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Tabby Canyon

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TABBY CANYON

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Master's Program in Creative

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Dedication

To Matt, Ramie, and Sage
Thank you for supporting me through this journey.

TABBY CANYON

by

JAMIE RAE MEYER, B.A.

THESIS

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Thanks to my director, José de Piérola, Ph.D. for giving me confidence in my ability to create Nettie's story. Your courses and critiques set high expectations that I needed to find my full potential.

To my committee, Professor Daniel Chacon, thank you for teaching me that I have a higher purpose as a storyteller. You helped me listen to Nettie; she told me her story, I just typed. Additionally, Professor Christina Convertino, thank you for opening my eyes to being culturally responsive to heteronormative standards. Hopefully, Nettie can disrupt others' "normal".

Finally, thank you to my colleague, Renee Eisert, for suggesting I get my degree with her, paying for me to take the GRE, supporting me through my writing, and just being an amazing friend. Your crazy idea to get a master's degree helped me to fulfill my dream of writing Nettie's story.

Critical Preface

1.1 Scope

In Native American traditions, dreams are a significant part of their culture. They are believed to help one connect or communicate with the spiritual world. This ability is not limited to warriors or medicine men, anyone may contribute to the spiritual knowledge of the tribe. Many nations seek visions at a young age, and children are asked about their dreams. Each tribe across the country has a different way they may interpret the dreams. Typically, dreams often have a metaphorical/symbolic, literal, or prophetic meaning.

Whereas, in many non-indigenous cultures, individuals see dreams as something to be forgotten, a novelty, or simply the brain trying to file away memories. However, understanding that dreams are more than just neural pathways, they are spiritual truths that are core to understanding cosmic knowledge. Aarthur Versluis, explains in his book *Sacred Earth: The spiritual Landscape of Native America*:

Across all of the Americas, among the whole range of tribal peoples, each individual participated in a spiritual reality, that meant anyone might receive a spiritual vision or a revelatory dream. And, in fact, the vision or dream of an individual, as revelation, might very well reveal a ceremonial context in which individual dreams and visions played a central part: each individual directly experienced a reality known to the rest of the tribe. (31)

Therefore, to say that my story comes from a dream, follows the belief that dreams bring spiritual awareness. Roughly, in 2010, I had a very profound dream. It was one of those dreams where you take the time to write it down on paper. The emotions and the setting stuck with me for several days. In my dream, I saw a beautiful

red rock canyon, set against a forest background. It was the only red rock canyon in the area, unlike Bryce Canyon or Zions National Park. Additionally, the main character in my dream was a strong, determined Native American women who communicated with the rocks and animals.

Following this dream, I had several experiences that verged on spiritual revelation rather than coincident. First, on a drive up a canyon I had never driven before, I saw the red rock canyon. It was so similar I made my husband turn around so we could drive past several times. The town nearest this displaced canyon was Tabiona. The next coincidence happened a week or two later, when I met a man at a bus stop from Tabiona. I struck up a conversation and he informed me that the town was named after a Ute Chief, Chief Tabiona. I was genuinely surprised to learn this because the women in my dream was Native American. This led me to do some research on the Ute tribes and I began brainstorming ideas for a story. I have pages of research, but nothing stuck, and eventually I put the story aside.

Nonetheless, dreams should not be discarded. Versulius explains that “an individual visionary experience” is intertwined with “the tribal destiny and the cosmic cycle.” He continues by suggesting that there are consequences for the “tribespeople” or “the natural world” if the visionary errs or fails to direct their people. “The individual dream or vision is not really individual at all but rather is a particularized manifestation of the transcendent power that guides all the tribes people.” (32) In no way am I suggesting that my dream will guide any tribal destiny. Rather, by ignoring my research and abandoning my vision, I was failing myself and perhaps that one person who may learn something from my story.

Ten years later, visions of the women in my dream, would stand in the way of any story I chose to write. I found, as I began my degree, that I had serious writer's block. In my first two classes, writing was a chore. So, I stopped fighting and wrote her story. Once I began writing about the women in my dream, ideas began to flow, and I felt like I was tapping into my strengths as a writer.

As I began my research, I learned that Chief Tabiona was not Ute but was from the Timpanogos Nation. Born and raised in Utah, I had never heard of the Timpanogos except for Timpanogos Cave. What I discovered was that there are over 400 tribes across the U.S. that are not federally recognized. (GAO, 2012) Due to poor documentation and minimal numbers, the Timpanogos were discarded as Ute when they were moved onto the Uintah-Ouray Reservation. Knowing this was the pathway my story needed to follow, I learned more about the Timpanogos and found the tribes website.

Deciding that my character would be descended from Tabby-to-Kwanah (Tabiona), I needed permission to write her story. On the Timpanogos website was listed the Chief Executive of the Tribe, Mary Meyer. Here was another coincidence that I felt I couldn't ignore; the tribal leader had my same last name. "If we have no sense of the spiritual powers perpetually revealing themselves in nature, we simply cannot recognize the truths written in the world around us." (Versluis, 92) I decided to e-mail Mary and was thoroughly surprised when she responded.

Nervous yet excited, I was able to interview Mary on July 6th, 2021. During our time, she told me the story of the Timpanogos Nation and why they feared for their lives to even speak their tribal name. Mary radiated dignity and compassion when I told her my story and asked if I could have permission to write my story. Not because of Mary,

but due to my own insecurities, I felt unworthy to be asking such a question. Because indigenous people have been misrepresented time and again throughout history, the media, and fiction, I did not want to add to this misrepresentation. Mary emphasized that my dream was important, and that indigenous people saw dreams as connections to the divine. And since the story was fictional, I would not be doing any harm as long as I did my research and stayed true to the culture. Finally, at the end of my interview I asked Mary how she was able to continue to fight for her people. She pointed to a page in Phillip B. Gottfredson's book, *My Journey to Understand Black Hawk's Mission of Peace*, that I had brought, which she was quoted saying:

Our desire for the future is for our children to remember these things. That they grow strong in the knowledge that their ancestors must be remembered, and our people must continue to keep their ways. They were kind to newcomers, and we should honor that. Though we were made to walk knee-deep in the blood of our ancestors, we must forgive and free our souls. (285)

This was my final answer to continuing my story because it was about remembering. Remembering forgotten tribes. Remembering that Earth is divine. And even though it is a fictional story, hopefully others will learn about the Timpanogos Nation, and not allow the name to only be associated with a cave, a school, a Mormon temple, or businesses in Provo, Utah.

With Mary's permission, I began writing my story. Using names from the Timpanogos Ancestral webpage (timpanogosnation.com) I decided on a name for my character. Her name would be Nettie, named after Nettie West and Pernetta Sweet Murdock. Like her namesake, she would become resilient after the loss of her family and forced to assimilate into a culture that would not accept her.

Because the heart of Native American culture is storytelling, I chose to write a young adult novella. It would have been more traditional to write several short stories, perhaps different ways in which Nettie overcomes adversity. In the preface to the collection *Native American Myths and Legends*, edited by Richard Erdoes and Alfonso Ortiz, point out that: “Stories are told for adults and children alike, as elements in solemn ceremonies and as spontaneous creations. Rather than being self-contained units, they are often incomplete episodes in a progression that goes back deep into a tribe’s traditions.” (xiii)

But short stories are over quickly, and I want my audience to connect to Nettie and her experiences. Adolescents need time to connect to characters. As a 9th grade English teacher, I find that students become more involved in a character’s story when we read a full novel than when we read a short story. Teens will not connect to a story unless they see that the character in the novel and their own self have a future together, something that will create a long relationship. (Coyle) In an article from *Education Week*, Ariel Sacks argues that:

When we identify with a character, we experience their story as an extension of our own life experience. (Neuroscientists have found that these virtual experiences are stored in our brains in the same way that real life memories are!) This is one of the huge draws for young people to read and hear stories. Take that away, and you immediately alienate some readers who need to spend time identifying with characters in order to feel reading is a rewarding activity. (EdW, 2017)

Furthermore, I needed to write a novella to tell Nettie’s full story. I wanted to write about a strong female protagonist. And, she had to be Native American. A core

meaning in many indigenous stories show how “female forces”, or women, are so strong that they can “change the course of the world” and “once they take a stand, they change their own lives and the lives of those around them.” (Hazen-Hammond, 2)

In *Spider Woman’s Web: Traditional Native American Tales about Women’s Power*, author Susan Hazen-Hammond explains, “Native American women grew up hearing tales about the powers and strengths of women. They hear stories about women healers, women warriors, women artist, women prophets. But above all, they heard stories of woman as the divine creator, a woman as supernatural power, woman as a force of transformation in the universe.” (2) Nettie’s story may only be a very small piece of the universe, but she is able to transform herself and her universe to protect what she values.

For this reason, Nettie is from the Timpanogos nation and lives with her mom and grandfather. Nettie lost her father and brother within the same year. Her brother, Colin, is her best friend and mentor. Nettie must overcome the loss of her brother and learn how to survive without him in a place that neither accepts her in mainstream culture or in the local indigenous tribes. To do this, she must confront her grief and protect nature by saving Tabby canyon which is sacred to her family because it was where their ancestor Tabby-to-Kwanah took their people when they were forced to relocate. However, since the federal government does not recognize her tribe, she cannot claim the land as culturally sacred like the local Ute tribes. So, she must make a stand, which will change her and her small part of the universe.

I may not be Native American, but a drum circle makes me cry because I feel the power deep in my soul. I believe everything has a spirit, and I feel that the Earth is a reminder of the divine. “We must see the Earth around us again the way it was meant to

be seen; we must recognize the spiritual meanings of the sky and earth and waters of the mountains and rivers and rocks. We must again become grounded on this Earth.”

(Versluis, 5) This is why writing this story is so important to me. In a way it is pre-apocalyptic in the sense that if Nature is not heard she will find a way to heal herself.

However, humans have already broken a dam that cannot be contained, yet we can slow the flow of destruction by working with Nature instead of fighting her.

In creating a story based on a dream and following the coincidences, I have learned more about Native American history. I would have never discovered the Timpanogos Nation and learned that their story is not the only story of tribes that are not federally recognized. If I can create the same curiosity I felt, and send people on a journey of discovery, then I have reached my desired impact.

1.2 Poetics

How people perceive the world around them and then interpret what they see is a complex structure that requires a writer to use specific writing techniques so that the reader has access to the complicated reality of the character. From Descarte, to William James, to Maurice Merleau-Ponty the idea of what constitutes consciousness has been analyzed and helps us understand the nature of individual experience. In “Transparent Minds”, author Dorrit Cohn, quotes Schopenhauer by saying: “The more inner and the less outer life a novel present, the higher and nobler will be its purpose... Art consist in achieving the maximum of inner motion with the minimum of out motion; for it is the inner life which is the true object of our interest.” (9) These ideas are essential when building character, as a writer must understand the internal self of a character to be able to present them to an audience. Yet, what happens when an author is unfamiliar with the culture of a character which limits their ability to present the internal self of that

character? This is the question that has constantly plagued my mind since I began writing my novella. This internal conflict is the foundation for the different techniques I used throughout the text to try to create a character that is genuine and respectful to Native American culture. By incorporating dual narration and shifting focalization, personification, flashbacks, and ethnic dialect, I have tried to limit the narrative distance that comes with writing a character that is ethnically different from myself.

Rather than limit my story to one perspective, I chose to write my story with a dual narrative, which was not a form I had expected to use. The story follows two main characters, Nettie and Ryan. Originally, Ryan's story was only meant to be used in the prologue to set a foundation for personifying nature and creating an emotional connection to the destruction of natural resources. However, during my Thesis 1 class, my peers loved Ryan's character and they wanted to know more about him. I had created too much of Ryan's internal conflict that emotionally connected with the reader.

However, by using dual narration, I can present a more holistic approach to situations that follow the indigenous mindset of "collectivistic thinking." Doe A.S. Hain-Jamall suggested that Native American's learn through "experiential learning" which recognizes "that no two people will have the same experience; therefore, knowledge acquired by two children in the same situation will be different." (15) Ryan sees nature as destructive, unpredictable, and something to fear, reminding him of his own vulnerability. Whereas Nettie views nature as inspiring, grand and something that guides her in healing from the loss of her brother. Both perspectives are "true" to that individual. In fact, we even see that Ryan struggles to grasp the "truth" of his reality when Dugan suggests on page 134, "The cracks. I saw the cracks before I felt the

quake. You saved my life because you knew what she was about to do. Don't you remember?" Ryan did not see the crack but instead he saw "skeletal hands" that "moved across the walls of the cave like wisps of smoke toward the drill hole." (26) But Nature cannot be summed up in one perspective, she is all things. "This mindset allows for ambiguity and seemingly contradictory "truths," thereby enabling holistic thinkers to consider other perspectives as equally valid." (Hain-Jamall, 15)

Furthermore, by using a dual narrative, the reader sees Nettie's cultural beliefs through a shifting focalization and gains a more accurate account of the spiritualization of nature. For example, in chapter 18, Ryan and his helper, Mike, are attacked by a mountain lion.

A low guttural growl froze Ryan in place. This was directly behind him and was deep and unmistakably menacing. Ryan slowly turned his head to see Mike rooted in place holding a sample tray and panic in his eyes. Aggressively crouched under the sample table was a mountain lion. Baring its fangs at Mike it gave a guttural hiss and swatted at him making Mike back up several steps.
(120)

Seeing the mountain lion as "aggressive" and "menacing", perpetuates the stereotype of fear from a wild animal with such powerful characteristics. It gives the archetype of a villain trying to destroy the work of the drillers.

Yet, the reader can visualize this same event through Nettie's perspective in chapter 19, when she is watching the situation from her hiding place as she spies on the drillers.

The mountain lion bounded forward, protecting itself from the man that was going to bash it with a giant metal tray full of rocks. Nettie jumped up, ready to

defend the cat. It didn't matter that the regal creature could protect itself. Troy grabbed Nettie's shirt and pulled her back into the protection of the juniper trees just as the cat ran away past the drillers to the safety of the night. (128)

The aggressive mountain lion is now perceived as “regal” and “bounding”, changing the archetype from villain to proud victim. Yet, nature is not a victim, but more of a symbolic representation of beauty and power. It is this idea of Nature as representation of the divine that helps the reader understand Nettie’s internal narrative. Seeing nature, such as the mountain lion, as a representation of its spiritual self is a core foundation for Native American beliefs. “Spirituality is also not separate from other aspects of life. It is, in fact, an integral part of the Native-American lifestyle, not a religion. One is in constant contact with people and the natural world.” (Hain-Jamall, 16) In presenting the event through shifting focalization the reader gains a more holistic understanding of the event and gains sympathy for both Ryan and Nettie and can connect to Nettie’s view of the spirituality entwined in everyday interactions.

Additionally, the belief in everything being connected spiritually is why I chose to use personification as another form to present the inner life of Nettie. Throughout the text, Nettie can be found interacting with not only animals, but also wind, water and even inanimate objects such as fences and rocks. It is essential to establish a relationship between Nettie and the world around her. “Native Americans do not consider themselves as separate from, much less superior to the natural world... Inanimate objects such as stars, stones, and the land embody the Creator’s spirit which is why they are described with a form of animism, and they are respected equally with plants, humans, and animals.” (Hain-Jamall, 16)

An example of creating equal respect for inanimate objects is in chapter 12 when Nettie is faced with a fence that is keeping her away from hiking up a canyon that has cultural significance to her and her brother.

[1] The poles squared-up to the trespasser, as Nettie approached, pulling the glistening silver barbed wire tighter intensely signaling that there would be no passing. [2] Nettie sighed, frustrated at another boundary, another wall to her cage. [3] She closed her eyes, breathing in the perfume of the bristly sagebrush... [4] 'I guess I accept your challenge, Mr. Fence,' Nettie said as she pulled off her over-sized blue Melvin's Garage t-shirt. (86)

To establish this form of conscious spiritual connectivity, I used Rundquist's free indirect style and direct narration to form a way in which the reader can access the internal thoughts of Nettie and gain a better understanding of the relationship she has with the world around her. The distance between the narrator and Nettie is merge in the first example [1] when the narrator describes the fence's actions in third- person perspective. The narrator personifies the fence by explaining that the fence "squared-up", pulled the wire tighter, and "intensely signaled". Yet, the narrator's voice becomes Nettie's internal thoughts about the situation. Rundquist explains that people cannot verbalize what they are thinking (7). The visual and emotional understanding of an event cannot be expressed through language. In the second example [2] the narrator explains Nettie's feeling as "frustrated" through her action of sighing. Then through free indirect thought the narrator suggests Nettie's internal frustrations at feeling caged in "another wall to her cage." Finally, by using free direct thought [4] to express the idea that Nettie saw the fence as challenging her instead of an inanimate object that was just in her way, the idea that all objects embody the Creator, is fully realized. This is why

using personification through the novella is essential in limiting the cultural divide between myself and the internal world of my character.

To continue, the third form I apply is the use of Shoshoni dialect interspersed throughout the text. The language is foreign to Nettie, though it is not something she has not heard. She suggests at the beginning of the book that, “the words were unfamiliar, out of reach. Sometimes she dreamt in this language, and she knew in her dreams that she was speaking fluent Shoshoni. If she could be aware but not awake, she was certain that what she was saying made sense. Yet, when she woke up, she had no clue what it meant. Hearing the words now, gave her strength.” (3) In an article published on the National Library of Medicine website, Michael C. Corballis explains that, “the rules of language are in large part overlearned and unconscious, and even linguists have not completely articulated how those rules work. They operate largely automatically; we know intuitively how to construct a sentence, but do not really know how we do it.” (2019) Nettie’s understanding of language comes from an unconscious understanding of the language. She has heard the language, though rarely, as her family has generational trauma to the point where they fear speaking the language or do so in whispers.

There are two reasons interlacing the Shoshoni dialect into the text is essential to connecting to Nettie’s cultural background. First, to present that everything Nettie sees in the natural world reflects its “celestial archetype, its spiritual Origin.” (Versluis, 19) Many times, when Nettie hears the Shoshoni language it is connected to the rock that she keeps in her pocket. The rock is “not mere matter that acts as an abode for a spirit, as we might try to conceive of it; rather, the rock is a manifestation of its transcendent origin, of its spiritual archetype, and that archetype reveals a truth...all things in nature

can act as spiritual revelation.” (Versluis, 19) As it is through Nettie’s ancestral Origin that the rock provides spiritual revelation it is only fitting that Nature speak Nettie’s ancestral dialect.

The second reason that I utilize the dialectic language is centered around how “Native-American languages are described as ‘verb-based’, and it is thought that this reflects a cultural focus on action; on connections between a beginning and an end.” (Hain-Jamall, 15) Using the University of Utah’s Shoshoni Dictionary Project website, I was able to gain access to a multitude of Shoshoni words that I used in my novella. Nettie hears words such as “Ookwan”, be strong; “Iya’ih”, be alert; or “Nankasuanka”, listen carefully. Even though she may not fully understand the language being spoken to her, she automatically perceives the voice as something she is being asked to act upon. And eventually, being exposed to the language enough, she begins to understand the voices and the spiritual revelation that influence the way she thinks.

Finally, the last form I use to connect to the internal consciousness of the character and bridge the gap between cultural perspective, is flashback. As the flashback is a great tool to provide the reader with important events from the past which shape the character’s personality, and provide meaning to current events it in story, it can be overused. Flashbacks can be found in roughly thirteen of my chapters. I do not know if this constitutes overuse, but the device is essential to Nettie’s background. Foremost, it is very common to experience flashbacks when grieving. At the beginning of the text, the flashbacks are frequent and in almost every chapter with Nettie. “Sometimes one type of pain, leads to remembering other types of pain. Nettie tried hard not to let Collin seep into her thoughts. But the physical workout was breaking mental barriers not just muscle barriers.” (15) This is simply human nature

across all cultures to have different triggers that remind them of those that they lost. But as Nettie begins to let go of her loss, the flashbacks become less and less.

Yet, there is a larger cultural significance to Nettie's flashbacks. Remembering events and experiences is a core belief in Native American culture. Hain-Jamall points out that "In Native-American cultures, knowledge is expected to be subjective because any learning of value is acquired through experience... Spirituality is also not separate from other aspects of life. It is, in fact, an integral part of the Native-American lifestyle, not a religion. One is in constant contact with the spirit world through interactions with people and the natural world." By remembering Colin, Nettie is able to connect to knowledge through her experience. For example, chapter 8 is one complete flashback where Nettie remembers Colin taking her to the lake. He gives her advice, "Collin stood up slowly. 'You need time to be with the Creator. Remember, what mom always says, 'Listen to and follow the guidance of your heart.' When you are ready, the Creator will provide an answer. I will be here for you too.'" Throughout the text Nettie is reminded about what others said or of events that have taught her to grow. Therefore, it is not overuse of a device if culturally it is interconnected to Native American beliefs.

Hopefully, by incorporating the techniques of dual narration and shifting focalization, personification, language, and flashbacks I have been able to minimize the gap between my limited perspective on Native American culture. Additionally, by utilizing these forms I hope to have been able to provide an understanding of the internal self of the character in which a strong, Native American women emerges and is able to connect the reader.

1.3 Framework

When I looked back at literature in my past that influenced my own writing, I struggled to find one or two sources that I modeled my writing after. Instead, I decided to look at what might have inspired me to write a book with a Native American protagonist. When I had my dream in 2010, I was not affected by the current novels I was reading. As a junior high teacher, I read a lot of young adult literature. It was during this time that *Twilight* by Stephanie Meyers was being turned into a movie, the final book in *The Hunger Games* series by Suzanne Collins was released, and I was reading *The Maze Runner* by James Dashner. So, a dream about a Native American girl that wants to protect a canyon did not seem to fit the current genres.

