Continuing his walk along State Street, Sonny admired the warm, historical feel of the main thoroughfare of Uptown Westerville. The storefronts

were comprised mostly of the original structures built since the incorporation of the city in 1858. The pride of her citizens was apparent in the spanking clean look of the 19th Century, picturesque suburb of Columbus.

Sonny reached the corner of Main and State, and gazed across the street at the new restaurant, the grand opening of which would be celebrated this evening. Three stories tall, the large, stately building stood solid and imposing as new-morning sun kissed her ancient, red bricks.

A red canopy shaded the entrance with its centered blue stripe and eight-sided star, each point formed by a tipi and representing the flag of the Lakota Sioux. From its frame, hanging pots of Impatiens danced in a slight breeze. Soon pedestrians, busy with their early morning errands, would walk briskly by, some going to Schneider's bakery, others to Talbot's Florists, some intent on visiting Heavenly Espresso, the coffee shop across the street.

Sonny leaned against the corner lamppost and gazed in admiration at Lena Young Bear's labor of love, Cedar Woman, the first upscale American Indian restaurant in Central, Ohio.



Studying the restaurant from across the street, Sonny tried to imagine how it would look to someone who had never seen it before. Pretending to be a new patron, Sonny contemplated the impressive building. As guests approached the large, cedar double doors leading into the small entrance foyer of the establishment, they would first notice the top of the doorframe. Hanging above the striking entrance were four corncobs: one of white, one of red, one of yellow and one of blue, an ancient symbol proclaiming that all who entered the dwelling would be fed. *Now where on earth did she manage to find blue corn?* Sonny mused as he straightened and prepared to cross the street. *I'll bet she had Grandmother Nancy send it to her from Colorado. She would do that, seeing how sacred corn is. And of course there would be four,* he continued to ponder. *Lena Young Bear would use the sacred number representing the four winds, four seasons, and four directions of the earth.*

Beneath the corncobs was a simple carving. Engraved upon a cedar plank, and painted in the same deep blue of the awning stripe and star, were the words Mitakuye Oyasin, (Me-tdah-coo-yey oh-yah-seen) which translated from the Lakota Sioux language simply meant, "We Are All Related." *I cannot believe what she has accomplished,* he reflected, stepping down from the curb and crossing the still silent street.

Sonny recalled that Lena chose the building, which was later to bear her American Indian name, partly because of the location of the doors. The main entrance faced west where lived the Thunder Beings. From here came rain and nourishment so all may live.

The second door faced the north where the Great White Giant lives. From here came the cleansing white snows and the power of healing.

Sonny took a deep breath. He could still smell sage. The night before the grand opening, Lena performed a smudging ceremony to cleanse herself and the new restaurant.

Carrying a smoldering bowl filled with sacred grasses, Lena walked to the center of the first floor of the building.

The white ceramic bowl, which she had thrown herself, its rim painted with red ochre to symbolize the blood of The People, contained cedar needles, to cleanse the area, its sweet smell attracting the good spirits. In addition, there was wild sage, for purifying the soul and the air, enhancing balance within one's self and the spirit world. Wild sweet grass, to cleanse the mind and body and to attract good spirits and energies with its fragrance, along with tobacco, to carry her prayers to Creator was also included.

Lena "bathed" herself with the fragrant fumes. Cupping her hand, and capturing the floating ribbons of smoke, she passed them over her head, shoulders, torso, and under each foot.

Facing the west, she extended the smoking bowl and intoned:

"Grandfather of the West, this is Cedar Woman, I ask that you keep my feet true and on the Good Red Road. (To walk in balance, to walk with the earth and not just on it. To follow the rules of Creator.)

I ask that you guide me on this day, and all days, so that I may continue on this path. I ask that you help in my daily life. Mitakuye oyasin, we are all related. She next turned to the north and offered the same prayer to Grandfather of the North, Grandfather of the East and then of the South. Lifting the bowl to the heavens, she repeated her prayer to Father Sky.

Kneeling, the bowl in front of her, her hands on the floor on each side of her body, she sent her prayer to Mother Earth.

Finally, she again raised the still smoking bowl to the sky and added a personal plea, "Creator, this is Cedar Woman. I ask that you keep my feet true and on the Good Red Road. I ask that you guide me on this day and all days so that I may continue on this path. I ask that you help in my daily life. I ask you that I may feed all people and that my venture here will be successful." Lena placed the still smoldering bowl on a table and sat, slowly relaxing, her mind, body, and spirit in harmony.



Sonny pressed upon the heavy doors and entered the foyer. Fairly small in size, it served as a buffer between the changeable Ohio weather and the dining room within. Five paces across the vestibule stood a single door, also made of cedar. Entering the restaurant, he let his eyes move slowly around the first floor dining room. It was on this level of the three-story building where casual Contemporary American Indian foods would be served.

Built in 1881 in the Italianate style by M.S. Wyant, the structure had known many incarnations. From bookstore to telephone company, from

grocery store to clothing emporium, from gathering place to thriving gift shop, the uptown site had been a popular landmark for Westerville's citizens.

In 1886, during a performance of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the opera house, located on the third floor of the building, experienced a tragic fire. An actor, swinging an umbrella, accidentally hit one of the gas foot lights. Panicking, fleeing patrons ran, and the exit was blocked. Trying to find a window to throw the gas light out onto the street, the actor accidentally ran into a small hallway, discovering a woman and two children seeking refuge. None of them died immediately, but lingered through an agonizing death.

Remembering the heartbreaking story, Sonny took a deep breath, glancing toward the stairs which led to the spacious third floor, now allocated to teachers and students for the study of pottery, dance and music. There was no sign of the little girl and boy rumored to haunt the third floor, their laughter and running feet echoing throughout the three-story building, but Sonny was nervous nonetheless. Lena assured him that she had sent the children "home" the day she smudged the restaurant, but Sonny remained skeptical.

Sonny glanced away from the staircase. Relieved that no sounds echoed down the flight of stairs from the region above, he relaxed and allowed his mind's eye to take a mental tour of the beautiful restaurant. Tonight would be a special night, the middle floor, the fine dining area, filled to capacity with friends and relatives eager to celebrate this special day, to celebrate the happiness of Lena Cedar Woman Young Bear.



Lena appeared in Sonny's mind's eye. He constantly experienced a queer shock when he first saw her, even after seventeen years. In his mind, when picturing her, she always seemed larger than life, towering above all with whom she came into contact. In reality, she was quite diminutive in stature, barely reaching 4'11" and maxing out, he would guess, at 90 pounds. It was as if Wakan Tanka, in His infinite wisdom, created her body as an afterthought, concentrating on the immenseness of her soul instead.

But, it was her eyes that startled the most. Almond in shape and slightly tip-tilted, they sparkled as if lit from within. Her left eye was a luminous, deep brown, so dark that the pupil at times appeared to be the same color. Her right eye was the same unfathomable brown, but only on the inside half of the iris. The outside half was vivid amber.

Wakan Tanka must have drawn the line Himself, Sonny mused. How else could her iris be so divided precisely in two, the outside half the exact same color of the eye of Wambli (Wahn-blee) the sacred golden eagle of the Lakota?