Yet, I had always been fascinated by indigenous cultures. One of my favorite books growing up was *Island of the Blue Dolphins* by Scott O'dell. I was completely engaged in the idea of a young girl, Karana, surviving on her own. The message of survival and love of the environment and animals was what I valued in my own life as a child. As my family often went camping or to the University of Utah Pow Wows.

Being a child of the 80's young adult fiction consisted of books like *The Babysitters Club* or *Apple Paperback* pre-teen books. I couldn't stand these types of books and tried to find books like O'dell. One caught my attention titled, *Calico Captive* by Elizabeth George Speare. I can remember the book having a significant impact on my life, but when I reread the synopsis, the book is not what I recalled. The only part I can remember is that the main character is captured by Native American's.

Later, I was introduced to books like *The Last of the Mohicans* by James Fenimore Cooper, *Sacajawea* by Anne Waldo Lee, and *Ride the Wind* by Lucia St. Clair Robson. I was particularly influenced by Robson because she would write about women

in history who had been forgotten. I loved these types of stories, strong female protagonists that showed resilience in the face of adversity. The only issue with the specific novels influencing my writing is that every single author is Euro-American or “white”. These authors could write beautiful narratives; however, if I were to reread these novels, would I see the Euro-American mind which centers on individualistic values and “colloquial catch phrases” and “cultural metaphors” that are counter to collective, holistic, indigenous thinking? (Hain-Jamall, 13) Will my own story reflect this type of thinking? I hope that through my research and modern access to culturally correct values and beliefs, I am able to get as close as possible to an authentic Native American protagonist.

Thankfully, my education in the Creative Writing department at UTEP has exposed me to texts that have fed my creative form and given me texts in which I feel I am modeling my writing after. Knowing I was writing a book with an indigenous protagonist, I was gifted the book *The FireKeeper's Daughter* by Angeline Boulley. A young adult novel, about an eighteen-year-old girl named Daunis Fontaine who is half Ojibwe. I modeled Boulley's use of cultural language in my own book feeling that the use of cultural dialect created a more realistic narrative. An example of this can be found at the beginning of the book when Daunis goes for a run. “Ziisabaaka Minising.’ I whisper in Anishinaabemowin, which my father taught me when I was little.” (6) In my novel, Nettie is further removed from her cultural heritage. She has family but most of her tribal ancestors have passed away, leaving her with no cultural community. Therefore, the language she uses is minimal and reserved to her Shoshoni friends and Nature.

Additionally, because of Dauni's dual citizenship as part Native American, she is shunned by many within the local tribe and counsel. She must prove she is worthy to be accepted as a strong Ojibwe woman. Nettie does not need to prove that she is Timpanogos to her family; however, she is not accepted within the local tribal community or the local townspeople because they are not federally recognized.

Another book that influenced my writing was *Beloved* by Toni Morrison. The form of shifting focalization came from Morrison's masterful ability to use free indirect style. By visualizing a scene through multiple perspectives and inner voice, the reader can empathize with Sethe who murders her children. Yet, the reader does not walk away judging Sethe, but pitying her and her trauma.

No. No. Nono. Nonono. Simple. She just flew. (4) Collected every bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful, and carried, pushed, dragged them through the veil, out, away, over there where no one could hurt them. Over there. Outside this place, where they would be safe.

(192)

But this moment is not only seen through Sethe's point of view. To completely understand the character Morrison presents this scene through three different character's points of view. To understand the different viewpoints of nature, I juxtaposed Ryan's view of nature and events with Nettie. Ryan's viewpoint is "whiter" as Nettie's shows Native American values.

Next, Manuel Scorza in *Drums of Rancas* brilliantly represents personification in his book. Perhaps my idea of a fence was generated by this book, as Scorza creates a living breathing creature out of a fence that continually grows and separates communities. "You could not see the end of the barbed wire even if you stood on the

hilltops. It never stopped moving. Hills, pastures, waterholes, caves, lakes, it swalled up everything. By Monday at four o'clock it had devoured Chuco Hill." (37) As I was writing the chapter where Nettie confronts the fence that is keeping her from accessing the canyon, I thought about the way that Scorza treats the fence as a living breathing entity.

Furthermore, Scorza uses dual narration to tell a story of the people and the government that keeps them from rising about their station. As Ryan and Nettie's story runs parallel, Scorza tells two different stories that can be read separately, but they are woven effortlessly together.

To conclude, as I analyze the elements of my craft, I feel that one stands out, truth. I have researched everything from Native American culture to drilling equipment in an effort to create authenticity. Stories are based on realistic events or characters. Novelists model a character after someone they knew or plots around historical events. For every book my students read they ask, "is this real" even when we are reading a science fiction novel. They want to connect to characters that are similar to themselves in multiple ways, or even reaffirm their differences. Therefore, it was so important for me to research as much as I could to make my novel as culturally authentic as possible and hopefully, I have done just this.

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Tabby Canyon

Preface

Delicate care has been ignored, and things are out of balance. One can feel it. Sit still, listen. Not with your ears, but with your heart, with that sixth sense that tells you something is not right. It creeps up your arms like a tickle of static that makes the hairs stand up. Moving up to your heart, you feel it. You feel the screaming, the sorrow, the extreme exhaustion that she feels. Our Mother, the Earth.

They knew all along. They warned us. Tribes around the world understand the danger moving past the point of containment or even restoration.

“Everything has a soul,” they whispered.

“That is not science,” others rebuked.

Until it was. Technology let us hear the songs of leaves. Science found that water retains memories. Vibrations create snowflake-like patterns. Rocks can hug something so tightly until it sparkles. Trees talk to one another through a long network under their roots.

Yet, that is not a miracle?

Jesus turned water into wine.

Mother Earth turns coal into diamonds.

Winter

Chapter 1: Nettie

It wasn't the first time Nettie walked into the school after a death in the family. The familiar nausea rose one step at a time up the cement stairs at the front of the cold brick building. The first time, it wasn't as obvious. *No one knows my dad*, she thought. Who cares if another inmate dies? One that commits suicide in prison must be guilty. She didn't care. Dad had fought demons that kept pulling him to dark places.

But today was different. She was coming back after a death that had become headline news. Well, the Sheriff's critical condition was. Her brother, Collin, on the other hand, had been narrowed down to "1 dead" and a small paragraph about "the tow truck driver" in the local newspaper.

Nettie paused at the top of the stairs.

Close your eyes and breathe. She breathed in the late winter air, cold, and crisp, and exhaled trying to expel the nervous energy swelling in her bones and moving toward her muscles.

Ookwan. Tammü -nnuhi maapüatu~tümaapüatu e, she thought. The words unfamiliar, out of reach. Sometimes she dreamt in this language, and in her dreams, she spoke fluent Shoshoni. In a lucid dream, what she just said would make sense. Yet, fully awakened, she had no clue what it meant. Hearing the words now gave her strength.

She needed strength.

Stepping inside the building a dark cloud descended around her mind. Pulling in each direction of the school. Walking down the hall she smelled the familiar stale carpet like a wet dog. The students edged toward the walls as she passed. More than usual.

How yagaysuwayte.

Not until she walked through the senior hall did she truly feel their eyes. The darkness swirled at the end of the hall, tendrils of anger sneaking through the students, pouring out of their eyes and mouths in quiet whispers. Nettie kept walking protected by a shield of light. It's glowing embers blocking the hate inching toward her.

"There she is," a female voice rose above the others.

"Can you believe she came to school," another voice followed.

"The Sheriff's wife should press charges," a third.

"I guess we don't have to worry about who will win the Derby this year."

"Maybe they should go back to Mexico."

"You dumb ass, she ain't Mexican."

"Does it matter?"

Voice after voice, after gossiping, whispering, sad, and lonely voice, drifted over, under, around, and at Nettie.

Her shield flickered and faded.

Darkness reached every corner inside Nettie as she stared at her open locker. The books piled high had unreadable names. Which class did she need the giant red textbook for, again? Grabbing all five books, she stuffed them in her backpack. Better to avoid having to come back down this hall again. Hefting the bulging backpack on her back, Nettie headed toward Mr. Simpkin's class, hoping that it was the right class. Was it A-day or B-day? *I guess I'll find out when I get there.*

"Nettie!" Mr. Simpkin always stood at the door to greet his students as they entered his classroom.

Tsawüntün.

"Hey." Nettie lifted one arm in a half wave, half high-five awkward movement.

“I didn’t think you’d be back this week.” The pity in his voice elicited prickles up Nettie’s arms.

“I didn’t want to be at home.” Which was the truth. Home was darker. The embarrassment of her father’s death placed heavy weights on her mother’s shoulders. Those weights clanked and rattled throughout the rooms making it hard for Nettie to relax. Collin’s death replaced the weights with wailing. Pain from the loss of those you love. Nettie reached into her pocket and squeezed the red sandstone rock. She had replaced her usual metal washer with the rock Collin kept on his windowsill. *Ground me, please, I need clear footing.* She let go of the rock and sat down at her desk.

“*Pakateh. Be a body of still water,*” the rock whispered.

Chapter 2: Nettie

It wasn't until the lunch bell rang that Nettie realized she was done for the day. Sometimes forgetting is Nature's blessing. Like forgetting it is Friday, only to realize later in the day it really is Friday, and your day is almost over. Nettie realized that since it was an A Day, she had her Duchesne wildland fire internship.

It was the one thing she used to look forward to, and even though she was still grieving, it created a small dent in her sorrow. Hitching up her backpack and pivoting out the front doors instead of toward the lunchroom, Nettie raced down the cement stairs she had struggled to climb that morning.

The fire house was only a couple blocks up the street. Nettie preferred the small walk than taking her truck. The bitter cold felt like an ice bath an athlete might use after a long workout. Regardless of the time of year, the outdoors released her tension. However, main street did not sound like nature.

She grabbed her earbuds dangling from her zipped up jacket and pressed play on her phone, and the music blocked out the diesel trucks and cars driving through main street to stay on highway 40. Set to repeat, the melancholy guitar sound of "Home" by Depeche Mode embraced her thoughts and made the human world disappear for the eight minutes it took to get to the fire station.

Nettie pulled her hood up over her head to keep her ears from freezing. Only about a foot of snow covered the ground, yet the streets and sidewalks were clear. Winter in the Uintah's could be harsh but the last couple years they hardly had any snowfall. *It's going to be another bad fire season.*

She looked up at the sleeping elms between the street and sidewalk. They looked tired lately. Even the trees up the canyons looked like an ER nurse coming off a seventy-

two-hour shift. Nettie paused, placing a hand on the closest elm empathizing with its burden. The course, deep intersecting fissure of the bark felt rough like the knuckles of her grandfather's hands. *Worn yet wise.* Would he be taken too? Who was next?

Sighing, Nettie looked up at the web of branches waiting for an answer. Three branches up clung a little Downey woodpecker. No bigger than a sparrow, it twisted its red-patched head, gauging whether Nettie was a threat and if he could continue drilling. Slowly, Nettie reached up to pop her headphones out. Holding still, she watched the little bird fidget around the trunk. Finally choosing a spot, the little bird began drumming in a small crack of the bark.

Several branches near the crack looked as if they had not sprouted any leaves the previous spring. *Bark Beetles.* The damned insects had been given too much food to feast in overgrown forests. They were decimating nearby pines. *Thank goodness the Elms are more resilient.*

"Just keep munching Mr. Birdy." Nettie encouraged. "Help this Elder Elm fight that infection." Nettie patted the tree and glanced at her watch.

Shit. She was late. "Well, at least you won't go hungry, Woody," said Nettie, pushing off the tree and heading toward the station. One species dies while another species flourishes. But, where was the balance?

Arriving at the sage green and cream-colored fire station, Nettie rushed through one of the four garage doors that were open. Stopping just inside the door to catch her breath, she feared not being allowed to finish the program. It had been about three weeks since Collin's death.

Ookwan. The voice in her mind whispered again.

“Nettie?” a surprised voice startled Nettie and she quickly looked up. Captain Williams stood in front of her, the other two students in the program followed behind him.

“Hi, Captain, sorry I am a little late.” Nettie stuffed her headphones in her pocket and grabbed her rock. Keeping the rock in her hand, she quickly pulled her hood off her head.

Ookwan. The rock reminded.

“No worries, Nettie. We didn’t expect you until next week. Your mom said you’d be out...”

“I know. I just couldn’t sit around the house anymore.” Knocking her fisted hand against the leg of her jeans, Nettie felt bad she interrupted. It wasn’t that the captain made her nervous, or even the other students, she just didn’t want them asking her any questions about Collin. Especially, since the Police Chief and the Fire Captain were such good friends.

Kaihinasumbanrayde. The little rock encouraged.

“Well, come on in. Today is mainly instruction day. Wildfire behavior and safety is on the agenda. Maybe if you’re lucky we can get to practice deployin’ fire shelters,” said Captain William’s, guiding the three interns to the conference room.

Plopping down in one of the leather seats furthest from the other two students and the instructor, she stuffed the rock back into her pocket. Nettie opened her backpack and took out her spiral bound notebook; the other two students took out their laptops. Nettie couldn’t stand taking notes on a computer. Doodling in the margins helped her focus.

“Your instructor will be here in just a moment. I think she just ran to go grab a Diet Coke.” And with that, the captain left, leaving Nettie alone with the other two interns.

“So, I hear your brother killed the sheriff?” Nettie wasn’t surprised that Ammon asked the question. He hated her and her brother ever since he lost last year’s demolition derby. It was the first year Nettie drove, and he was pissed he lost to a girl.

“A car killed my brother. The sheriff is in the hospital.” She wanted to add “you idiot”, but she’d been taught to avoid hurting others. In this situation, she didn’t want to give Ammon any satisfaction that he was getting a reaction from her.

“Shut up, Ammon.” Abby was the other student in the wildland fire internship. Nettie was surprised she was there since she didn’t seem like the type that could pass the pack test, let alone swing a Pulaski. Guess she shouldn’t judge blonde haired, petite girls, because Abby was tough.

“Ya, well, I heard that if your brother had done his job correctly and got that car on the tow truck quicker than the Sheriff wouldn’t of been hit by that second car.” Ammon wasn’t going to back down. There were only two spots available for next year’s volunteer wildland fire crew, and he was trying to keep Nettie from getting the second spot.

“Had the second car not been speeding in icy conditions my brother wouldn’t of pushed the Sheriff out of the way...” Nettie was interrupted by their instructor, Mrs. Smith, pushing the door open with her back. One hand carrying a large Styrofoam Maverik cup and the other a handful of papers.

Nettie jumped up. “Let me help you Mrs. Smith.”

“Oh, thanks Nettie, but I...” Mrs. Smith paused when she realized who she was talking to. “Geez Nettie, what the heck are you doin’ back here so soon?”

Nettie shrugged and sat back down. She didn’t feel like explaining why she didn’t want to stay home.

“Well, I do have some stuff you’ll need to take home and study. Unfortunately, if ya wanna get your red card, then you gotta pass the test. I hate givin’ ya homework after, well, you know, after what happened.” *After my brother died?* Nettie didn’t understand why people were afraid to say words like death or died. Death is part of life. Grief was about missing the person, not that they were now obsolete.

“It’s okay, Mrs. Smith. I need the distraction.” Nettie drew swirls in her notebook.

Twenty minutes later, Nettie had drawn clouds and lightening around the margins of her paper, accented by several rain drops that look similar to tear drops. They’d been talking about weather patterns and what types of weather made for extreme fire danger.

“Actually, within the last couple years, Uinta, San Juan, and I think, Grand County, temperatures have risen higher than the global average,” explained Mrs. Smith.

“Global warming is a myth,” Ammon interjected.

“If you say so Mr. Hansen, but the data from the past several years tells us that fires are burnin’ hotter, and the fire seasons are gettin’ longer. So, it don’t matter what you believe. You need to understand how the weather will affect fires and what to watch for.” Mrs. Smith took a sip of her Diet Coke. Nettie could tell it was her way of self-restraint.

“Why don’t they do more prescribed fires?” Nettie asked. “My Grandpa James said that local tribes used to do prescribed fires to protect the land, but the US Government put a ban on allowing’ indigenous people to do prescribed fires.”

“I’m not sure about that,” contemplated Mrs. Smith. “All I know is that it’s complicated when it comes to prescribed fires.”

“But wouldn’t it help to get rid of all the dead trees and allow for new growth?” This is why Nettie wanted to get her red card. She had read that California was working with local tribes to do prescribed fires.

“Ultimately it would. But there are so many laws and assumptions about wildfires that there’s a lot of red tape when it comes to prescribed fires.”

“I see.” Nettie wanted to push the topic, but she didn’t want to sound disrespectful. She would save her questions for a better time.

“Alright, y’all. Enough sittin’. Go suit up and meet me out front with packs. We’ll be hiking two miles today!” Mrs. Smith clapped her hands and rubbed them together like a comic villain.

“Did you hear that Murdock? We are at two miles now. Guess you missed more than homework.” Ammon pushed as soon as Mrs. Smith walked out of the room.

“I’ll be fine. Thanks for your concern.” Nettie didn’t even look at Ammon knowing he just wanted to irritate her. Sometimes it was hard to stay respectful.

“Oh, that’s right. You Mexican’s know how to run.” Ammon laughed at his own joke.

“I’m Timpanogos.” Nettie didn’t know why she was even responding to Ammon’s sick joke.

“Timpanogos? Like the cave?” Laughed Ammon even harder.

“No, like the Nation. The cave and mountain are named after our tribe.”

“Really?” asked Abby. “I’ve never heard of the Timpanogos. I always assumed you was Ute. I mean since this area is near the reservation.”

“That’s okay. I get that a lot. It’s not the first time someone has asked if I’m Mexican.”

“I don’t remember learnin’ about the Timpanogos in school.” Ammon followed the two girls as they headed to the lockers. Spinning the code on her locker, Nettie hoped that her joggers and socks weren’t too ripe after sitting for three weeks. She was happily surprised when she sniffed her socks that were stuffed into her running shoes.

“I’m surprised you remember learnin’ anything, Ammon,” Abby cut in. Sometimes Nettie wondered if people thought she was weak because she avoided putting other’s down.

“No, you wouldn’t have learned about the Timpanogos Nation. We aren’t federally recognized,” Nettie said as she grabbed her things to go change in the restroom. Abby followed close behind her.

“What? You’re admitting you’re a fraud?” laughed Ammon.

Damn it. I just need to shut up sometimes.

“Good luck, Timpy, you do know we started hikin’ with weighted packs, too?” Ammon had to have the last word.

Don’t snap back. He isn’t worth it. Happiness of one is the happiness of all.

“Is that true?” She asked Abby.

“Yeh, they have gov issued packs that are weighted cuz we gotta hike with forty-five pounds on. But we don’t have the full weight, yet. They just started adding weight last week. So, don’t let Ammon scare you.”

Nettie wasn't afraid of the weight. She could hike and loved it. She could even hike fast. It was more about keeping pace after being gone that worried her.

By the time Nettie got out to the garage, Abby and Ammon already had their packs on. Captain William's held up a third pack for Nettie. It didn't feel too heavy as she cinched the pack in place, but the pack straps wouldn't tighten enough to keep it from bouncing. One strap was slightly fraying near the right shoulder blade.

"Alrighty, you three," called Captain William's. The three interns walked to the edge of the garage door, prepping to hike out in the cold. "We're goin' to start easy since it's cold out. Get our muscles warm. Then, we're speed walking down to 4th south, over to 4th east, back up to 2nd, and then back to the station. Got it?"

They all nodded.

"You're trying to make it back here in less than forty-five minutes or close to. The average person can walk a mile in fifteen to twenty minutes without weights. The pack test in May requires you hike three miles, with forty-five pounds, in under forty-five minutes." And with that the Captain began a steady walk expecting the three to follow.

At first, Nettie kept up with the others. Soon, three weeks of lying in bed with the covers over her head, put her further and further behind. The captain started hiking in longer, faster strides once they reached the bottom of the street and turned south along 4th.

"Faster, Nettie," she said out loud to herself and picked up the pace. The pack started bouncing on her back making hiking more difficult. She would land with one foot and the pack would slap her in the ass like it was telling her to giddy up.

I'm never going to make it there if this thing is bouncing. No wonder why the other two rushed to grab a pack. Nettie pulled the pack off her shoulders and looked

inside to see if there was anything she could use to fix the straps. Only sand weights sat at the bottom.

Looking around her, she hoped to see something on the ground that might work to adjust the pack somehow. Of course, since there was snow and water in the gutters there wasn't going to be anything she could use.

Just then she remembered the drawstring on her joggers. They sat snug enough on her hips that she didn't need the string to hold them up. It was just decoration at this point. Yanking hard on one end, she was able to release the string from the elastic waist band.

Putting the pack back on, she pulled the front straps forward and tightened the two straps together with the string across her chest, making the pack in the back sit higher on her hips and tighter to her waste. The pack hurt a bit against her front shoulders, but there wasn't much she could do, she had begun to shiver and needed to get going.

Rolling forward, Nettie began to jog the two miles back to the station on her own. She wasn't supposed to run, but she didn't want to get too far behind. She would stop running once she turned the corner and could see the group again. They weren't allowed to listen to music as they trained, which is painful when you don't want to let your mind wander. At first, she tried to focus on her breathing. Soon that led to counting the inhales and the exhales like one would count sheep. In, in, out. In, in, out. One, two, one. One, two, one.

The straps under her arm pits and front shoulders began to rub the skin like an eraser burn, but Nettie kept going. She had to make it in forty-five minutes, and she

must have wasted a good seven minutes fixing the straps. Pushing the pain from her mind. She tried to focus on something else.

Sometimes one type of pain, leads to remembering other types of pain. Nettie tried hard not to let memories of Collin seep into her thoughts. But the physical workout was breaking mental barriers not just muscle barriers. This route was the path her and Collin took after school when the day had been particularly difficult.

“You’re descended from the great chiefs, Nettie,” Collin’s voice rose in Nettie’s mind as she raced past the Strawberry Riverwalk Park. The cold sidewalk was replaced with a paved walkway along the Strawberry River. The green grass nodded in agreement and the river gurgled it’s understanding. “Chiefs Tabby, Wakara, Arropeen, Sanpitch, Kanosh, Grospean, Ammon, Sowiette, and Black Hawk. So, you can’t argue with your teachers.”

Collin parroted what their mom had taught them as they walked home from school. Only a year older than Nettie, he acted like he was five years older, since their dad acted like he was five years younger.

“I know.” Nettie walked slowly next to him, kicking one specific rock to see if she could keep kicking the same rock all the way home.

“It’s not your place. Listen with courtesy, even though what he says might be worthless.” Collin smiled. “You know who you are.”

Nettie smiled back. “I just said that Black Hawk was a hero cuz he was protecting’ his people and the land, and the war shouldn’t be called the Black Hawk war, but the Mormon war. I don’t understand why I have to be taught that my relatives were the villains.”

“Nettie, sayin’ that the Mormon’s are the villains is gunna make everyone in that classroom react.”

The pain in Nettie’s shoulder jerked her attention back to the pack that was digging further into her skin. She had turned the corner without realizing it and could see Ammon and Abby at the top of the street. *I’m not too far behind them.* She thought as they disappeared around the corner. Seeing Ammon turn the corner made her feel the same anger she had for her history teacher. Nettie’s thoughts went back to that moment in history class. She replayed the conversation in her mind.

Placing a name before the word war creates ownership. Protecting people you love, and the land, which is our mother who nourishes her children, from those that are destroying that nourishment is not an act of war, it’s an act of heroism. She always wished she could go back in time and say what she really wanted to say, but her mom had taught her to be respectful of her elders.

Like I wish I could have the last word with Ammon. She thought, wishing Collin could pick her up from the fire station. They would go for a drive, complain about all the things they had dealt with during the day, and be laughing by the time they got home.

Stinging, the pack cut further into Nettie’s shoulder, just like Collin’s memory cut her heart. Slowing down, she tried to adjust the pack, but it only moved back into place when she started hiking again.

“Damn it,” cursed Nettie out loud as tears filled her eyes. *They’re going to think I’m crying because I can’t make the time.*

Anger consumes. Becomes fuel. Nettie grabbed ahold of that resentment like an undercurrent. Pulling the fury into her legs to push herself around the last corner.

The fire station lay two blocks down the street. At a slight downhill, Nettie used the last of her anger to propel her forward. Walk-running Nettie pushed her little legs to go faster.

Geta nuikwi. The wind whispered to her as it pushed against her back, nudging her forward.

Gasping for air, Nettie ran into the station garage. The captain stood at the edge with a stopwatch. Ammon and Abby had their packs off, guzzling water from plastic bottles that Mrs. Smith provided.

“Forty minutes exact, Murdoch,” announced Captain William, clicking the stopwatch, and following her into the station.

Wincing, she tried to unknot the string that held the pack together. Nettie’s cold fingers couldn’t grip the tight knot and she had to ask Mrs. Smith for help.

“What the heck did ya do?” She asked taking over the task.

“The straps wouldn’t stay tight, and the pack kept slippin’ down makin’ it hard to hike. I tied it so it would stay on correctly.”

“Holy cow, Captain. I thought we got rid of this pack last week when Ammon couldn’t finish the hike cuz he said the pack was broken?” Mrs. Smith hollered over her shoulders to the captain.

“Yeh, I put the pack in the back of the closet.”

With both their backs turned, Ammon tipped his hat toward Nettie and smiled.

“Guess we’ll need to cut two minutes from your time since you completed the run with a crappy pack,” said the captain. “Ammon didn’t even get a time last week cuz of this pack.”

The happiness of one is the happiness of all. Nettie couldn't help but smile back at Ammon.

Chapter 3: Ryan

The earth bleeds water. Ryan thought to himself as the drill punctured the rib of the dull black rock, spattered with white quartz, and yellow speckles of arsenic. Can't even see it's there. High grade microscopic gold, two ounces per ton.

"You can smell it sometimes, can't you?" He yelled at his helper.

"What?" Dugan yelled back angrily, trying to hoist a steel rod into place.

"Never mind." Ryan knew better than to start thought provoking conversation based off his stream of thoughts. But he could smell it in the water. Blood. The tang of iron made Ryan's mouth water like he was sucking on a penny. He spit hard and shoved a handful of pickled sunflower seeds in his mouth. At least this wasn't Cortez where the hole ran blood-red with iron oxide.

This dewatering - this bloodletting - was taking the weight off the mountain so they could dig deeper. One can hear it, too. The earth heaves and groans when its quiet, like she is surrendering her insides to being eviscerated. He wasn't there drilling for the gold. No, his job was to hunt down the water veins and suck the blood out of the mountain so the mine could eat more ore, more flesh. His gold was the water. He was hired to mine the water.

The sick yellow light from the overhead explosion proof "torches" cast inhuman shadows across the drill station into the drift. Ryan wiped sweat from the back of his neck with the dirty bandana he held in his left hand. He pressed the drill lever forward piercing the earth's hard skin. Bile rose in his throat, making him choke on the sunflower seeds. It didn't matter how many times he began a new drill hole; it always sickened him. He felt as if he was thrusting a knife into the side of someone he loved. He shook off the thought and reminded himself how much overtime he would make this week and what percentage

of the safety bonus he would put into savings. *Was the cash worth trading for the life of the earth?*

The mine had been drilled, blasted, and mucked thousands of feet down into the heart of the mountain for almost 150 years. Each drift, or main tunnel, had a drill station. Each drill station had hundreds of bleeding, calculated and engineered, deep puncture wounds in the rock. Each wound seeped water that had been stored away for millions of years. Cleaned and purified by her. The water flowed down the back and ribs of the mine into piss ditches. The piss ditches syphoned the precious water, along with spilled oil, Copenhagen, and other foul liquids to massive high voltage, high volume pressure pumps that pushed the water out of the mine to be used in other flesh-robbing aspects of the mining process, ultimately to be disposed of as waste.

“Watch your head, you dumb ass,” hollered Ryan over the roar of the drill to his helper. Dugan ducked as the next iron rod was placed on the drill by the mechanical arm.

“I saw it comin’. This ain’t my first rodeo.” Dugan shouted back as he poured the flesh-colored rock chip samples into a chip tray from a spaghetti strainer for some college intern to look at and talk about the crystal morphology.

“Then stop dickin’ around! I don’t wanna fill out the paperwork or pee in a damn cup again.”

“All of this for gold and copper,” Ryan muttered to himself as he adjusted his head lamp on his hard hat.

Ryan slammed the heavily worn and polished control lever for the slip plate forward, pulled the drill head back, fired the rotation to thirty RPM, kicked the air on and softly pushed the feed forward until he could hear the native drum beat of the percussive

hammer. Funny how air, water, and steel can cut through anything. *Funny how the mix of these things is an art.*

He was deep. Real deep. Too deep for this type of drill. *God, if I stick this string, I won't get a bonus this month.* Luckily, he never had. He was good, but he hated being this good.

Being good meant being in a position of authority and being the lead driller on this project was the last place he wanted to be. He hated drilling. But what else could he do? Not many choices when you're raised in a town where the job options are ranch hand, farm hand, trucker, or driller. Drilling might be the worst job on the planet, but it paid six figures. He wasn't stupid like the rest of the miners who spent their money on supped up F150's to peacock to the world. He saved everything he had. He dreamed of buying land and retiring early. Problem was, he wasn't sure how much longer he could last.

He remembered the first day he rode down to the bottom of the pit at the Kennecott mine. Driving down the haul road into the pit of the giant festering wound, Ryan had to avert his eyes toward the sky. Cheese grater like scars serpentined their way around the colorful walls of the pit, beautiful striations of mineral dense ore layered like the rings on a tree. A geological record of the eons of time. Now an open wound, the earth created acid to try and protect herself.

Haul trucks loaded with the high-grade guts from the mountain moved slowly up the haul road in a line like giant 450-ton imperial ants slipping past each other. Looking up at the sky from the bottom of the pit made a man question his existence every day. A red-tailed hawk ridge-soared along the eastern edge of the cliff face and a poor sparrow bounced from berm to berm. It had probably been carried down into the pit by the mines very own weather system. *That little bird will never fly out of this pit again.* That was the

last thing he saw as he drove down into the depth of the underground mine, a hole in the deepest manmade hole on earth.

A shutter from the drill levers brought Ryan out of his head. He looked around the drift to see if anything else was shaking.

“You feel that Dugan?” he hollered. Dugan’s back was to Ryan. He was prepping another rod by lathering the threaded end with sticky black grease. Ryan glanced at the giant lights expecting to see flickering or shaking, but their beams held true. He looked at the gauges for the pressure and to see if the drill had hit a water pocket or soft rock. Nothing registered. Sometimes the ground “talked.” The superstitions of miners are as numerous as the cuts on their hands and the grout burns on their feet. But nothing seemed wrong.

Stop daydreaming. He knew better than to let his mind wander when they were drilling an up hole. Drilling thousands of feet in the ceiling of the man-made cave was what made Ryan an expert at his job. No one else around the world had done what him and his crew had learned to do. The contract was to de-water the pit so they could drill further into the mountains heart to follow a massive ore deposit. An upheaval of gold, copper, and silver running through the heart of the mountain, decided eons ago by planetary systems.

Out of the corner of his eye, something moved in the shadow behind the torch lights. Ryan whipped his head to the left but couldn’t see anything in the dark outside the manmade cave. Trying to see past the blackness, Ryan squinted his eyes. Working the graveyard shift always gave him the heebie-jeebies. It wasn’t unheard of to see “things” in the shadows of the mine. He had before and he had never come to terms with it.

Once, as he was driving an underground haul truck out of the mine, the lights inside the cab flickered making him slow. Light from a drill station ahead gave an eerie glow on the belly of the tunnel. Beyond that, was pitch black. Suddenly, someone, or something, ran across the tunnel in front of his truck. He slammed on the breaks. “What the fuh,” he spat. What idiot would run in front of a giant truck loaded with rock? He downshifted the 30-ton metal diesel monster. Shaken and pissed Ryan grabbed the handheld radio in the passenger seat.

“Anyone working in drift number four this evening. Over,” the crackle of the radio sent shivers up his spine.

“No one’s been in drift four this week, Meyer,” his supervisor barked back.

“You guys pranking me then?”

“What the hell you talkin’ about, Meyer? Everyone is outside the drift in the trailer waiting for you to move your ass out of the tunnel so we can send down the drill rig.”

Ryan’s hands went numb and his heart beat wildly in his throat. He knew he had seen someone, or something, run across the tunnel road. It wasn’t unlike the guys to pull pranks. Maybe Dugan was getting back at him for the time he had made him run up the tunnel in the dark.

“Dear God, let me go home tonight,” he whispered.-

Ryan put the truck back in gear. Just as he was about to pull forward, he saw something move just beyond the light. It was darker than the pitch black of the tunnel and it crawled along the floor just out of reach of the light. Ryan was paralyzed from looking away. The thing crawled along the belly of the tunnel, up the ribs, along the back, and pulled itself into the adjacent drift.

As soon as the thing was gone, the lights in the cabin of the truck flickered back on. He buried the throttle to a painful, crawling 10 mph and slowly lurched passed the area the shadow had crawled into. He didn't dare look left as he passed the drill station. He knew if he did, he would see something that wasn't meant to be seen. None of this was ever meant to be seen. *Men don't belong here.*

He passed the section and felt "it" glaring at him through the bullet proof glass of the chugging underground haul truck. Hair on the back of his neck stood up. Adrenaline rushed to his ears ringing louder than the roar of the 700-horsepower diesel engine.

After that experience, he never went into the mine alone. He never told anybody, but he would always arrange it so he was with someone. He knew the stories of dead miners haunting mines, "the man in white boots," "the rogue headlamp," the random scream, but this was different. This felt like an ancient throbbing darkness.

Rubbing his eyes with the back of his hand, Ryan cast his eyes back at the hole he was drilling. He had to stay vigilant at the controls and stop getting sidetracked with ridiculous thoughts.

"Hey Meyer! Stop dozen off, dumb ass." Dugan chided Ryan in a copy-cat voice.

"Sorry, man. Been gettin' the heebies all night."

"Shit, dude. Don't start talkin' about that crap. You know I'm afraid of the dark."

"Why the hell did you choose a job that sends you down into the darkest places on earth?" Ryan laughed.

"Money and the glory! Why else would I deal with you?" Dugan smiled his lopsided toothless grin and tilted his hard hat toward Ryan while giving him the finger.

At that moment, the torch light flickered behind Ryan, replacing Dugan's smile with a wide-eyed panic. Dugan gripped the bars of the lift bucket. Ryan whipped his head

around. He couldn't leave his post at the controls to see what was wrong with the lights. Once they began to drill, he couldn't stop drilling, or the rods would get stuck in this unstable rock. He even had to shit in a bucket at the controls when the ground wanted to keep the million-dollar string of rods.

"Dugan, pause on the next rod. Get down here and check the wiring on those lights," he shouted. Ryan wasn't worried about the lights. For whatever reason, he felt like he had to get Dugan out of the lift bucket. Just as Dugan reached the ground, the lights flickered again, and the drill levers began to shake.

Shadows, like two giant hands, grew out of the dark corners of the drift. Ryan gripped the controls tightly and Dugan froze next to the lift. They watched as the skeletal hands moved across the walls of the cave like wisps of smoke slithering toward the open wound. The hands wrapped around the huge anchoring chains and ripped them down. The darkness gathered around the hole, expanding outward. The flow of water stopped.

Just then, the mine took a violent breath, like they sometimes do, and blasted air into the drill station like a bomb went off.

"Get out of there, Dugan!" Ryan found his voice just in time. He jumped from the control deck, grabbing Dugan, and dived behind the platform underneath the rod rack. A deafening storm of screaming hot metal echoed around the chamber as the entire string of rods all joined in 6-foot sections came sailing out of the hole, like one continuous steel ribbon.

Thousands of pounds of hardened precision Swiss steel, rotated and slithered like a violent snake fighting for its life in the claws of a falcon. The men huddled down in six inches of mud and hydraulic oil and covered their heads as they were pelted with water and rock ricocheting around the drill station like bullets. The string cut through the

control stand like a hot knife and pushed the fifty-thousand-dollar drill back against the adjacent rib. The huge blow-out preventer, which was cemented and anchored to the rib around the opening of the hole, blew off and went crashing down. The men hunkered down underneath the rack as the violence ensued around them.

BOOM

“THAT WAS THE 480 PANEL!” Dugan screamed as he tried clamoring to his feet in the cold mud. Ryan grabbed Dugan by the mine belt and yanked him back hard into their shelter. His head lamp flickered on Dugan’s brass tag. Would they be able to brass out? Or would their tags still be hanging on the board as a reminder that the mine had claimed another victim?

Sparks flew everywhere from the high voltage panel being thrust upwards like a speared fish out of the water. Ozone instantly filled the air. Arcing electricity bounced off the wet rib and metal. Hydraulic motors whined and spun up as their torque no longer had anything to move.

Chapter 4: Nettie

Her dreams were getting more intense. She recalled shadowy hands crawling along what seemed to be a giant mine. Arms ripped at steel that was piercing rock. She remembered miners diving for cover as metal came falling out of the mountain. *Great, now I'm going to be in a fugue all day.* Each intrusive image reminded her to feel, and she wanted to remain numb. Yet, Earth was not allowing her to.

Reaching for the cup of water on her nightstand, Nettie emptied the cup. She flipped on the light and lay back down, spooning the snoring German Shepherd-Husky mix to fight the emotions that were trying to consume her. The dog let out a large comfort sigh as Nettie put her arm around her Peter Pan nannie dog. Nettie began to beat rhythmically on the dog's chest, like the wings of a butterfly. She steadied her breathing by focusing on the dog's breathing as her hand tapped up and down with the dog's slow breaths. The Shepherd sent calming feelings to push out the negative energy that had taken hold of Nettie through the nightmare. *Thrum, Thrum, Thrum.*

Pieces of the dream kept trying to push through her meditation. Arms growing out of shadows, water like blood pouring out of rock, metal clanking like bells, the smell of iron making her mouth tang with the taste of pennies - and the screams. Screams of pain, echoing through caverns and tunnels, falling on deaf ears. A women's scream as metal drills twist, twist, twist.

I am tiyaimmi'a. Whispered the voice hovering on the wakeful edge of the dream.

Nettie ignored the voice.

Settling back into calm numbness, Nettie picked up her phone. Squinting with one eye, she looked at the time. Five Fifty-three. *Why did dreams always wake you right*

before your alarm went off? Nettie wished it was four in the morning, then she could get another hour of nightmare-free sleep.

Rolling off the bed in a barrel roll, Nettie flopped to her knees on the floor. It was hard to get her body to cooperate after such dreams. *Should she tell her grandpa?* Grabbing the bed sheets for support she pulled herself up slowly. Like a newly awoken zombie, Nettie shuffled toward the bathroom down the narrow hall. Mornings sucked. Mornings brought memories, and memories brought pain. *Dreams or memories, what was worse?* Scalding hot water was the answer. Nettie flipped on the fans to keep the small bathroom from becoming a sauna and let the water heat up in the shower.

An hour later, Nettie sat at the breakfast table, the crackle of the Rice Crispies made her smile. Her long black hair was still a little damp as she twisted it and threw it behind her shoulder so it wouldn't fall in her cereal as she ate. Taking a big milky bite, she reached across the table and flipped on the old portable TV that her grandfather insisted remain on the kitchen table instead of checking her phone.

Besides, there wasn't any one she cared to check-in with now that her brother was gone. The "friends" that she did have were surface level friends and most of them started ghosting her after Collin died. She couldn't blame them, they were grieving in their own way, and she knew that she was a reminder of that pain.

Troy, Blake, or Wade should have called. Collin's best friends were like family, but she hadn't seen them in weeks. It wasn't like them to be away so long.

"In other news, two miners nearly escaped death late Sunday night in a drilling accident. Lindsey Nelson is on the scene at Kennecott with more details. Lindsey." Nettie

heard the clatter on the porcelain bowl as the spoon dropped from her hand splashing milk on her black hoodie.

“Holy, shit.” Nettie angrily scooted the chair away from the table to get a paper towel.

“Nettie, it’s too early for profanities,” her grandfather’s deep voice lectured behind her. Rolling her eyes at him with a half grin, she grabbed the paper towel he was holding out to her and dabbed at the milk spots.

“Mornin’,” she said as she turned around to pick up the spoon and wiped down the rest of the splatters on the table. Coffee began to percolate and filled the room with the dark, stale aroma of cheap coffee. Nettie loved the comfort smell.

“What are you watching?” her grandfather asked as he sat down next to her seat waiting for the coffee to finish. His big frame took up the entire chair. Nettie loved how his white braid blended into his Hanes undershirts he always wore to bed.

“Nothing’ really. I just flipped it on to veg while I ate breakfast.” Nettie thought of the images of the shadow-like hands that had ripped the drill out of the wall of the mine in her dream.

“Hmm,” was all her grandfather said as he looked at her then back to the weather report on the TV. The coffee machine bubbled and sputtered the last of the water into the pot. “Tell me about your dreams last night,” he softly asked.

Nettie spun around and walked over to the faded yellow linoleum countertop. It was routine to discuss dreams in her family. She had been taught that dreams were spiritual revelations for her tribe. Yet she wasn’t ready to discuss this dream. Opening the

cupboard, she pulled out the heavy, truck-stop-brown coffee mug and filled it to the top. Black was the only way her grandfather took his coffee.

Setting the coffee on the table next to him, she hugged her grandfather. Neither said anything after the embrace, there wasn't a need to fill the air with useless chatter when the gesture held all the sentiment that needed to be said.

Nettie grabbed her backpack that sat near the front door, along with the keys to her truck that dangled on a hook above the light switch.

"See you to-night," she said softly to her grandfather who was sipping at the coffee, engrossed in the breaking news story. "I'll tell you about my dream later." He waved goodbye without looking up. Nettie smiled and opened the front door.

The waking sun was tickling the sky with light wisps of pink. It still hid its sleepy head behind the mountains but lit the sky in a soft blue. Nettie offered a silent prayer to the sun in her head. To say the words out loud made her feel like she would be betraying some unspoken rule. Generational fear is a continuous poison.

A dove cooed across the street and brought Nettie back from her thoughts. It was late February and the morning air felt crisp. A slow tingle rose along the back of Nettie's spine like something was tugging at her soul with an invisible string wrapped around her chest. She knew what was calling to her, reaching out like a lost child. Tabby Canyon waited up the pass just outside the Uintah-Wasatch-Cache National Forest. But Nettie didn't want to acknowledge the spirit that called for her attention.

E wisa. Watükih e. Tabby Mountain reverberated along the rocky formations and ridges.

Nettie shook her head and squinted her eyes shut. She flipped her hoodie up as she turned her back to the canyon, ignoring the mountain in the distance. Her own grief took precedence.

Little pebbles crunched under her feet as she walked up the gravelly, snow laced drive toward the carport. The white, metal carport had been repurposed as a shop. An old 1977 Buick sat in the middle of the carport with the hood propped open and everything torn out so that only the frame of the car was left.

Walking between the car and the piles of discarded car parts, Nettie made her way to the other end where an old green picnic chair sat. Sighing she plopped herself in the seat facing the Buick. Nettie, and Collin, had started working on the derby car last winter to get it prepped for the 24th of July Duchesne Demolition Derby. Nettie hadn't touched the car since Collin passed.

Nettie loved working on cars with her brother. She smiled to herself visualizing Uncle Julius sitting in the same green chair, the color less faded.

Even when she was little, Nettie always helped with the toolbox, when her brother and Uncle Julius would work on their old Ford. She loved to listen to her uncle tell stories of their people, the Timpanogos, the Snake River band of the Shoshoni. How they would use the Eu, reeds, which grew along what is now Utah Lake, to make their Tah, arrows.

Utah.

“Did I tell you the story of how Spirit Fox, Bobcat, Wolf, and Mountain Lion saved the people?” asked her uncle, sitting in the green chair in the driveway.

Nettie and her brother sat on a truck bench seat that had been pulled out of some old vehicle her uncle and Dad were working on. Bologna and mayo sandwiches in hand. The two shook their heads waiting for Uncle Julius to tell his story.

“When the land was green, with forests and rivers, we lived in harmony. Our people had food and water and were happy. Then a warrior group of vicious little people, who were skilled with the bow and arrow, drove our people out of the best forest area.

A great council was held, and a renowned, respected medicine man was chosen for a vision quest. The medicine man agreed and ventured into the forest. On his journey he saw a bright star. He followed the star for a day until he came to an opening.

There in the opening sat a wolf, a bobcat, a fox, and a mountain lion. The mountain lion had a head of a man and hands for paws. This frightened the medicine man. But the mountain lion spoke in Shoshone and said ‘Do not be afraid. I heard from the animals you passed in the forest that you were coming. We will help you. Tell us what you need.’

The medicine man explained their troubles with the vicious little people and asked how they might get rid of them. The council of animals said they would help on one condition that the Shoshone or Bannock people would never hunt the wolf, bobcat, fox, or mountain lion. They would stay away from them. The mountain lion said, ‘Bring your warriors, women, and children back here so that they will know you are telling the truth.’

For a day the medicine man followed the bright star back home to the forest. He held a great council and told the people what he had seen. Some warriors did not

believe him, but it was decided to visit the spirits. There was a large migration of our people that followed the bright start.

When they arrived at the opening the women and children were afraid because the mountain lion had a head of a man and hands for paws. The mountain lion told them not to be afraid and that the spirits would help them.

Then all the spirits prayed and as they did the medicine man rose high up in the air. Once he was high in the air, the spirits shot down lightning. The lightning struck the trees and a fire erupted. It engulfed the little people, and they were burned. Then the fire went away, and the medicine man returned to the ground.

The mountain lion said, 'You are safe now. You may go home but remember your promise.'

To this day, the Shoshone-Bannocks do not hunt the wolf, the bobcat, the fox, or the mountain lion."

Smiling at the memory of the story, Nettie stood up from the green chair and reach into the pail that held spare bolts, screws, and washers. Instead of pulling out her usual washer, she grabbed onto her red, sandstone rock. The rock was Collins that he kept in his room. He had saved it from their first hike up Tabby Canyon. From then on, he had always carried it in his pocket, said it grounded him. After Collin died, Nettie began carrying the rock instead of washers. Carrying washers was like a lucky penny, she would even pick up random washers lying in the road. Without Collin, she needed more than luck, she needed hope.

Nettie shoved the rock in her pocket and hustled out of the garage before the tears began to flow. If she started crying, she would never make it to school.

Chapter 5: Nettie

Four classes, ninety minutes each, plus five minutes between classes, and sixty minutes for lunch, is hell for an eighteen-year-old senior. Nettie pushed the metal bar of the school door open with as much force as a bull in a pen. She inhaled the crisp, fresh air deeper than she had the entire day. *How can I do this for three more months?*

The metal bench in the baseball dugout froze through Nettie's black baggy jeans. The dugout was always the best place to hide while the school emptied of its scholars. No one thinks of baseball during the winter. Not even the stoners or lovers who chose the cliché bleachers to meet after school, or really, in this town, the back of a Ford pickup.

"I swear everyone is seven degrees away from Footloose in Duchesne." Nettie whispered to the drifting snow on the field. Laughing, the wind sprayed small crystals of ice at Nettie into the dugout. At least the wind was still her friend.

Nettie smiled pulling her hood further over her head, her long black hair spilled out the sides making it look like she had a fur collar. Bringing her legs up onto the bench she pulled the zipped-up hoodie over her knees and down to her ankles. Then she pulled her arms in from the sleeves and huddled in her hoodie cocoon.

The wind picked up, excited to have an audience. Gathering up the icy powder, it played with the snow across the baseball field. Icy crystals twisted and pirouetted along the fence, spinning out of the gate to bow just outside of the dugout in front of Nettie.

I could stay here until I fall asleep. Her fingertips and toes becoming numb. *Wouldn't that feel peaceful?*

She lay her head forward on her knees and covered her frozen nose. Her breath warmed the tops of her knees. "I wonder how long the heat of my breath would hold to keep me alive." She whispered into her jacket.

“Longer than what you realize,” a deep voice spoke softly from around the corner of the dugout.

Nettie shot up like a starfish. Legs burst out of the jacket and arms plunged through the sleeves. Grabbing the side of the bench she wondered who had followed her. No one paid attention to her anymore. Her friends were Collins friends, and without Collin they melted back into the crowd as if they were deer and she was the wolf.

No way she was saying hi first. That would acknowledge that something had number one, spoken to her, and number two, heard her whisper to herself. She could use her backpack as a giant shield. All the books created a ton of weight that would knock someone down that was not expecting an attack.

Nettie listened carefully. There were no footsteps or sound. Suddenly she heard a slight crunch of snow under foot at the far end of the dugout. She sucked in air and held it. There was no way her breathing was going to get in her ear’s way. Turning her head slightly she sent all her energy toward the sound. Nothing.

Nankasuanka. Listen carefully.

Time clicked by like a dog herding sheep. The slow movement of each foot bringing the dog closer to the watchful sheep. Nettie knew she was the sheep but was afraid that what was watching her was not a watchful watchdog.

“What are you doing here by yourself, Nettie?” Troy asked as his head popped over the roof of the dugout. Screeching and throwing cat scratches at the air, Nettie smacked Troy in the face.

“*Ataa!* What the hell, Nettie.” Troy lowered himself to the ground, rubbing his cheek where Nettie’s hand had made contact.

“Me, what the hell? What the hell on you, Troy,” Nettie fired back, pushing her hoodie off her head. She ran her fingers through her hair trying to calm her nerves at the same time straighten the mess the hoodie created.

“*Tuhuwa'i*. I was just checking up on you. When did you become so jumpy?” Troy wiped the icy crystals that had blown onto the bench and sat down. His sherpa lined light brown corduroy Wrangler jacket looked warm and Nettie wished she could be buttoned up inside that jacket, too.

Nettie looked at the cement and sat back down in her corner. These thoughts were off limits. She knew that. Troy was Collin’s friend. There is an unspoken rule about liking your older brother’s friends. It’s called “off-limits.”

“Why didn’t you ever stop by during our mourning for Collin?” Anger rose in her throat catching in the middle and placing a large lump in the center of her vocal cords. She didn’t understand why she was getting so angry at Troy. “Blake and Wade stopped by to help make sure that he was never left alone and to help mom and me. Where were you?”

Troy looked at Nettie with his amber eyes. Compassion and empathy were held there. He didn’t have to reply. Nettie looked down, she understood. Words were not needed to explain Troy’s sorrow. Nettie wasn’t about to disrespect Troy by pushing for an answer. Besides, he was Collin’s friend, not hers. He didn’t owe her a thing.

Timidly the wind picked back up and began playing with the snow again, hoping to relieve the tension that was building in the small space under the awning of the baseball dugout. Nettie noticed the distraction and smiled at the sparkles of snow being whipped around the bases.

After a while Troy spoke up. “I promised Collin I would keep an eye on you.”

“It’s been two months. But, you get an A plus for effort.” Nettie gave Troy a half smile.

“Who says I haven’t checked up on you?” Troy’s eyebrow went up in a questioning look, firing back at Nettie.

Nettie blinked for what felt like ten minutes but was less than 15 seconds. Her heart fluttered at the thought of Troy caring enough to make sure she was okay. Yet, the thought of him watching her sent shivers up her spine that were not created by the wind.

“Creeper!” The words came out before she could think of a better come back. Mortified, she kept talking. “You’ve been watchin’ me? Do you also sneak into my room and stand by the window? I never pegged you for that type.” She could keep talking, but she bit her bottom lip.

Done. She was done. Pulling her hoodie back over her head and her legs up on the bench, she yanked the jacket down to her ankles and buried her head in her knees. She breathed in the smell of detergent and vanilla scented sweat. That felt real. She wanted to stay hidden like a child that plays like they are invisible. If she couldn’t see him then he couldn’t see her.

The bench whined and Nettie waited for the sound of footsteps. She opened her eyes in the darkness of her jacket hoping to feel the energy of Troy standing near her and picturing him sitting down next to her. The branches of the nearby trees rustled and creaked trying to get her attention.

She looked up and Troy was gone. He hadn’t even made a sound as he walked out of the dugout. No, goodbye. No, I’ll check on you later. Nettie sat up again, slowly pushing her legs out of her jacket. “I’m an idiot,” she whispered to herself.

“You’re not an idiot,” came a voice on the side of the cement cave. Nettie spun to her right, and there stood Troy, one arm up on the wall, the other spinning his keys in his hand.

“It’s freezing and I can’t stand to sit on that cold metal bench any longer. Can I drive you home?”

“I have my own truck, Troy.”

“Well, let me just walk you to your truck. Everyone is gone. Parking lot is empty.”

Nettie didn’t say a word. She just grabbed her bag and followed Troy. Sticking her hands in her pocket she squeezed her rock. *Please ground me.*

Chapter 6: Mother Nature

Pain has a threshold and tolerance takes different forms. A spiral tattoo swirls in multiple colors along my skin growing larger and larger every season. The needles hammer deeper and deeper; I bare the pain of the open wound, my body reacting with acidic puss to numb the pain. But some children keep taking. They have become sadists. The more pain they inflict on me, the more pleasure they gain – wealth, material, possessions.

They claw deeper at my wounds, reaching my limit. I wail as veins of water are punctured over and over. Screaming out, I beg for them to stop this torcher. No amount of pleading will stop them. Their self-indulgence is an addiction they can no longer fight.

Like a victim tied to a chair, I slowly begin to weaken my restraints. Shifting slightly, little slivers of fractures zig zag along the man-made caverns. Yet now is not the time to break away. Another shift and my ground vibrates with the changes. Slivers turn to cracks. I know it is only a matter of time before they dig too deeply, and those cracks will help me escape, shaking violently enough to seal the wounds they have carved.

They see the cracks, but their greed keeps them moving forward.

Spring

Chapter 7: Ryan

Highway 40 crooned in a steady rhythm with the diesel engine that carried the exploratory core drill. Late March clouds rolled across the sky, warning travelers of the impending storm. Ryan sighed as the sagebrush speckled hills gave way to reveal the dusty blue of Strawberry Reservoir, its soft ripples mirrored the clouds above. The reservoir was always a waypoint that provided relief on the long ride home from visiting family in Salt Lake when Ryan was a kid.

“Are those seagulls?” asked Dugan who sat in the passenger’s seat of the two-man cab.

“They’re pelicans.”

“No f-ing way! I thought Pelicans were only around the ocean.”

“They migrate up to Canada from Mexico. I did a report on them in junior high.” Ryan loved seeing the giant white tank-like birds work together to drive the fish to the shallow end of the lake, where him and his dad sat fishing on the bank. His dad always went fishing on his days off from the oil wells that speckled the landscape around Roosevelt, the small city outside of Duchesne where Ryan grew up.

“Well, now. Aren’t you just adorable!” mocked Dugan.

“Shut it, Dugan. At least I can remember somethin’ from school. Did you even go?” Ryan smirked.

“Hey, I made it to 8th grade.” They both laughed and the conversation ended as they grew quiet again.

Since the accident, Ryan found himself caught up in his thoughts more than usual. He was always bouncing around in his memories, but now he was stuck like a seized

motor. His mind could not leave that dark underground portal, the sound of metal grinding and shrieking around him as he and Dugan huddled under the rod feeder. Waiting for the sound of death in the pitch-black darkness of a mine warps the soul.

Darkness also warps time, it took the rescue team only forty-five minutes to get to the drill station, though it felt like hours. The day crew was already gathered in the trailer waiting for the morning briefing at the bottom of the pit when the emergency system blared. Reports from drill station number two that the entire rod chain had slipped in drill station number one, sent the men into action. Without waiting for orders from up top, they gathered their equipment and headed into the mine.

A beam of light, like an angel's halo, bounced off the back wall of the man-made cave and brought Ryan back from his mental spiral toward death. Muted shouts and a high-pitched ringing in his ears made it hard for him to pinpoint which direction he needed to go. Pulling himself through the mud out from under the platform, he struggled to stand. Multiple beams of light were bouncing around the cavern, as the rescuers slowly climbed around the wreckage.

Suddenly the station was flooded with light, as the florescent torch lamp from the second drill station was moved to the mouth of the portal. Ryan squinted and turned away from the searing rays. The smell of electrical ozone and iron matched the taste of blood in his mouth. Looking down, he could see Dugan's hand under the platform. Diving back under, Ryan grabbed Dugan, pulling him by the straps of his Carhart overalls until he was clear of the machine. Dugan groaned and looked up at Ryan.

"Well, shit! They better pay us workers comp." Dugan smiled his toothless smile and grunted as he sat up. Unspoken understanding forced the two to look up at the ceiling where the drill had once been anchored. Water trickled like tears from the scar in the rock.

Staring wide-eyed and speechless, both men couldn't move past sitting cross legged in the mud until they were discovered by rescuers.

Rumble strips on the highway sang out their warning and brought Ryan out of his daze. Adjusting the wheel, Ryan brought the rig back to the center of the lane.

"You need a break there?" asked Dugan, who had also been lost in thought.

"Just back in the hole, again. Like usual." Ryan rubbed the back of his neck to release the tension that had built up in his shoulders.

Dugan nodded. The men had a silent understanding of the other's trauma. It was never openly discussed, but mutually avoided, like they had made some secret pact not to talk about what happened that night. Neither of them wanted to admit there was something more that happened than "equipment failure" like the final mine report had concluded. Thank God, it was equipment failure and not human failure, or their asses would have been fined for more than their lives were worth.

"I think I need to stretch my legs for a second. Driving this rig makes my legs go numb," suggested Ryan as the Fruitland Sinclair came into view, the first truck stop for miles up this stretch of highway. "Besides, it's your turn to drive."

"Damn it. I told ya, I don't know the area. You're the big wig who grew up in these parts." Dugan spoke in a cowboy drawl as he said "these parts" prompting Ryan to quickly flip off his helper as he maneuvered the giant truck into the pump station.

Jumping down from the cab, Ryan clasped his hands behind his back and stretched, tilting his head from side to side to get his neck to crack. It had been roughly four years since he had been back home. He just prayed to God that he wouldn't run into anyone he knew while he was stationed in Tabiona.

At eighteen, Ryan joined his father working for LP Drilling as a helper. Since his dad had worked for the company for over twenty years, it was easy for Ryan to get a position. In a small “city” like Roosevelt there weren’t many career choices other than crude oil, farming, or ranching. His father had gotten Ryan the job, but he was the one who made sure he excelled at what he did.

He was lucky that they didn’t blame the accident on his age. At twenty-two, he was the youngest driller in the company. He didn’t have the years of practice behind him, but he was damn good at what he did. He had never gotten a rod stuck, never lost a hole, and him and his team had the best safety record, until last month.

“We aren’t firing you, but we are takin’ you off the contract,” explained John, Ryan’s supervisor.

“That’s fine, cuz I ain’t ever goin’ back down in that mine again,” replied Ryan folding his arms and sitting back in the old burnt orange office chair that leaned so far back one would think it would topple backward.

“I don’t know what the hell happened down there, Ryan. Your report doesn’t make any sense. Shadowy arms? Are ya freaking serious? I get that men see “things” down in the drift, it’s natural to think you see things in dark, dank places. But to think you could blame this mess on something you thought you saw is ridiculous. Just shut the f-up about shadows, and report there was an issue with the equipment.” John shoved Ryan’s incident report into the shredder. “Now start over and leave out the damn shadowy figures. But first, go piss in this cup and ya better not piss hot.”

“So, if ya ain’t firin’ me. What am I doin’ now? Are you demoting me to helper?” Ryan didn’t care at this point. In some ways he wished they would fire him, but the money was too good to walk away from.

“I’m puttin’ ya on surface. We have a bunch of small contracts, exploratory drilling, and dewatering. Shit like that. Different places that have high grade deposits.”

“Fine. As long as it ain’t oil. I already did my time drilling that black wax shit in Myton.”

“Did your time, my ass. You are still a baby in this business and should have been left in the fields for another five years before you were placed underground. Good thing people respect your dad in this company.”

Ryan pierced his lips. He was grateful for his dad and the job, but he was tired of people holding that over his head every time he got a promotion or screwed up.

“You coming in to grab a soda or something?” Dugan hollered, startling Ryan into the present moment. He looked around the gas station like Dugan had given away his hiding position.

“Would ya just grab me a Red Bull?” Ryan didn’t want to take any chances that he might run into someone he knew. Small towns tend to hold onto those that were raised in them and never let go. He was one of the lucky few that got out. Though he wasn’t sure how lucky he was living in Salt Lake where the air pollution was ranked 10th worst in the nation. *Always nice knowing the company you work for adds to everyone’s lung problems.*

“Yo, Brother Jensen, is that you?” Ryan spun around at the mention of his last name. He practically choked on the cheek full of sunflower seeds in his mouth, hearing himself called “brother” again.

Walking toward him in a charcoal grey, polyester suit with a Star Wars tie, hand outstretched ready for a handshake, was Ryan’s old Bishop. Ryan spit the mouthful of

seeds into the paper cup he was holding and wiped his hands on his semi-clean jeans prepping for a solid “pump-three-times” handshake.

“Hey, Bishop Jones, how ya doin’?” Ryan asked as he shook hands with the perfectly sculpted grey-haired man. Ryan didn’t know how to address the older man other than “Bishop Jones”. He hadn’t been to church in years and wasn’t sure if he should call the man Mr. Jones since he no longer attended. He felt like he was twelve again.

“Just fine. Just fine, Brother Jensen. I hear you work in Salt Lake now at Kore Mine. What are you doing back here?”

Ryan wasn’t sure how much information he should provide the bishop. He knew he would be stationed in Tabiona for months, but wasn’t sure he wanted anyone to come knocking on his door for the “How ya been? You should come to church” visits from old neighbors.

“Oh, just passin’ through,” said Ryan, which wasn’t a complete lie. They were still about two hours away from Tabiona since he didn’t think Route 208 was open yet. Ryan decided to change the conversation. “What are you doing clear out her in Fruitland? You still livin’ in Roosevelt.”

“Oh, yes, we’re still in Roosevelt. Just out her doin’ some service work for Wendy’s mom. She hasn’t been feeling’ well lately and can’t get to church. So, we come and give her the sacrament at her home.”

Shit! Was today Sunday? This was not the direction he wanted this conversation to go.

“Oh, that’s nice,” was all that Ryan could muster. Hell, he could deal with listening to filthy stories from the stereotypical driller but became mush in conversations that might turn to the saving of his soul.

Dugan came out of the convenient store just then and tossed the Red Bull at Ryan without even caring that he might hit the man standing next to him. “Let’s go! I just dropped the kids off at the pool and I don’t wanna sit around to find out if it floods.”

Ryan smiled at Dugan’s crass humor and then smiled back at Bishop Jones. “Well, it was good to see you again, Bishop. Tell Sister Jones I said hi and hope her mother gets better soon.” Without waiting for a reply, Ryan hopped in the cab of the diesel and started the engine.

Chapter 8: Nettie

Nettie tripped down the narrow mobile home hallway, her mom's arm draped around her shoulder, almost knocking several photos off the wall. *Mom, you look like royalty in these pictures.* Nettie loved the picture of her mom in ceremonial dress, looking into the distance, chin held high, ivory-colored beads running the length of braids, and a single eagle feather reaching towards the sky.

"You can't fall asleep on the couch, Mom." Nettie hugged her mom tighter.

"My room is too empty," Rose sighed groggily.

Glancing at all the skid marks at the base of the door, Nettie kicked the bedroom door open. The door flung inward, light from the hall revealed the edge of a bed and a tan comforter crumpled at its base. Piles of laundry covered the floor, but a path had been made to the bedframe.

"I'll fold the laundry tomorrow on my day off."

"Sure mom." *It's okay if you don't.* Half the clothes were Collin's, or her dad's, that needed to be packed up or donated to the Deseret Industries Goodwill. Even after a year, you could still smell the musky smell of pine from her dad's shirts if the door was closed for too long.

Nettie maneuvered her mom to the bed, guided her head to the pillow, and lifted her legs to pull off her shoes. Setting the white crocs down next to the bed, she picked up the bedspread from the floor and gently covered her mom.

"Thanks so much, Nettie," Rose whispered.

“Love you, Mom,” Nettie replied walking quietly out, shutting the door behind her.

Two twelve-hour shifts at the Fort Duchesne Indian Health Center left her mom completely drained. The health center wasn't terribly busy, but Nettie suspected it was the emotional drain that left her mom exhausted. You had to smile, be strong for those dealing with crisis, while your own world was in pieces. Losing a husband and son less than a year apart - *resilient like her picture*.

Flopping onto the couch, Nettie picked up her microwaved burrito and took a bite. Hot on the end but cold in the middle. She hated eating after her mom got home. Disinfectant smell from the scrubs permeated her nose and sanitized her tastebuds. She couldn't swallow, letting the bite tumble from her tongue onto the paper plate.

She pushed the paper plate away and lay on the couch. The brown and yellow stains from the roof leak last winter made weird faces at Nettie.

“Stop looking at me like that,” she whispered.

Nettie sighed and rubbed her eyes. *That needs to be fixed. Stop waiting for someone else to do it.* She struggled to want to do anything, still. Her grandparents were too old to get on the roof of their trailer and her mom had to put in double the hours now that it was only the four of them. Working at The Pit, Tire and Lube Co. to help her mom cover the bills, she wasn't ready to fill Collin's shoes completely. Plus, interning at the station to get her red card left Nettie exhausted by the end of the week.

Nettie sat up. She couldn't lay there any longer with those faces staring down at her making her feel guilty.

Grabbing her keys and her wallet off the countertop, she quietly shut the door behind her. The setting sun made her eyes water. Squinting she walked around back to the kennel.

“Hintza?” Nettie whispered. The German Shepherd mix poked her head out of the doghouse. Nettie had taken the name from her favorite movie, *A Far Off Place*.

“Come on Hintza, let’s go for a drive.” The dog wagged her tail as Nettie opened the kennel door. She knelt and hugged her camping companion. Hintza laid her head on Nettie’s shoulder, letting her know things would be okay.

Nettie’s forest green ‘95 Toyota Tacoma sat parked across the street. Nettie had helped Collin restore the truck, which he surprised her with on her 16th birthday. Working for the local scrap yard as tow truck driver gave Collin the advantage of claiming restorable cars and trucks.

She looked both ways, even though she knew no car would be coming down the gravel road, then quickly crossed the street.

“Up, Hintza.” The shepherd bounded up and jumped across the manual shifter to the passenger’s side. Placing a paw on the window seal, Hintza looked at Nettie reminding her to roll down the window as soon as the car was on. Nettie slid into the driver’s seat. Pressing down on the clutch, she turned the key and quickly rolled down the window. Scratches along the door vinyl showed how patience was not one of Hintza’s virtues.

Pulling out of the street faster than she meant, the truck knew where to take her. The guilt that had been pulling and calling for her needed to be recognized. She could no longer ignore the mountain, but the canyon would have to wait.

Turning left at the fork, she headed up the dirt road toward Tabby Mountain. *Driving gives you too much time to think.* Too many memories took over her thoughts. She remembered the time Collin had driven her up to Little Lake. Ammon had been extra brutal with his bullying and Nettie asked if Collin would check her out of school.

Collin didn't say a word as he drove out of town and turned up the dirt road. Looking out the passenger window as things blurred by, Nettie leaned her forehead against the cool of the glass.

Nettie looked straight ahead as Collin pulled into a clearing. She hadn't spoken since they left the school. It had been several weeks since their father had passed away. But the anger was still raw. *How could he do that to mom?* Collin gave her the needed silence as he drove.

The tiny lake rippled, the wind tickling its glossy skin. Nettie brushed her hair out of her eyes as she stepped down from the tow truck's cab. The wind was a prankster today and flew up to bother the trees.

Collin walked over to a log near the water's edge. To the right of the log, Nettie could see the remains of a campfire. She had a feeling Collin came here often because the spot had been properly cleared away, only a slight scorch mark remained. Any regular camper would have disregarded the spot.

Nettie's feet moved toward the bench. Her body was still recuperating from a day of trying to ignore her anger and the continual bullying from Ammon. *The hurt of one is the hurt of all.*

Collin looked up at Nettie when she reached the bench then back at the lake. Nettie knew Collin was offering her to sit. The wind saw the two and decided to tease and rattle their clothes. But wind is finicky, and it went to find someone else to bother. Nettie pulled her hair back into a ponytail with the spare band she always kept wrapped around her wrist. She knew the wind would be back.

“I come here often when I need some solitude. The wind is welcoming you.” He smiled but did not look over at Nettie. He continued to gaze across the lake as if he could see someone standing on the other side.

She knew he would not ask her what was wrong. It was her story to tell in her own time.

“Listen. The water giggles as the wind makes the trees sway. The trees rustle their excitement, touching their brother’s and sister’s arms. The birds sing and the bugs hum in merry work. And underneath it all, you can hear the heartbeat of the mountain.”

Nettie listened. A bustling metropolis of mother nature. She sat still and sent her mind out across the lake. *Let the anger go.* She sighed.

Quietly she began to hear it. The mountain’s heartbeat. There are no analogies to describe this sound. It has a pulse. It beats to the rhythm of your soul from your toes to the tip of your head.

Nettie let the heartbeat envelope her.

A kopa e.

Ever so softly Collin spoke. “Each part of nature that you see knows more about life than we do. Water carries memories. Trees grow memories. Birds fly memories. Rock holds memories. There is a lot we can learn from each other.”

She listened intently, looking across the lake, and took a deep breath of the fresh mountain air.

Collin continued. “The more we learn, the more we understand ourselves. The more we understand ourselves, the more we understand others. The more we understand others, the more we love ourselves. The more we love ourselves, the more we love others.”

Nettie felt the ache in her heart lifting from her father’s death. Her brother intuitively knew what she needed to hear. Always.

“To live in harmony, we need to respect other’s differences. One needs to remember, we are not superior to the water, or trees, or birds, or land around us. We must listen to our hearts as well as our minds.”

Nettie looked down at her hands. They were balled into loose fists on her laps. She glanced over at her brother’s strong hands. Just like her grandfather’s. Fingers clasped gently together to form a protective knot.

Collin stood up slowly. “You need time to be with the Creator. Remember, what mom always says, ‘Listen to and follow the guidance of your heart.’ When you are ready, the Creator will provide an answer. I will be here for you too.”

Collin walked off along the edge of the lake where a small trail had been worn. Nettie wondered if Collin had created it or if he was following an animal trail.

Nettie thought about her father's death and the choice he had made. The wind batted at her ponytail like a cat. She concentrated on listening to the heartbeat of the mountain.

"Since when did Colling start sounding like Uncle Julius?" Nettie asked the wind.

The wind giggled in her ear.

Chapter 9: Nettie

Nettie realized that she had already made it to the clearing. Time is a frightening thing when it has been lost. Especially, when you can't remember the last 30 minute of driving.

The forest green Tacoma slowed; it knew where it was going even though her mind had wandered. Nettie backed her truck into her usual camp spot. Hintza whined quietly, impatient to explore her favorite places.

"Wait a second. I'm hurrying!" said Nettie, unbuckling her belt as quickly as possible. The shepherd licked Nettie's ear, knowing it would get her to move faster.

"Ew, Hintza. Gross!" Nettie opened her car door. As soon as she stepped out of the truck, Hintza jumped from the cab and ran down to the lake edge to sniff for new friends or intruders.

The cool breeze of the mountain air filled Nettie's lungs. She looked up at the silhouette of the mountain walls as the sun ran with the clouds along the rim. The golden orange was a stark contrast to the dark blue of the sky. The nearby lake mirrored the setting sun. Glass in a meadow of spruce and white pine.

The familiar tug pulled at Nettie. She could feel the heartbeat of Tabby Canyon that lay further North up the mountain pass. *I'm not ready, yet. Give me more time.* Nettie projected her thoughts toward the canyon, hoping to calm its need.

Pulling down the tailgate, Nettie crawled to the box of gear she always kept stashed in the bed of the truck and pulled out a foam pad and sleeping bag. She rolled them out and whistled for Hintza to jump up beside her.

Both girl and dog snuggled down in the back of the truck. Hintza circled twice then spooned Nettie's back. Nettie looked up at the darkening sky.

"This is a much better view to fall asleep to. Don't you think, Hintza?" The dog yawned in reply and cozily smacked her lips.

Nettie's hearing became her eyes as the last of the light faded. Little frogs began trilling nearby. She loved the nighttime song the frogs would sing as the evening grew darker. Their song was like a twig running down a washboard or along a narrow-slatted fence. One frog would begin his brave song, followed by the choir of the others.

Yet, there was one frog that could be heard against the rest. It was not louder but different. He trilled at a deeper bass. He would begin on the down beat when all the rest trilled on the upbeat, setting his little song just slightly off tempo with the rest.

At that moment, her life felt like that one frog singing at the wrong tempo. No. Her life had always run at a slight down beat from the rest of the world.

Her mother hated that Nettie slept in the mountains alone. Since Collin had shown her the spot, she started sleeping here as often as possible. It wasn't unusual for her to take off like she had.

This was the only way she could get a good night's sleep. Out here, under the stars. Hearing the heartbeat of the mountain. The whistle of the wind spirits. The creak of the tree people. The artificial hum of refrigerators, streetlights, distant highway, kept her awake.

Lying awake in bed was like driving, the mind meditates. Nettie reached behind her and ran her fingers through the thick fur of her German Shepherd. Hintza groaned in

reply. Soon Nettie began to drift asleep to the flickering stars. Images began flashing through her dreaming mind.

Collin's smile.

Red tow truck.

Mountain Highway.

A rustling sound on the left side of the Tacoma snapped Nettie out of her pre-sleep images. She was hyper aware there was something nearby. Hintza was too and was hunkered down shaking.

Nangkattsah. Listen. Warned the delicate leaves of the Aspen trees she had parked under.

Nettie closed her eyes to use her ears as sight. The night was dark, and several clouds made the darkness heavy. Again, to Nettie's left she could hear something moving through the bushes.

Mepesegade. Freeze. Creaked the Aspen branches above.

Every animal that could possibly be next to her truck began racing through her mind. She was by a lake, it made sense that animals would come to drink. She had seen a moose and her calf at dusk one time. She had also dealt with a skulk of foxes who pestered her throughout the night because she had grilled a steak on the fire.

This was much bigger.

Slinking silently and padding through the soft leaves it sounded like it was moving around the truck. Nettie's heart raced and Hintza's shaking began to rattle the truck slightly.

Collin help. Where are you when I need you. Unlike that day when he first brought her here, Nettie didn't feel numb. In fact, all her senses went into full gear. *Think, Nettie.*

Deer? Steps were too soft, no hooves.

Coyote? Steps were slow, not agitated.

Bear? Definitely not. They grunted as they walked. Bears never had to hide their presence.

The animal had moved to the right of the truck, but she could tell it was a little way off. She knew the area well enough to know it was walking through the dead leaves of the oak brush about five yards around all sides of the truck. Her heart hammered in her throat.

Reaching out with her hands, she grabbed her phone that was sitting on top of the wheel well. Pulling the covers over the phone she found the ring tones, turned up the sound, and blasted the worst ring tone on the menu. Alarm.

The creature stopped. This gave Nettie time to sit up and reach into her gearbox for a flashlight and her .22 rifle. She didn't want to turn her back to the night for too long, so she fumbled behind her for the clip of bullets. She brought her hand back around and through feel, snapped the clip into place.

I have slept up here by myself before, why am I so afraid? She knew why. Collin. He was always a text or phone call away. He would drop what he was doing to come help her, always.

Nettie pushed her legs out of her sleeping bag and balled up with her back to the gearbox. Flipping on her flashlight, she scanned the area. No eyes peered back at her. That was good, and bad. Good because it was not tall enough to be a moose or bear. Bad because it wasn't small enough to be a skunk or a badger.

She flipped off her light, thinking maybe it had moved away. Sitting alone, in the wilderness, in the dark, with a frightened German Shepherd is the worst feeling in the world.

Again, Nettie used her ears for sight. Just as she began to think the animal had run off, she heard it again. This time it was padding at the front of the truck, back toward the left side.

Then she knew. It was rare, not many sightings up here. And the possibility that it would get near a truck was minimal.

Mountain Lion.

It was a literal game of cat and mouse. No help from a frightened dog, who smelled the danger as soon as it appeared. No waiting twenty minutes for Collin to come racing up the mountain road. Nothing would wake her mom at this moment. Her dad was gone, but she never relied on him anyway, and her grandpa didn't have a phone in his room.

She thought about crawling through the back window of the Tacoma, but it was latched from inside. She could shoot the gun in the air to scare it off. But the cat was acting

strangely, who knew if it would run. The alarm and the flashlight hadn't frightened it away.

If she shot the gun, would she have enough time to jump out of the truck bed, unlock the door, and get in before the cat pounced? Did she have the guts to turn her back on the animal? And what about Hintza? She couldn't leave her in the back by herself.

Nettie could hear the cat again on her left side. She turned on the flashlight and the cat stopped. She cocked the rifle of the .22. These small bullets wouldn't kill the cat.

She sat paralyzed. *Collin what should I do?*

"Listen and follow your heart." Nettie could hear Collin's advice.

Nettie breathed and listened. The mountain lion began to move again in the dark. Nettie held still. She could hear the wind caressing the trees. She could hear the lake breathing in her sleep. She could hear the frogs trilling quietly. Their trill filled her with confidence. If they could sing with the present danger, then maybe she was safe.

And then they stopped.

Nettie froze. Hintza shook harder.

"To live in harmony, we must accept other's differences," whispered Collin in Nettie's mind.

Nettie bravely flipped on the flashlight and scanned the edge of the lake. The head of the mountain lion peered over the log her and Collin used as a bench. She stared at the large cat. Eyes glowing like ghosts.

Neither her nor the lion moved. Nettie breathed deeply. The heartbeat of the mountain began to pulse through her soul.

The cat stared a moment longer, then darted off along the trail that Collin had taken on the day he brought her up to his spot on the mountain for the first time.

The Creator will provide an answer when you are ready. Nettie began to cry, and the frogs began their sweet trill song.

The tears fell for what seemed like days. She hadn't allowed herself to cry once when she heard Collin had died. Crying would have meant that she accepted that Collin was gone. The pain was raw and felt as if her soul was being ripped from her heart. The ache spread from her heart down her arms to her gut, making her nauseous.

"Ahhheee." Nettie screamed into the dark. Letting the pain out to be absorb by the starry night sky. She buried her head into Hintza's teddy bear fur and breathed in the scent of sweet dust and mountain air. It helped ground her back into the present moment.

Chapter 10: Ryan

Ryan stared up at the red rock of the canyon. The telescoping diesel electric light plants flooded the area making the upper walls of the canyons look like giant sentinels. Dark figures standing out blacker than the night sky, foreboding. “Enter Sandman” began to play through his single air pod as he ran through his pre-op equipment check. Ryan hmphed to himself. *Fitting*. He thought. *Might as well lay myself down, if I can’t pull it together and stop thinking the boogeyman is around the corner.*

When Ryan first arrived at the platform around dusk the day before he couldn’t believe where they would be drilling. He knew they would be drilling in Tabiona, but not at the base of Tabby Canyon. He remembered taking Prom pics with his high school sweetheart, Jenny, at this canyon. It was a popular place for locals to take pictures, the paprika colored walls made white dresses glow and grey suits dazzle. If you got to the canyon at golden hour, the pictures would be stunning. At least that is what Jenny said driving up the canyon while yelling at Ryan that he had picked her up late. He thought the pictures turned out just fine. Maybe that is why she broke up with him. *Who the hell takes prom pictures an hour after sunrise, anyways?*

The iron oxide of the cliff walls really was gorgeous. Their rust-colored waves, like links of chains left to weather. Ryan sat in the truck as the sun began to set behind the cliffs waiting for the cross shift to start. *There ain’t gunna be nothin’ but problems*. He looked at the base of the canyon where the drill platform had been cut. Beautiful canyon. Dry riverbed. Bad ground to drill in.

“I thought this canyon was owned by the local tribes?” Ryan asked the Tool Pusher, Lenny, as they stood in a circle for the cross shift briefing that evening.

“You don’t get paid to think that hard. Doesn’t matter now, does it?”

Ryan knew Lenny was pissed. Something bad must have happened earlier for him to even be here. Ryan sighed; tonight was supposed to be an easy shift.

“What matters is that you don’t fuck up this project.” Lenny spat.

Great, thought Ryan, my reputation has already leaked out.

“It was equipment failure, didn’t ya hear? Let’s just hope your day crew got things prepped properly for us to sail smoothly this evening.” He looked at Dugan and the other two guys on his crew, Mike and Jason. All three nodded once in acknowledgment.

Lenny’s eyes grew wider in furry. Gripping the sides of his clipboard he spoke through his teeth. “That is, in fact, why I am here. Bill, mind explaining the situation.”

“What kinda problems did ya run into?” Dugan asked.

“I found cat tracks just outside the drill area,” one of the helpers piped up before Bill started talking. “They seemed fresh. Got me worryin’ that maybe a cat was up the canyon.”

“A cat ain’t gonna get near the platform. Hell, probably scared it out of the canyon when the dozers came in to cut this area,” Mike piped up.

“The cat ain’t the issue,” Bill cut in irritated. “This dumb ass was so worried about the tracks, he forgot to set the front jacks. So, when we went to set the casing, it hung up and pushed the rig offline, and we dropped the casing down the hole.”

Collectively Ryan’s crew groaned. Their easy night just turned into a shit show.

“I need you boys to fish that damned casing out of the hole and then grout it,” Lenny instructed. “Also...”

“There’s an also?” whined Jason.

“We had problems with the generators down at the doghouse. They took forever to get started, and they keep tripping off, but there is nothing going that would overload the circuit. Seems to be running fine since about four. Shouldn’t be a problem now.”

“Shouldn’t?” Ryan knew he was pushing his new supervisor, but he hadn’t started things.

“Don’t even start, Ryan,” Dugan said softly across the circle. *Since when did Dugan become the voice of reason?*

“Thank you, Trent.” Lenny looked at Ryan with a look of arrogance.

“Call me Dugan. Everyone just calls me by my last name, Sir.” Dugan put his thumbs in his Carhart bibs. “Don’t get me wrong, sir. I just want this debriefin’ over so’s we can show these day crew boys how a real man drills.”

Everyone laughed.

Ryan’s crew had to retrieve the broken ten-foot piece of bent up hardened steel casing out of the bottom of the 100-foot hole, replace the casing all the way to bottom and then cement it in place by morning. Not an easy job, it wasn’t as if Ryan’s crew hadn’t saved the day before. One had to be innovative and think outside the box when trying to pull things out of holes in the ground. The Earth doesn’t like to let go of what gets lost under her thick skin.

“Yup, this is gunna to be one of those contracts,” chimed in Mike while waiting for a rod trip between another unsuccessful run at fishing the casing.

“You know, there’s a reason they call it fishing,” Ryan said waiting for Dugan to throw the punchline.

“Like fishin’ with your mom.” Dugan slammed the joke home.

“What do you mean?” asked Jacob ignoring the mom joke and slapping grease on the top drive of the core drill. Both Ryan and Dugan kept giggling.

“Well, I heard from one of the dozer guys that cut the road in up here that they had huge problems clearing the drill pad for this hole. They even tipped a backhoe into the cutting pond,” explained Mike.

“No shit. Are ya serious?” Jacob paused to listen.

“No, dumb ass, he ain’t serious. Stop squawking like a couple teenage girls,” demanded Dugan.

“I am serious. My buddy was there when it happened. Said it shouldn’t have rolled. It was almost as if it was pushed,” Mike defended himself.

“Maybe it’s cursed,” said Jason as he looked up at the dark walls. The construction lights made the area around them feel like daytime. One look outside the safety perimeter of light reminded you of your insignificance. “Didn’t you say this land was owned by the Native Americans, or something’?” asked Jason sounding a little unsure of himself.

“I heard Skinwalker Ranch is nearby,” Mike added.

“It ain’t anywhere near here,” snapped Ryan, getting irritated at the conversation. “That’s clear out by Roosevelt, roughly seventy miles from here.” Ryan pulled his collar up to hide the chill that ran through his body. Growing up in Roosevelt he had always been wary of the stories he heard from the local indigenous boys about supernatural things. Yet, after his encounter with the shadows in the mine, he completely believed there were things out there that could not be explained away.

“Ya ever hear the story of the Little People?” asked Dugan.

“No!” Both Mike and Jason said at the same time, with an inflection of question in their voices.

“Remember, Etu? He worked with us for a bit up in Elko.”

“Yeh, I remember him,” said Mike. “Big guy, build like a brick shit house, right?”

“Ya that guy.” Dugan pointed at Mike like he had just won the answer at a game show. “Well, he told me the story of vicious little people that live in the mountains. Basically, ya don’t wanna piss them off cuz they’re considered people eaters.”

“Put a cork in it,” broke in Ryan. The last thing he needed was for the guys to get superstitious out here, especially after what he and Dugan went through. “Dugan?”

“Yeh?”

Ryan just looked at Dugan, knowing he would understand immediately why Ryan wanted them to quit talking.

“Enough of that. Let’s show the day boys how to get this done,” Dugan backed Ryan.

“I gotta grab a new rod wiper from the doghouse if you guys wanna take a quick piss break.” Ryan headed off toward the trailer that was situated about thirty feet away from the drill pad. It held everything from tools to toilet paper, to microwaves, and dirty magazines.

Walking out of the florescent daylight made you walk blind for about twenty paces before you could start seeing things clearly. Once, when Ryan was a helper, his driller sent him out to find the “hole straightening fluid.” At the time Ryan was only nineteen and had to do whatever task the driller sent him on. He asked several guys around the station who sent him onto another guy, until finally he was sent to talk to the Tool Pusher who was in the doghouse. Ryan was in a hurry to find the fluid and blindly walked as fast as he could to the trailer.

Halfway out of the light, Ryan stepped near a boulder and heard the distinct grating ch-ch-ch sound of a rattlesnake. Ryan flipped on his headlamp to see that he had stepped next to a rattlesnake that was curled up under a rock trying to get the last of the rocks heat. The thing was too cold to move fast. Ryan was much faster.

After that, Ryan would always pause at the edge of the light and close his eyes for about thirty seconds giving his eyes time to adjust before he went tromping through the brush at midnight.

Reaching the doghouse, Ryan was again bathed in florescent light as he opened the trailer door. He looked over the metal shelves that held the indispensable tools. Just as he reached for the wiper, he heard the generator sputter, the lights flickered, and he was standing in the dark. There is something ominous about the lights flickering off in a repurposed cargo trailer. Ryan’s heart raced and his breathing quickened. Sweat beaded

up under his hard hat, and his mouth grew dry. That same smell of electrified ozone wafted through the air freezing Ryan in place.

“Get a hold of yourself,” whispered Ryan. How was he going to continue to do his job when such asinine things scared him?

Ryan cautiously reached up and turned on his headlamp. Black shadows raced behind tools and boxes on shelves as the light passed over each spot. Ryan forced himself to close his eyes and breath. *Just listen.* Ryan could hear nothing but the slow wheeling of the drill up the hill.

I'll look at the generator after we fish the casing out. Thought Ryan as he stepped out into the night. The open night air felt safer than the confines of the trailer. Ryan took a deep breath and wiped his forehead with the towel he kept at his chest in his bib.

The onyx night sky glittered with crystals. Weaving throughout, the Milky Way created a river of pyrite. Ryan soaked in the alluring stars, pulling himself out of his head.

Taking a deep breath Ryan began walking back up to the drill platform. Just at the edge of the workstation nearest the canyon, Ryan saw the silhouette of something slinking along the boundary of light.

You've got to be kidding me. Thought Ryan as he watched the large cat-like shadow pad its way up toward the canyon.

Chapter 11: Nettie

Feeling slightly numb, yet light, Nettie reached into her backpack. There were no tissues, but she found a pair of socks. Blowing her nose in the sock she felt like her face was swollen and puffy. She glanced across the field at the lake where the mountain lion had run off.

The full moon hovered directly center above the lake, as if it were singing the lake a lullaby. The water reflected the moon making the night light up in a beautiful royal blue hue. Nettie stretched her legs and jumped out of the truck. Hintza dived off the tail gate excited for a midnight adventure yet still a little worked up about the mountain lion.

“Don’t worry, you baby,” Nettie said pulling the shepherds head against her leg. “The cat is long gone by now.” Nettie wasn’t positive about her statement, yet she felt the earth vibrate up through her feet to give her confidence that she really was safe.

The cold night wind noticed Nettie was awake and softly brushed her arms giving her chicken skin, which helped continue to make her feel better after she had cried. She picked her way carefully along the field toward the bank of the lake, stepping carefully over shadowed rocks.

Nettie knelt at the side of the lake. The calming burble snore of the soft lake waves felt familiar. Cupping the water in her hands she brought the icy water up to her face. The cold water helped sooth her memories and emotions.

Nettie stood and wiped her face with the bottom of her shirt. Pulling her shirt away from her face Nettie froze in place. Across the lake three shadows bobbed. The air caught

in her lungs and a tingling fear ran up her spine. The figures seemed to be floating nearer to her camp spot. A low growl snapped Nettie back.

“So, I’m not seeing things, then.” Nettie whispered to Hintza. She knelt and put her arm around Hintza, too frightened to turn back to the truck.

First, a mountain lion. Now this? What are you trying to tell me, Collin?

As Nettie’s brain started to calm down from its initial fright, Nettie could make out the figures.

“Are they kayakers?” she asked Hintza. “What the hell are kayakers doin’ on the lake at this time of night?”

Voices ran across the surface of the lake, amplifying sounds that were too far away to understand what was being said.

Laughter?

Nettie was surprised at how fast the kayakers were moving, like the calm lake was pushing them herself.

“It’s stupid to wait here until they land. One girl, and three dudes. This is not good, Hintza.”

Hintza looked up at Nettie with a big smile on her face. It was the face she always had when Nettie got home from school.

“What are you all excited about, little miss wimpy? Two seconds ago, you were growlin’.” Nettie took a step backward away from the shore yet kept her eyes on the

approaching kayakers. *Why don't I run to the truck?* The wind picked up and played with her hair as if it were trying to whisper a secret in her ears.

Caam-ma-sua-nkyh. Curious.

Nettie knew she had her .22 in the truck but for some reason she felt calm. Calmer than she had felt in weeks. She stepped back toward the log and sat down. Like waiting for a long-lost friend, Nettie's heart fluttered.

"Either, I am goin' crazy, or all my cryin's made me numb to my rational fight or flight response." Nettie looked at Hintza who's tale was wagging at the edge of the lake.

The laughter and voices of the kayakers became clearer as the moon lit up their figures. The three kayakers rode side by side. Their motions completely in sync with each other as they paddled from one side to the other side in smooth even strokes with no effort.

The hue of the blue night muted the colors, but Nettie began to make out the silhouettes of the kayakers. One wore a baseball cap, one had short spikey hair, and the last looked as if he had his hair pulled back in a ponytail.

"Hey there!" a deep voice called out to Nettie.

"Is she still sitting there?" another voice asked.

"Of course, she is! Why wouldn't she wait for us," a third laughed.

"Are they talking to me?" Nettie whispered to Hintza.

Hard plastic rubbed against rocks, as the boats scraped against the shore. Nettie gasped as the first stranger stood up, she would recognize that jacket anywhere. Troy grinned smugly.

“What the h...”

“Hakaniyun. Happy to see us?” Troy cut in before Nettie could finish her sentence.

The moonlight shone on the faces of Blake and Wade as they stepped up next to Troy. All three characters grinned at Nettie like long lost friends.

Chapter 12: Nettie

The fire yawned and stretched as Wade blew on its red face trying to get the fire to wake up in the misty midnight air. Bark and wood cracked like arthritic bones of the fire as it sat up a little taller in the small depression that had been dug for the fire pit.

“That’s it,” Wade softly coaxed the fragile flames. “Stretch and grow little *gotoope*.” The growing embers lit up Wade’s proud smile as he added larger sticks to the fire, helping kindle the growing warmth. Embracing the logs, the fire sparked with approval.

Nettie looked around at the three interlopers to her solitary evening. Shadows melted away with the fire and she could finally see the full features of her brother’s friends. Waiting patiently for answers she hoped would come, Nettie held her hands out to the fire. Heat patted her palms and the front of her jeans, warming up her knees and shins.

Her surprise at their arrival reminded her of the first time she had met the three. She was fifteen and was helping her Uncle Julius change the oil in his old Ford pickup. Helping meant she and Collin did all the work, while her uncle sat in the lawn chair with a beer telling her stories of Trickster Coyote and his brother Wolf. Though, at that moment, he had gone in for another beer.

This was her favorite way to spend a weekend.

Lying under the truck, she heard footsteps up the gravel drive and her brother greeting the newcomers. Wanting to know who Collin was talking to, Nettie hurried to unscrew the oil plug. Splashes of oil hit her cheeks and forehead as it dumped into the oil pan positioned below the spout.

“Collin where are the paper towels?” She hollered, scooting out from under the truck. Four faces stared down at her with wide grins on their faces.

“And this is my little sister, Nettie.” All three friends waved at her. The kid with the long braid reached into the truck bed and pulled out the roll of paper towels.

“Is this what you are looking for?” He handed her the roll. Nettie grabbed the paper towels from him and frowned, even though her heart was beating like the wings of a bumblebee.

“Who are you?” Asked Nettie wiping the grease from her hands and face.

“These are the friends I was tellin’ you about I met at the festival last August. This is Troy, Blake, and Wade.” Nettie nodded, remembering her uncle had taken Collin to the Shoshone-Bannock Festival last summer after he turned sixteen.

“Hi,” Nettie said, then looked at Collin. “Don’t think you’re getting out of helpin’ me finish this job. You know I have a hard time reachin’ the oil filter.” Just then her mom came out and shuffled the boys into the house for a proper greeting.

“Nettie, hurry and clean up and come help me in the kitchen,” her mom hollered over her shoulder. Nettie sighed. She knew her mom planned on cooking for the boys to welcome them to their home. Nettie hated leaving the job unfinished. Looking around the garage for a stool, she found an old paint bucket and dumped out the tools that had been stored inside. Flipping the bucket over she stood on top to see if she could reach the oil filter.

“Do you need help with that?” Nettie quickly straightened and looked around the hood with a quizzical expression on her face. She stared at the boy with the long braid, not remembering which one he was, Troy, Wade or Blake. “What’s your name again?”

“Troy.”

“Ya know how to change an oil filter in a Ford, Troy?” Nettie knew she sounded pretentious, but she didn’t want Troy to think she couldn’t do this herself.

He just smiled and walked up next to her. Leaning over, he reached through the hoses and past the power steering pump that made the filter hard to reach. Unscrewing the filter, he looked at Nettie and gave her a sly smile.

“Got the new filter?” he asked handing her the old one. She stood for a moment in surprise, then hopped off the bucket and grabbed the new filter. Instead of handing the filter to Troy, she leaned over the side of the truck with her toes barely touching the bucket and screwed the new filter back in place.

“I might be short, but I’m not a baby,” she said, throwing Troy a flippant look. He laughed and raised his hands up in mock surrender.

“Hey, you questioned me on whether I could change a filter or not. I just asked if you needed any help. Your mom sent me out here to get you since your brother was busy clearing up the living room.” Nettie felt bad that her brother was picking up instead of visiting with his new friends. She knew she should be in there helping.

“Wanna help me finish puttin’ the oil in?” Nettie didn’t think twice about whether it was rude to ask her brother’s friend to help her finish changing the oil.

“Sure.” Troy smiled again, and Nettie quickly crawled under the truck to replace the oil plug before she started blushing.

The crackle of the fire brought Nettie out of her memory. She quickly looked around hoping the fire would mask the blush on her cheeks. Brushing his hands off on the back of his pants, Wade stood up from the fire. Laughing a soft chortle, Wade sat down on the log next to Nettie.

“Look at you miss ‘I camp all alone.’ Since when did you start camping up here all by yourself?” Wade teased smacking the lid of Nettie’s cap.

“When did you start kayaking in the middle of the night across a lake, mister I am Jason Voorhees,” Nettie shot back, mimicking Wade by flipping the lid of his cap, which he always wore backwards, knocking the hat off his head.

Wade’s smile grew bigger, his eyes almost completely closed, like a little fox. “Ah, good ol’ spunky Nettie. Where you been Spunky Brewster?”

Nettie looked away from Wade’s banter. The fire flicked an arm at Nettie as if it was pressing her to keep talking.

“The spunk’s been hibernating, until it gets warmer,” she finally replied.

“Well, at least it’s still there. Summer will come sooner than you expect.” Wade put his arm around Nettie’s shoulders and gave her a quick brotherly squeeze, then pushed her away like she had initiated the hug, making her laugh.

Nettie glanced at Troy to her right as she sat up. He stared at the fire intently with his hands in his jacket.

What would it feel like to have those eyes staring intently into hers?

Troy looked over at Nettie at that exact moment. Nettie quickly looked away and tried to play off the awkwardness she felt by reaching down to pet Hintza, who lay curled up between the two logs that separated her and Troy.

She hadn't seen Troy since back in February when he stopped by the school to "check-up on her."

Guess he figured she was just fine since it was April.

"How's your mom doing?" asked Blake from across the fire. Blake was Collin's best friend and was always showing up randomly. He had family that lived in Fort Duchesne, just outside Roosevelt. So, he was often down from Idaho visiting them, especially after they all graduated high school. Blake was always showing up in the oddest places. He was like a cat, aloof yet clingy at times, and always onto your scent. He had stopped by several times to say hi and see how everyone was after Collin's death.

"She works several shifts, back-to-back. I think she does it so that she becomes so exhausted she can sleep." A twinge of guilt fluttered Nettie's heart remembering why she had come up here. She struggled to see her mom grieving.

Am I any different?

"Your mom has a strong *mukua*, a strong mind and spirit. Give her time." Blake ran his fingers through his spiky hair.

"Don't we all just need time?" asked Nettie.

"Yes, but your mother grieves both your father and brother."

“My dad was an ass.”

“True, but she knew him before he started drinking. He wasn’t always that way. Knowing your father was once a good man makes it harder for your mom to let go than for you.”

“I don’t know why my mom married someone not indigenous.” Nettie kicked her toe into the dirt. She knew who she was truly angry at.

“I’ll go find us some more wood for the fire.” Blake stood up and walked away. Typical of Blake. He couldn’t sit in one place for long.

An awkward silence nestled into the dark crevices that the firelight could not touch. Wade fidgeted with his ballcap, flipping the brim forward then backward on his head. He poked at the fire making it crackle and giggle to keep it awake. Finally, he stood up.

“What is taking Blake so long? I’m going to go help him find more wood. The fire is getting hungry again.” Agilely he jumped up on the log and then off following the path Blake had taken.

Placing her hands inside of her hoodie, Nettie grabbed her grounding rock and smoothed her thumb over the soft sandstone. She was getting impatient. She knew that she would get the answers she needed from the three, but she was getting tired of waiting, and just tired in general. Never a good combination.

Tuhuwa’i. The rock suggested.

The moon rocked the lake gently, creating a soft wavey lullaby. The trilling frogs had fallen asleep and all that was left of the evening was the softly snoring wind. Nettie closed her eyes and let the rhythm of the waves and wind rock her.

“I promised I would keep an eye on you. That’s why we are here,” Troy’s deep voice spoke softly, and Nettie opened her eyes slowly. She needed a moment to think about what Troy said.

The babbling fire had quieted down. Nettie stood up and moved some logs around to help keep the flames awake. She wanted to argue with Troy, but she didn’t want to be disrespectful since he had started the conversation. She sat back on the log, not looking at Troy.

Fire is hypnotic. The dance between red, orange, and yellow is an unspoken meditative language. Nettie watched this movement of colors, waiting to hear if Troy would say anything else. If anything, she didn’t want the conversation to move faster. A slow conversation meant that Troy wouldn’t leave as quickly as the other two.

“Things still tough at school?”

Nice diversion tactic.

“Always will be.” Living in a society that expects you to adopt their teachings, yet doesn’t recognize your Nation as legitimate, is exhausting.

“Do you remember the first time we came to your house and met your family?”

“Of course.” *Did he know I was thinking about that?*

“You were just as short then as you are now.” Troy’s lip curled into a sly smile.

Nettie didn't know what to say. She wanted to be angry, but that smile was mesmerizing. It didn't help that she waited for those moments when he smiled.

"It's nice to see you smile." Troy looked at Nettie, amber eyes intent on hers.

Nettie froze. *Was that a compliment?* She couldn't let Troy change the subject.

"How in the world did ya know I was up here?"

"Well, Collin used to come up here all the time. This is where we hung out. It's public land. Collin had a thing for making sure we weren't trespassing on Rez land, since, well, you know..."

"Since we aren't officially indigenous," Nettie finished Troy's sentence. Nettie knew all too well the struggle her ancestors and family had been through as part of the Timpanogos Nation. Living life in constant defense drains one of fight. "It still doesn't explain how you knew I would be here."

"Didn't you pay attention to all the stories your Uncle Julius told you. We even enjoyed listening to his stories as the Shoshone-Bannock festival. That's how we met Collin. We had camped near his trailer that first year, and your uncle was always telling stories."

"Of course, I paid attention. What does that have to do with you knowin' I was campin' here. Did you wake up my mom? My grandpa? If you did, you are dead meat."

"No, I didn't ask your mom or grandpa for help." Troy put his hands up like he did that first day, surrendering to Nettie's accusation. "Do you remember the story of the peopl asking animals for help. Stories of *ish-shah*, wolf."

Nettie clenched the rock in her pocket. She was very familiar with the stories.

Troy continued slowly, "*Sehedukubichi*, bobcat."

The hair rose on the back of Nettie's neck.

"*Too-wah wahng-itch*, fox."

Nettie shivered. She knew exactly what Troy would say next.

Troy paused, imploring Nettie with his amber eyes.

"*Toi-yah'-to'-ko*, mountain lion."

Chapter 13: Mother Nature

The scraping of dirt and uprooting of trees is a constant torture. My heart aches every time a tree cries; its roots ripped out of the ground. Newly scared soil sings softly, comforting trees that lay dying, embracing them back into my care.

This cycle of life and death. It doesn't ease the heartache.

The seasons are a constant reminder of this essential balance.

Give and take. Take and give.

But now it is only take. Take. Take. Take.

The taking is their addiction.

The Takers that etched the circular tattoo in my side on Oquirrh Mountain, plowed through Old Riverbed, flattened Juniper and Sage on Tabby's shoulder. They are prepping to create another festering wound.

Letting go with love is one of the hardest trials a parent can face. I understand my authority and power, yet I want to provide one more chance.

Screaming out in agony and pain I let the sound be carried on the waves of dreams, hoping someone will listen.

I know my screams disturb my children's dreams. It is the ones that listen that I am pleading to for help.

I cannot let this happen again.

Summer

Chapter 14: Nettie

The rusted barbed wire bowed with the heavy no trespassing sign between two rustic wooden fence posts. The fence hadn't been mended in over fifty years and the wire was beginning to unravel in places making it easy to step over. This was the best spot to cross along the edge of Tabby Mountain to get to the small red rock slot canyon. It was as if Mother Nature took a small chunk out of Zion National Park and set it down in this hidden town. It was Collin and Nettie's favorite place, a connection to their past. Collin used his black and white flannel shirt to drape over the rusted wire even though the bending wire went only up to his knee and could be stepped over easily.

"I'm not gunna cut myself." Nettie rolled her eyes as Collin reached out his hand to help her over the fence. Noticing his small, dark brown ponytail at the base of his head, she lowered her eyes so he wouldn't see her smile. He had decided a few months back to grow his hair long in honor of their ancestors and it was at that awkward stage. It was too long to allow to hang freely but not long enough to braid.

"You sure as hell will cut yourself if I don't help ya across. You never pay attention to where you're stepping." Collin's smile faded into memory like smoke rising from a fire.

Nettie glared at the new fencing. Its straight, square-cut poles stood ridged like a skyscraper among cottages, awkward yet domineering. This nice of a fence meant big money. *Had a new rancher moved into the area?* She hadn't been up to their spot since Collin's death. After her breakdown at the lake, she felt ready to acknowledge the canyon's summons.

The poles squared-up to the trespasser, as Nettie approached, pulling the glistening silver barbed wire tighter intensely signaling that there would be no passing.

Nettie sighed, frustrated at another boundary, another wall to her cage. She closed her eyes, breathing in the perfume of the bristly sagebrush.

She couldn't go East, there lay the Ute Res which was strictly off limits without a pass. It was even more off limits to her due to her "tribal affiliation" or non-affiliation depending on who you spoke to. Nettie kicked at the red dirt spraying irritated dust. She couldn't go further West, there lay more barbed wire fencing by ranchers and developers. Only so many fences were too old to put up a fight. She couldn't go North, there lay Duchesne with a community that made her feel like she was doing social prison time. Nettie looked at the sun, pulling the visor of her ballcap down further over her chestnut eyes to stop the glare. The Sun was trudging slowly up the blue summer sky and would be resting at noon. She couldn't go South, there lay her home, a tomb full of memories.

"I guess I accept your challenge, Mr. Fence," Nettie said as she pulled off her oversized blue Melvin's Garage t-shirt. "You can beat this shirt up, Wires. Nothing like a good second-hand bargain at the Desert Industries thrift store." Nettie stepped up to the fence, her 5'2" stature towering a head over the fence post. She imitated Collin as she lay the shirt across the solid sharp wires, sticking out her sport-bra covered chest in a manly display of a protector. She pulled her hair tighter in the long, black ponytail that stuck out from the back of her red U of U ballcap.

The battle was set, now onto the fight.

Placing her left hand on the pole for support, Nettie placed her right hand on the shirt covered wire between the barbs and pushed down.

"Hey Gravity, you pull, I push, okay?" Without hesitating Nettie pushed down on the wire as she stepped up with her left foot onto the middle wire and saddled her right foot over the top wire. Rustling from the nearby oak brush and juniper trees startled

Nettie, snagging her left pant as she was pulling her leg over the top. Gravity, already engaged at pulling the wire, reached up to add its tugging energy to Nettie's fall. She slammed to the ground on her back, her left foot hanging above her head.

Without looking back to see who had caught her trespassing, Nettie yanked her leg out of the fence's grip. Metal wire always fights dirty and ripped a gash in Nettie's calf as she finally pulled free. Scrunching her eyes and biting her bottom lip she stifled a cry. Even though trespassing was only a misdemeanor, there was no doubt in Nettie's mind that these new owners would press charges, especially if the trespasser was native, or looked remotely Mexican. Rolling on her stomach, Nettie looked up and down the fence planning her escape.

"Kai namanukkih. Don't run," a soft whisper in Nettie's right ear made her freeze. She held her breath like a jackrabbit caught with nowhere to run. She sat motionless, waiting for someone to grab her arms and yank her off the ground.

"Click, Click," a little cicada bravely broke the silence, nudging Nettie out of her fear. Then several other cicadas joined in the chorus of nudges, encouraging her to look up. Nettie looked around. The dry land had gone back to its normal thrum and flow.

Pulling her legs around, Nettie sat up. Her back felt like it had road rash in places. Sharp pings ran up her leg as she rolled the torn pant leg up to her knee.

"Nice, Clark." Nettie mumbled watching the small trail of blood soak into the top of her white sock. She grinned at the reference to Clark Griswold from Christmas Vacation, her and Collin's favorite movie. Collin always used the name when someone did something stupid.

Laughter unfolded from her memory, as she stared at the wound. A memory snuck up and snatched Nettie into the past. Her present self set on pause to stare absently at her bloody sock, as memory pressed play.

Collin held the old, barbed wire fence and Nettie saw herself place her hands on Collin's shoulders as she stepped over the fence.

"See, no problems," she patted Collin on the cheek and turned to start up the small deer trail.

"Dude, wait right there Nettie," hollered Blake from the other side of the fence that Collin was still holding down. Collin and Nettie shook their heads in sync. Blake always showed up without notice.

"Thanks, bro," Blake teased, smacking Collin on the cheek as Nettie had with a louder smack. Collin grinned and let the wire go, snagging Blake's toe at the last second. Blake fumbled forward trying to keep from falling on his face. Gracefully, he was able to recover like a cat jumping from a ledge.

"Ah man, I thought fer sure that you would fall that time," Nettie smirked watching Blake skip up to her with his last few controlled falling steps. Flinging his hair back and raking his fingers through his black hair, he winked at Nettie. She raised one eyebrow in mock irritation.

"Pshh, he never falls," cut in Collin, keeping Blake from making a smart-ass remark. Tying his flannel around his waist, he walked up the trail to join his sister.

The memory began to fade out and the vision of blood brought Nettie back to the present moment. She rubbed her eyes and thought of the flannel that Collin had wrapped around his waist. It was hot that day like it was today. He wore the flannel like some 90's

grunge kid, but she never saw him take it off his waist and put it on. Hugging her knee to her, she realized that Collin had only brought that flannel to drape over the wire.

“Were you trying to hand me the flannel?” she spoke to the energy she felt was Collin hiding behind the brush. Nettie used the back of her hand to wipe the tears that were forming on her lower lashes. Red sandy dirt scraped her eyelids, having settled on her hands and arms from the fall.

“Damn it, stupid...” Nettie cursed grabbing the t-shirt that lay crumpled on the ground and finding a clean spot to wipe away the tears that had finished falling down her cheek from the irritation.

“I’m not Blake, you know! You should have waited until I cleared the fence.” Nettie was getting agitated, as if her brother were standing there. “I told ya I wouldn’t cut myself. But you just had to rush to try to stop me, didn’t ya.” Nettie yanked her pant leg down over the cut and stood up.

Dirt clouds puffed from her jeans as she patted and slapped her legs and butt. Stopping mid-slap, she heard the rustle behind the oak brush again. She froze slightly but waited a moment knowing instinctively no one was there. Suddenly a sage grouse fluttered out of the bushes, too afraid to hide any longer. The start made Nettie laugh.

“Oh, my gosh, you would come back as a fat, lazy grouse,” Nettie teased Collin but felt bad for the remark. Rubbing her arm, and pulling her shirt back on, she began walking up the deer trail to the little slot canyon.

The trail hadn’t been worn down any further. That was good. She felt her shoulders relax toward her back. Guess the new owners were only concerned about the fence, for now. Most new fences meant personal ATV courses or pay-to-hunt private game areas, especially with the money they put into this fence. Not many people put up new

fences for ranching. Why put-up fencing when you could just park the heifers on public land?

Chapter 15: Nettie

Sweat carved out a new groove in the fine hairs on the back of Nettie's neck like snow runoff. The Sun smiled down on her bare skin adding pigment to her beautifully bronzed skin then plopped down for a rest at noon. She inhaled deeply and breathed out the heat. Nothing but dry grass, thistle and sage grew on west facing hills until the tree line. *Fires are gunna be bad with how dry this grass is already.* She was glad she left Hintza at home. It would have been too hot for her cold-loving friend.

Nettie glanced up at the gradual slope with the barely visible zig-zagging deer trail. She put her hands on her hips.

"You miss me, lovely?" The hum of cicadas and the wave of heat off the side of the hill answered her. Fondly, she squatted down and picked up a small rock. Rolling it in her hands, she gave the little rock an embracing squeeze as if she could hug the mountain. She placed the rock gently back on the trail.

For a moment, she sat there, mentally unable to stand back up. A feeling of guilt blanketed her heart. She should have come sooner.

"You can't be angry with me, Mountain. We weren't always on the bestest of terms. You remember?"

With that question, a greener slope looked down at Nettie through memory. Late spring, early summer heat caressed her white t-shirt, and she stuck her hands in her pocket. A few purple wildflowers popped up here and there in a crowd of white wildflowers.

"Why are we here again." She asked Collin as she glowered at the hill she was supposed to be climbing.

"You needed to get out of the house."

“Did not.”

“Did too.”

“Did not.”

“Did too.”

“Are you both five?” Blake shot back. He was already bouncing up the hill and was several yards ahead of them.

“Nettie, in all honesty, I just felt you needed this. I promise, you won’t regret it,” said Collin looking back at Nettie.

Nettie clenched the small iron washer she kept in her pocket. Pulling it out she rubbed it between her thumb and fingers.

“Can’t we just go work on the derby car? It’s not like I’m a wuss. I just prefer shade.”

“The only thing you do is work on the derby cars.”

Collin’s eyes scrunched in that “I’m worried about you” look that Nettie hated. Gripping the washer, she quickly turned away from Collin and stomped up the hill.

A light breeze brushed the sweat on her neck and the fragrance of sage brought her out of the memory.

“Thank you, Sister Sage. Was I sitting here too long? I tend to do that lately.” She reached out and caressed a soft leaf on the bush. “Would you help me get started up this darn hill. The beginning is always the hardest part.” As if in answer another breeze rustled the bush. Nettie broke off a small twig and inhaled the earthy aroma.

Standing up slowly, she started up the hill. The zip zag patterns up the slope were always the hardest with no shade to relieve the heat.

Reaching the tree line, Nettie took a deep breath and plopped down on a large red boulder. Collin was smart to push her on this hike that day. She needed a place to connect to her Timpanogos heritage.

A shadow floated along the hillside in front of Nettie. Lifting her hand out in front of her, she covered the sun. Looking up, she could see a large black crow gliding above her.

“Well, hello, Crow.” It wasn’t as if crows were scarce in this area. But it startled Nettie to see one. She had promised Collin she would listen to the earth and the animals.

“Are you here with advice? Because I could really use some.” Nettie asked respectfully knowing crows were the most intelligent birds. The crow circled back, following the lift the ridge was creating. Its black wings glistened as it circled back around tilting to the side. She thought the wings looked like a ladder between the earth and the sky.

“Are you pointing toward the earth or are you pointing towards the heavens?”

The crow cawed in response and flew up toward the top of the ridge and out of sight. Nettie blinked a couple times and tilted her chin in shock. She hadn’t expected the crow to reply to her question. But there was no doubt in her mind that it had.

“Do you know what the crow meant, Collin?” she asked looking up at the clouds, because that was what she thought she was supposed to do when talking to the dead. The lazy clouds drifted slowly across the bright blue sky creating a feeling of vertigo, as if Nettie could feel the world spinning in space. She closed her eyes and memory replaced the feeling.

“That’s it. I’m done hiking,” Nettie hollered up at Collin as she plopped down on the red rock that seemed to have been placed near the trail as a bench.

Collin turned around and sat down next to her. He opened his backpack and pulled out a water bottle. Nettie could see Collin's brown leather-bound journal their grandfather had given Collin on his 16th birthday. She wondered what he was planning on doing with it up here.

"We've been hiking for fifteen minutes, Nettie! This isn't a hard hike," Collin laughed under his breath.

"For you. Ever since Uncle Julius took you to the Shoshone-Bannock Festival, you've been going out on your spirit walks."

"Ya, I have. I decided to listen to grandpa and Uncle Julius for once. Maybe you should too." Collin bumped Nettie with his shoulder. "You will see when we get to the top, but this has helped me figure out things after Dad got arrested."

He's changed since dad went to prison. Maybe there was something to this hiking thing. She hated to admit he was right and planned to complain the entire way up the rest of the hike.

"What did grandpa say anyway," Nettie asked trying to change the subject. She hated talking about her dad. Not because she missed him but because of the anger that welled up inside her when she did.

"He basically told me we needed to stop ignoring our past and our ancestors." Collin took a long drink from the water bottle and handed it back to Nettie. Nettie took a big gulp.

"Grandpa took me to a sweat lodge. There I had a vision of a wolf with several wolves that followed warily behind him. But the lead wolf ignored the pack behind him.

When I spoke to Grandpa about my vision, he explained that the wolf is my spirit animal and that wolves run in packs. They must work together to survive. That is when

Grandpa began to teach me more about our history. Because of Dad and how Grandpa was raised, he had always been hesitant to speak about his heritage, unlike Uncle Julius.”

Not many of us left, though. Nettie thought of the times her mom, uncle, and grandparents would talk about Timpanogos traditions. It was a core memory that had always fascinated her. But her dad usually shut down the conversation by reminding them that they would never be able to celebrate their heritage. There were a lot of things that he shut down until her mom just stopped trying and her grandparents began staying in their room more and more. Generations of forced assimilation into the mainstream religion created unhealthy coping skills.

Anxiety began creeping into Nettie’s heart and she began to feel claustrophobic by the conversation.

“Where did Blake go?” she asked trying to change the subject. “He’s always disappearing. Why the heck do ya hang out with him?” Standing up, she stretched and pretended to care to look for Blake.

“I’m used to it. He comes and goes as he pleases.”

Chapter 16: Ryan

Ryan spat a sunflower seed shell into his Maverick coffee cup. Shells piled more than halfway in the cup. Ryan was stressed. The amount of shells always equaled the amount of stress he was under. It was better than Copenhagen. Most of the boys chewed. When you work in a profession that doesn't allow smoking breaks or is so dirty you can't smoke on the job, many turned to chewing. Ryan gave up the habit two years prior when his then girlfriend found a hidden spitter cup in the closet. Pulling the paper out from under the cup, it toppled spew on her head. She left shortly after, but the sunflowers stayed.

"Jake-ass, move it with that chain wrench," hollered Dugan over the thrum of the drill as he spun the next rod onto the bottom rod.

"I'm right behind you - like I was with your mom last night," Jacob stepped from behind Dugan to cinch the two rods together quickly. Dugan raised his arm like he was going to slug Jacob.

Ryan laughed at their banter but didn't join in. He sent the rods back down the hole hoping it wouldn't cave in again. The men were irritable because they had run into so many problems with this hole. At cross shift, they had to have a hot briefing, which kept the drill moving while discussing problems that had happened earlier.

"It's an old riverbed. You know that means bad ground," Ryan explained as Bill briefed him about the drill getting stuck multiple times. The day crew hadn't reached the desired footage, and everyone was furious. Footage equaled bonuses.

Another night not being able to leave the controls meant cups of shells and bottles of piss. At least he wouldn't have to go down to the doghouse again. The heebie-jeebies had never left. In fact, they had gotten worse. It took everything Ryan had to ignore the feeling that the shadows were gathering strength in the darkness.

"Thank God it's summer," Ryan mumbled to himself.

"Why's that?" asked Dugan extra loud. Leaning closer he spoke softer, "Just asking, cuz you're talking to yourself again. Figured I'd help ya not look crazy."

Ryan nodded and spoke up, "Cuz it stays light until ten and I can work on my tan."

"The only tanning we're getting will be from Lenny if we don't make our footage again tonight," Mike hollered over the drone of the drill as he catalogued the last core sample they had pulled.

"Anything 'high grade' yet?" Ryan asked.

"Just your mom," Mike shot back. Ryan smirked. Mike was the only geologist that he could stand to work with. He held his own with the crass drillers without getting his panties all in a bunch.

Ryan glanced at the slim boxes that were piled neatly next to the sample table. The current box lay open with several rock cylinder samples. Ryan felt like a surgeon doing a biopsy on the earth. Yet, these sample were not going to help cure her of any cancer. They were testing her thick skin to find the best place to plant a cancer.

Chapter 17: Nettie

Hunkering down along the edge of the canyon wall, and just outside the platform, Nettie viewed the scene. Bulldozed and flattened, the dried-up riverbed had been sterilized to create a space where a giant mechanical syringe had punctured the earth.

Heartbroken, Nettie laid her hand gently on the dry earth. A prickly nerve pain shot up her spine, as if she had cut herself and could see down to the bone. The shock of the injury sending aching electrical pulses that radiated up her back and down to her hand. Nettie shuttered. *Am I feeling her pain?*

Maapüatu~tümaapüatu. A whisper on the wind drifted pleadingly down the canyon.

Nettie listened carefully. *Maapüatu~tümaapüatu.* Her heart ached, breaking with the pain the voice carried. One doesn't need to understand the language to know a cry for help. She had heard this cry before. The cry from her dreams.

The sun was beginning to wane in the west, growing shadows along the base of trees and rocks. Nettie inched closer along the edge of the platform. The cicadas backed her up by growing louder each time she snuck closer, masking the sound of her footsteps. She knelt behind a thick jumble of juniper trees close enough so she could hear the voices of men near the drill.

“Damn it, bad ground again. Watch it Dugan, I gotta reverse the drill,” the one at the controls hollered at the man wearing Carhartt brown coveralls.

“We'll never get our f-ing footage if we gotta keep backing out of the hole,” said the coverall dude spitting dark brown spit on the ground from the huge pocket of Copenhagen in his lower lip.

Nettie wondered how long the drill had been stationed here. She thought back to the last time she had come up to the canyon. It had to have been over seven months ago when her and Collin had hiked up in November. She hadn't been back to the canyon since Collin's accident in December. *No wonder why the canyon had been calling out to her!* Nettie was angry with herself for ignoring her feelings.

Like a flash flood, starting with a trickle of rain, and then a flash of water surging down the canyon, Nettie's heartache turned to anger. Barreling through her veins, it picked up memories like debris. Thoughts of her family burst into her mind. Her Uncle Julius telling ancient stories to keep them from dying, her grandfather afraid to speak his language due to abuse at boarding school, her grandmother adopted through the Lamanite Placement Program to save her from her "savage" curse from God. And her mother. A fierce, courageous woman who gave her children strength even when she had given all of herself just to keep their family alive after her father committed suicide.

"They will not have this, too," she whispered to the cicadas and junipers. The choir of cicadas sang out, the juniper rustled with the wind.

Bears Ears, Bryce Canyon, Nine-Mile Canyon, Zions, all these places sacred to local tribes. Respected. Preserved. Protected. What did she have? The name of a town? The name of a cave? A mountain claimed by vacation cabins, ranchers, private gaming investors, and now a mining company.

Named after Chief Tabby-to-Kwanah, Child of the Sun. The last of the "sacred brothers". Her ancestor. A town named Tabiona. *He took his family there when they were sent to the reservation. He buried his son in Heber City, "like the white man" and died on the Uintah-Ouray Reservation, blind.*

Because of the name, and the connection they felt to the canyon, her and Collin made the place sacred. Sacred to their lineage. A place to connect to *Nü Pia Nü sokopi*. Nettie breathed in sharply. She knew the words.

My Mother Earth.

Chapter 18: Nettie

Sharp prickles rose up Nettie's feet warning her they were falling asleep from squatting for several minutes. Looking around, she noticed a small patch of sagebrush and twisted juniper that created a type of alcove where she could sit and think.

Soldier squatting as she run, Nettie easily made it to the alcove without being seen. Peeking under and behind boulders she quickly assessed that the area was clear of rattlers and plopped down on one of the cool rocks. Removing her backpack, she took a swig of water from the water pack nestled into the front pocket.

I'm gunna fight to get this mining company out of our canyon. It was pointless to go to the authorities, not because she couldn't trust them, but because the city had to approve this drilling. The town was not very rich and pulling in money from a long-term investment like mining, would secure the town for years to come. *Maybe social media?* As if! By the time she amassed enough followers the project would be too established to stop. *The local tribal associations?* They were amazing at helping preserve land and fight to protect it, but she wasn't viewed as having tribal association. *What was the significance of the land she wanted to conserve?* "My brother and I use it to connect to the land and our ancestors?" thought Nettie out loud.

The loud chit, chuck, chit warning sound of a cliff squirrel startled Nettie. She could see the little rascal in the juniper tree above her, its little body jumping each time it yelled. She must have startled the poor thing as it foraged from tree to tree.

"*Tuhuwai*, little brother," a male voice whispered off to Nettie's left. Grabbing her pack to run, Nettie stood as tall as she could in the small hiding place. Just then Wade's face peaked in through a hole in the branches, with his big foxlike smile. Nettie plopped back down on the rock, patting her chest to calm the fierce beating of her heart.

The tiny chipmunk jumped off the top branch onto the ground, bouncing from side to side, as if it couldn't decide which way to run. Wade threw a small pine seed at its feet as he hunched underneath the branches into the small opening.

"Aeshen for helping us locate our friend," Wade whispered to the little squirrel as it scampered off.

"Us?" asked Nettie.

Two other bodies followed Wade into the alcove.

"I ran to get us some help," said Blake dipping his head under the spikey arms of the juniper and squatting next to Wade. "You rushed down here to check things out and I figured Wade and Troy could help."

Nettie's heart jumped again, and she had to keep tapping her chest at the mention of Troy. *I am sick of my heart flaring up like an engine piston every time he is near.* She thought just as Troy took up the last of the small space in her hiding spot.

Seeing all three of Collin's friends crouched in front of her helped to patch the last of the wound she had healed earlier that day on the canyon's edge. Since she was fourteen, she had always seen them as Collin's friends. In this moment, she realized they had always been more than Collin's friends. They were family.

"So, did you come up with a plan while you were sitting here?" asked Troy. Nettie's face flushed as she realized she must have been staring at them longer than she realized.

"NO!" she whisper-yelled with sarcasm. Nettie paused for effect and then said in a sing-song voice, *"I need a hero. I'm holding out for a hero 'til the morning light."* All three laughed under their breaths at Nettie. She always used the lines from Footloose whenever one of them asked if she needed help on the derby cars. It was always her way of letting them know she could do it herself.

“So, you do have a plan?” asked Blake.

“Not yet, I was trying to come up with one until you guys showed up.”

“Ah, so we are the hero’s today. I knew you secretly needed one,” joked Wade.

“Yes, you tamed that squirrel so well, I was hoping you had some more of those pine nuts to throw at those big driller men. I bet they would go scampering off, too.” Wade chuckled. Their bantering reminded her of Collin. *Perhaps, she was helping Wade the same way he was helping her by filling the void that Collin left?*

“We actually have a plan,” broke in Blake. “We’re gunna steal the keys to their pickup. The one that they ride into and from the site.”

“Figured we would start small. Little things can quickly add up to big things if you keep festering a wound,” added Troy.

“How are we going to steal the keys? Those huge lights are going to flick on any minute now that it is getting darker.” Nettie remembered she thought those huge lights were so cool the one time she got to go with her mom to take dinner to her dad at a construction site near their home.

“Those lights are our escape plan. Get outside of those and the dark becomes your friend,” said Blake running his fingers through his hair. Nettie could tell he was beginning to get antsy.

“Okay, how can I help?” asked Nettie.

“Be the look out,” offered Troy.

Several minutes later, Nettie found herself squatting down in her original hiding near the drill rig. She worried she would be spotted by the drillers because the lights, like watercolors, blended past the working line, until they diminished into the dark. The lights

haughtily stood, daring Nettie to step closer. She knew they could see where she hid and were daring her to try to get past their eyes, unseen.

“Nettie,” a voice whispered from behind her. She didn’t jump, knowing exactly who was there. She turned her head to see Troy crouch walking toward her.

“Everyone is in place,” he said as he positioned himself behind her. The warmth of his shoulder touched the back of her shoulder. Nettie froze in place, electrical currents flowed through her at his touch. She knew he felt the same electricity because he didn’t move either.

Time is relative, and what felt like an hour was merely a moment. Troy leaned in closer and whispered in Nettie’s ear. “Now, keep your eyes open. The boys and I called for reinforcements.” Troy didn’t move away after he spoke. He was so close she could feel his chest against her back. If he wanted to, he could wrap his arms around her. *Does he want to?* She thought. A part of her wished he would, the other half wondered if she was allowed to wish this.

Chapter 19: Ryan

Ryan flinched as the light plants flipped on like magic when dusk turned to dark. *Shit, I have got to pull myself together.* Ryan was getting sick of being jumpy. Shadows in the doghouse made him jump. Lights going on made him jump. Weird sounds carried on the wind made him jump. And now, he thought he could hear voices near the drill platform. *For hell's sake, maybe he just needed to quit.* He had saved up plenty of money over the last couple of years. Even though he was frugal, it still wasn't enough to retire on just yet.

"Dugan?" Ryan hollered over the drill. They were in-between rods and Dugan had run to the truck to grab his Copenhagen and another sack of Spitz chili lime sunflower seeds for Ryan.

"WHAT?" hollered Dugan sticking his head out of the driver's side cab window.

"Grab Jake's pouches." Ryan hadn't chewed for over a year, but tonight he needed something to calm his nerves. This restless panic was getting out of hand.

"What the hell, bro?" Dugan said as he walked up to the drill. "You haven't chewed since Cortez. You tryin' to be a man again?" Dugan laughed handing Ryan the Black Buffalo tin. "You know your gunna get sick."

"That's why I asked for the pouches and not a pinch from your 'hagen. That shit will mess you up if ya aren't prepped." Ryan stuck the pouch in his lower lip and silently prayed that it would help him relax.

"So, what the hell is up?" asked Dugan. "I've seen you deal with bad ground like this before and nothin' phases you. This is baby work, even with all the setbacks."

"That night, in the drill station, did you hear or see anything before the hole blew?" Ryan knew he was crossing that secret pact the two had made not to talk about the

incident. Dugan's eyes glazed over for a second. It was obvious that he was seeing something he didn't want to admit.

"Hear what?" asked Jacob walking with Mike back up from the doghouse.

"Ah, nothin'. Thought I heard some kinda animal up the canyon," Ryan quickly changed the subject. The crew had heard, what they thought might be a bobcat, earlier in the week. Another sound that had made Ryan panic. The sound a bobcat makes would make anyone's skin crawl.

"Here's your scrod," Ryan said handing Jacob his chew tin.

"What the hell ya need that for? You don't chew," said Jacob, placing the tin in his back pocket.

Dugan jumped in with an excuse. "We heard the bobcat again."

"Shit!" said Mike. "Hearing that thing again would give anyone nightmares."

Just as Mike finished his sentence a banshee scream came wailing down the canyon. All the men jumped. Mike stepped back like he was about to take off down the hill. Jacob reached for his back pocket like he was carrying. Ryan and Dugan held their ground, though Dugan clenched his overall straps tighter, and Ryan squeezed the drill handle.

"Ef me runnin'," cursed Jacob. Again, the violent scream of a women shot through the dark making Mike stumble backward.

"That was just outside the lights," exclaimed Mike, trying to brush off that he about took off running.

Dugan laughed at Mike. "You was about to give 'er the onion and bolt all the way down the mountain." Ryan laughed at the Canadian idiom that Dugan had picked up from their last contract working with the Canadian drillers.

“Aren’t bobcats rarely seen? Shouldn’t that thing have taken off by now, especially with all the noise the damn drill makes?” Mike was not about to let it slide that there was a wild animal just outside the perimeter of lights.

“Sure. But it could be a juvenile or something’ and we are in its territory. We would have scared off the prey and now its hungry and on high alert.” Ryan always took the animal’s sides.

As all the men stared in the direction the sound had come, a figure slinked into the light at the corner edge where the lights met the canyon wall. Its grey, brown striped spotted fur and bobbed tail left no doubt what had made the sounds. The bobcat’s ears, in pointed tufts that made it look like it had spikey hair, twitch backward in a predatory growl.

“Don’t move,” whispered Ryan. He didn’t think the cat would attack, but weird things had been happening since they started this contract. And truthfully, he didn’t want the thing to run off.

“Maybe it’s got rabies,” mumbled Mike.

“Maybe it’s a Skinwalker,” muttered Jacob.

“Maybe you’re an idiot,” hissed Ryan. “Not everything that can’t be explained is something other worldly. Besides, look how beautiful that creature looks. I would think if it’s a Skinwalker or had rabies it would look battered and sickly.”

The cat continued to slink toward the other side of the light and with a final warning growl it bolted out of the light and up the canyon. Everyone sighed in unison.

“You know,” said Dugan. “I don’t know why that thing spooked me. It wasn’t no bigger than a beagle or a small lab.”

“It’s their damn scream!” said Jacob taking the tin out of his back pocket. “Give anyone the willies.”

A high-pitched bark, like an injured dog, made the men spin around. About twenty yards away, near the pickup truck, sat a grey fox scratching its ear with its hind leg. Quickly, it spun around and yipped again, as if it was looking for something.

“What they hell...” Mike trailed off mid-sentence.

“Did someone leave food under the truck?” Things were starting to make sense to Ryan. “Where have you guys been throwin’ your food?”

“In the dumpster down by the doghouse,” said Dugan. The other two nodded in agreement.

“Think the day crew is doin’ the same?” asked Ryan.

“I wouldn’t put it passed them to just chuck their shit anywhere. They work the day shift and don’t have to worry about night intruders. Just deer, crows, and maybe a wild turkey.” Dugan spat out a huge wad of spit he had been saving since the bobcat showed up.

The fox ran under the truck and sniffed the ground completely ignoring the drill and the crew.

“Damn it! Boys, I didn’t realize we were so close to needing a new rod. Hurry, get the next one ready and freakin’ just ignore the damn foxes, they’re just scavenging.” Quickly, Dugan and Jacob rushed over to the rod rack to set up for the exchange. Mike rushed over to the sample table to prep for the next core sample he would need to log.

No one noticed when the little fox jumped into the bed of the truck and through the open rear window.

Once the next rod was in place, and the drilling continued the men looked around for the little fox.

“Where’d he go?” asked Dugan.

“Probably to find your mom,” laughed Jacob.

Ryan pulled the plug from his lower lip and dropped it into his sunflower cup. He had forgotten about it and he was starting to feel a little nauseous. At least he wasn’t so jumpy. Seeing the cat helped to ground him in reality. What the mind can create is always scarier than facing the reality. In fact, he was glad that the cat had walked into the light. Hearing the banshee like screams brought back the sounds he had heard underground. The piercing cry of a women in agonizing pain. Seeing the cat made him forget about the supernatural in the mine.

“Guys, look,” Mike pointed toward the truck. The little fox’s head was sticking out of the driver side window with its feet on the window ledge. It looked in their direction when Mike called out.

“What’s it got in its mouth?” asked Dugan. In that same second the words were spoken he grabbed Jacob and was running after the creature. “It’s got the damned keys!” Both men went rushing into the dark after the fox. Several other yips like laughs could be heard in the dark as it bolted into the brush.

Ryan couldn’t move. He had to keep the drill running. The ground was solid tonight, and he kept the drill moving at the slowest pace he could. Without his full attention on the machine, he might screw up and get the rods stuck.

“You ever seen a fox do that?” asked Mike as he picked up a sample tray. “You know this area, right?”

“I’ve seen foxes get into food and run off with trash, but never with keys. That’s what raccoons do.” Dugan’s shouts could be heard hollering down by the doghouse.

“Dugan, Jacob, get your asses back up here.” Ryan shouted as loud as he could hoping his voice could carry that far.

A low guttural growl froze Ryan in place. This was directly behind him and was deep and unmistakably menacing. Ryan slowly turned his head to see Mike rooted in place holding a sample tray and panic in his eyes. Aggressively crouched under the sample table was a mountain lion. Baring its fang at Mike it gave a guttural hiss and swatted at him making Mike back up several steps.

“Get away,” Ryan hollered at the cat. He figured that two big men could easily scare away a mountain lion. They weren’t like black bears that knew their size and would take on any aggressor. A mountain lion was smart and wouldn’t risk injury.

“Go on!” Ryan shouted again.

The cat hadn’t budged and kept looking back and forth from Mike to Ryan. Its lean muscles quivering as it stepped toward Mike. Ryan looked around the drill area. About ten feet away sat the gear wrench Jacob used to cinch the rods together. *Can I grab it in time?* He thought and let go of the drill lever to move toward the tool.

Just as he took a step, the lion sprung out from under the table toppling the contents over. It swatted at Mike with both front paws, knocking Mike backwards into the pile of precious core sample boxes. The tray in Mike’s arms went flying backwards and he slid trying to find footing as the boxes toppled, spilling rock cylinders everywhere. The mountain lion rushed past Mike, across the lighted platform, and up the canyon into the dark. The keeper like walls seemed to embrace the creature as it passed, creating a foreboding shadow barrier.

Ryan rushed over to the drill, backed the rods off the bottom of the hole, and powered it down before any major damage could be done. *Damn, coming off bottom. I'm gunna lose this hole.* The whirring of the rig crescendoed into an eerie silence. Running over to Mike, Ryan reached out his hand to help Mike up.

"You okay, man?" Ryan asked assessing his arms and legs for injuries.

"I'm good. Just some major bruises on my ass and to my pride, that's all," said Mike angrily brushing the dirt off his pants and shirt sleeves.

"What the hell was..." several expletives followed as Dugan ran up to the site with Jacob a few yards behind.

"Mountain lion," was all Ryan could say.

"You stopped the drill?" Jacob stated the obvious.

"No shit, I couldn't just leave Mike on the ground after that freaking cat attacked him."

"A mountain lion attacked Mike?" Jacob said in surprise.

"Welcome to the party, Jake-ass. Doesn't matter if the drill is running or not. We are seriously screwed," said Mike looking down at the broken core samples that were scattered on the ground. Weeks of precious metal rock samples that needed to be tagged and recorded at their specific depths were a jumbled mess. Knowing where the metals were and at what depth was the entire reason they were there. "I'm gunna get fired."

"I'm gunna get fired," Ryan countered. "The Kore Mine incident and now this. They're gunna think I am incompetent and can no longer run a drill."

Dugan walked over and slapped Ryan on the shoulder. "They already knew you was incontinent," joked Dugan. "You might as well let the guys know, too. Nothing to be ashamed of." Ryan rolled his eyes at Dugan but couldn't help giving him a courtesy laugh.

“No point in sitting around wallowing, boys. Let’s get ‘er rollin’ again and see what we can salvage. The night is still young, and I got the best crew there is.” Ryan walked back over to the drill to get her rolling again praying to God that she wouldn’t be stuck. Jacob helped Mike pick up the samples and Dugan put another wad of chew in his cheek walking over to the rod rack prepping for the next exchange.

Starting the drill up again, Ryan stared into the dark past the florescent lights. Searching the dark was a self-sabotaging act. In one way, Ryan wanted to see something that would explain what had just happened. Perhaps a deer, or prey that had brought all three carnivores to their site. In another way, the incident was so unexplainable that he was looking for the supernatural.

And he was rewarded.

Fight, Flight, or Freeze? Ryan froze. Panic clambered through his body like water freezing in below zero temperatures.

A women stood; long dark hair billowing around her in the non-existent wind. Dark shadows hid her face. Behind her trees writhed and reached toward Ryan. Next to the women stood a mountain lion, bobcat, and two foxes, fangs bared. An eerie howl of a lone wolf broke through the blackness like a door had been opened.

Ryan inhaled with fright. In that second, the scene disappeared and all he could see was the black night.

Chapter 20: Nettie

Nettie could hear the men laughing and talking but couldn't make out what they said over the thrumming spin of the drill. Her and Troy had been waiting for less than ten minutes, when they could see Blake wave at them from across the drill area. The screech of a bobcat made Nettie flinch.

"One never gets used to that sound," whispered Troy as he reached out an arm and gave Nettie a quick squeeze then moved his arm away.

"It's always one of those shocking sounds." Nettie thought bobcats had the coolest sound. It was about as creepy as a barn owl's screech.

Watching from the bushes she saw the men staring off in the opposite direction that Blake had waved from. Looking in the direction the men were, she saw a beautiful, stately cat, walk majestically into the light. Agitated at the men, the bobcat ordered them to leave by growling and flipping its ears back to emphasis its demand.

"I've heard bobcats several times, but I have never seen one in the wild," Nettie quietly admitted, looking back at Troy. His beautiful golden eyes lifted in that half smile she loved.

"Keep watchin'," he reminded. Reluctantly Nettie turned back around.

A few minutes later, near the pickup truck, Nettie saw Wade crouched down on the dark side nearest the rear tire. Two grey foxes sat in front of him, flipping their bushy tails from side to side as if they were listening to him intently. Wade looked up and smiled at Nettie with his big foxlike smile, then snuck off back into the woods. Both foxes began circling the truck, searching.

Nettie was startled when one of the men shouted that they had to get back to the drill. Once their backs were turned the two foxes jumped into the back of the truck bed,

which Nettie had seen Wade open before he took off. Inside the cab their bushy tails flickered back and forth as they explored around. Like watching a mystery, Nettie's anxiety began to rush to her throat, nervous the cute little foxes would get caught. She exhaled deeply when the first one jumped out of the truck window and ran off into the dark. The second one, halfway out of the truck, was spotted by the men.

Instinctively, Nettie moved forward to protect the little thieves, but Troy's hand on her shoulder reminded her that they would be just fine.

"Nettie, I want you to stay very calm and look to your left," whispered Troy leaving his hand on her shoulder.

"Why..." the rest of the sentence was lost in a swallow as Nettie stared at the majestic, powerful mountain lion that sat next to Troy. It towered over his crouched figure, noble and arresting.

"*Damme ashen -mia tümaapüatu ~ maapüatu babi'-a,*" Troy whispered reverently to the giant cat. Graciously the mountain lion walked forward and hunkered down under a table where one of the drillers was picking up a tray with samples that had been dissected from the earth.

Troy put both arms around Nettie and hugged her tight. "You can breathe now," he said softly. *That will just make me hold my breath more.* Thought Nettie as he let her go. Taking a deep breath, she steadied herself to watch what the magnificent cat would do.

Nettie's vision became unfocused staring at the scene in front of her. Taking over her sight, Nettie's mind unraveled a memory leaving the present moment behind. It was as if she were in a dream. She could see herself sitting in the back of her truck with her .22 rifle in her hands. A beautiful cat meandered around the perimeter of the truck,

sniffing the air and the ground. It didn't look as if it was trying to decide to attack what was in the truck. It looked like it was assessing whether the area was secure. *Was that the mountain lion that stocked my truck?*

Another memory blurred her vision again. This time, Nettie was sitting on the floor of their living room, Troy, Wade, and Collin sat on the couch, and her brother straddled the arm of the couch. In the center of the room sat her Uncle Julius. *He must be telling one of his stories again.* Thought Nettie, listening carefully to see if she was correct.

"Your dreams are extremely important," explained her uncle. All the kids nodded in agreement. One listens and doesn't speak when their elders are talking.

"Collin dreamt of the wolf. Troy the mountain lion. Blake the bobcat. And Wade, the fox. All these animals are now your spirit brothers. They will guide you, at the same time you must share their message with your family. Remember, this helps to remind us that everything in the natural world is spiritually connected."

Nettie listened intently to her uncle as if she was sitting in her home in the present moment.

"I'm surprised that you dreamt of these four animals. It is a reminder that we may need to call on their spirits for help, but we all must believe that they are spiritual beings and not just blood and bone animals. When we see the fox, we see the spiritual fox."

Nettie looked at the four boys sitting on the couch and wondered how they would be called to help. They were mischievous boys that worked on junkyard cars and drove in the demolition derbies. They snuck her uncle's beer and went up to the lake to shoot cans. They were your typical teenage rowdy boy.

“I heard this story from one of my Shoshone brothers. You three boys are from the Shoshone Nation in Idaho. We are Timpanogos, the snake band of Shoshone, who resided in Utah. You four are brothers.

Since you four brothers are connected to these spirit animals, perhaps we are being reminded of our promise and that you are called on to protect these animals. Perhaps, you are being called to visit them as they may have a message for you to bring back.”

Nettie looked around the room. Each boy nodded and listened reverently. None of them spoke, respectful of the wisdom that her uncle had given them. As she looked at each individual sitting on the couch, her gaze landed on Troy.

Those golden eyes snapped Nettie back to the present. The mountain lion bounded forward, protecting itself from the man that was going to bash it with a giant metal tray full of rocks. Nettie jumped up, ready to defend the cat. It didn't matter that the regal creature could protect itself. Troy grabbed Nettie's shirt and pulled her back into the protection of the juniper trees just as the cat ran away past the drillers to the safety of the night.

Anger flooded Nettie's soul. Ignoring Troy, she stepped forward. She was Earth's daughter. A familial rage took over every rational thought. She would destroy these men and that machine. She took another step forward.

“*Tuhwua'I, baithe.*” a motherly voice whispered in Nettie's ear. *Be calm, my daughter.* The trees reached out and embraced Nettie. A soft snout, touch the back of her balled up fist. She looked down to see the bobcat, foxes, and mountain lion standing next to her. The beautiful song of a wolf rang out in the night, reminding Nettie of Collin. Anger melted away into peace.

A strong hand reached out and took Nettie's hand, pulling her back into the safety of the night.

Chapter 21: Ryan

“You did what?” screamed Lenny whose neck was now as wide as his head with muscle and vein strain.

That morning at cross shift, Ryan explained to Bill what had happened the night before. Bill just stood there nodding his head as if everything was normal. The day crew had their own weird mishaps, and everyone was now just taking the weirdness as the new drilling normal. It wasn't until Lenny arrived to pick up the core samples that all hell broke loose.

“We didn't do anything wrong,” Ryan replied calmly. After the night he had, an irate tool pusher was not going to get him worked up.

“What do you mean you didn't do anything wrong? You only have two and a half freaking boxes of samples when you should have five or more from the morning and night shifts combined.”

“We understand and that is why we worked extra hard to get you those boxes.”

“Should I kiss your ass since you made up a few boxes? You're a moron. Those earlier core samples could have told us that there was a huge gold vein. And now you, and your idiot crew, lost the company money because we don't know what's in-between yesterday's depths and today's!”

Ryan was okay if he got yelled at. He would even be fine if he got fired. But call his crew an idiot, and he would let the bulldozer loose.

“Do not feed me that bullshit. I haven't lost the company jack. You know as well as I do that tomorrow's hole will show us the same damned veins of bullshit samples that we lost last night. My crew did more in one night than any other night on this god forsaken contract. So don't you dare lecture me on losing the company *money!*”

Lenny's face went so red that it clashed with the red of the canyons that were towering behind him. Removing his LP mining hard hat and wiping the sweat that pearly on his mostly bald head, Lenny tried to compose himself.

"That's it, Ryan. It don't matter who your father is, when I fill out my incident report, you're fired."

"If you say so. Last time I checked, you could only report your findings." Ryan knew he was walking on thin ice, but last night's sightings brought the mining disaster to the surface. He had always been in limbo with this job. His internal conflict of what he did to the earth daily had haunted him since day one.

"Oh, you just wait, Jensen. Everyone in the company knows how you froze and didn't take proper measures to back the drill out of the hole before things went south. Equipment failure, my ass. I'd say driller failure."

Ryan balled his hands in a fist. Like a movie playing out before him he saw himself reach back and belt Lenny in the face, knocking him backward and spilling the core samples. But Ryan held back. There was no way he would give Lenny the satisfaction of being a hero back at the corporate offices.

"I'm sorry to bother you guy," the helper that had found cat tracks the first cross shift, stuck his head out from behind Lenny. Ryan smirked at the look on the dude's face. Lenny spun around like someone had yelled "fire."

"Bill told me you had cat problems last night." He paused to wait to see if Lenny would say anything, but Lenny just stared in disbelief that the helper would even butt into their conversation. The helper stood up taller as he spoke.

“I hunt big game in Montana, and I just found fresh cat tracks down by the doghouse. Must have been prowling around the garbage dump last night. In fact, there were either young coyote or fox tracks, too. I’m pretty sure they are fox.”

“So what?” demanded Lenny.

“It backs up Ryan’s story. He said they were attacked by a mountain lion. If they were attacked, then they can’t be held responsible for the accident with the core samples.”

Silence followed. The morning sun was beginning to heat up the soil and the cicadas started to thrum filling up the silence between the men. Ryan wasn’t about to break this moment or add to what the helper just explained to Lenny. He didn’t want an “I told you so” to be grounds for getting fired.

Just as quickly as Lenny had begun his tantrum, he ended it by stocking off in the direction of the doghouse. Ryan wanted to holler, “You heading in to fill out that report?” but he reached in his pocket for a wad of sunflower seeds and stuffed them in his mouth.

Moments later, bouncing down the dirt road that had been cut for this project through the pine and juniper, Ryan stared at the splinters of logs and bushes along the edges of the road. *What did I see?* He thought to himself visualizing the apparition that had appeared in the dark. He couldn’t see it’s face but he could feel the anger like the radiating heat of a diesel engine.

“I never had a chance to answer your question last night,” Dugan said breaking the silence inside the cab of the pickup truck. Luckily, they had found the keys near the stairs of the doghouse that morning. Dugan must have scared the foxes when he ran after them making them drop the keys.

“What question?” Ryan couldn’t think past the image in his head.

“On whether I saw something the night of the...” Dugan couldn’t finish the sentence.

“Oh, yah,” was all Ryan could respond with. In the light of day, and in a space he couldn’t escape, Ryan felt uncomfortable discussing the disaster.

“You froze.”

Ryan sat up. The words plopped down on the seat in the space between the two men waiting for Ryan to acknowledge they sat there.

Dugan continued. “I have never seen you freeze. You always know what to do, like you have a sixth sense and can feel through the drill what the earth is doin’. I’ve seen you time and again adjust the drilling based on a hunch or the different vibrations you felt through the levers.

I might be afraid of the dark, but that night, the look of fear in your eyes scared me more than any ghost drillers or a woman in white that might be lurking in those tunnels to drag me down into the depths.”

Ryan adjusted his seat belt. It felt like it was pulling him tighter into the seat. Pulling too fast, the belt tightened and pulled even tighter.

“However, when I looked back up at the hole, that is when I saw what you saw.” Dugan cleared his throat like he had been holding back tears. Ryan quickly unbuckled his seatbelt and threw it off his shoulder. The belt whipped back into place and Ryan tried several times to pull the belt forward again. Each time he tried, it refused to unwind from its housing.

“Oh, for the love of God, Ryan, slow down and pull,” lectured Dugan as he maneuvered the truck onto the highway heading back into Tabiona. LP Drilling had rented a trailer home that all the men stayed in. One didn’t look too closely at the room

you were sharing with the day shift workers. You ate, showered, changed clothes, and passed out.

“I saw the cracks, Ryan. For hell’s sake, are you okay?” Dugan quickly looked over at Ryan and then back at the road.

“You saw what?” asked Ryan.

“The cracks. I saw the cracks before I felt the quake. You saved my life because you knew what she was about to do. Don’t you remember?”

Ryan didn’t know how to process what Dugan was saying. There were shadowy hands that pulled the housing from the ceiling. He saw them, just like he saw that figure last night.

“I haven’t known what to say or how to thank you. I’ve been so embarrassed that I turned into a pansy. I even pissed my pants. Maybe it was water from the hole, but I’m pretty sure I pissed myself.”

Ryan laughed at the thought of Dugan peeing his pants. This big dude, who always wore overalls and could bench over 250, being embarrassed didn’t fit his profile. Ryan remembered the first contract he was on when he met Dugan. They were working on a shitty rig where the stairs were rusted through. Dugan had warned Ryan to watch for the bad stair. When you are running up and down as the new guy fetching “hole straightening fluid” you tend to stop paying attention to the little things.

As Ryan was running up the stairs after discovering the hole straightening fluid was just a prank, he stepped down on the rusted metal, his leg slicing clean through. After their shift, Dugan pulled Ryan aside forcing him to reveal the injury. Ryan had a giant gash in his shin. Needing to report the workplace injuring, both men knew the unspoken rule of the trade. If you could still move, you shut the hell up. Dugan helped Ryan get the

things he needed and stuck up for him when the other men wanted to send Ryan on unneeded errands.

Ryan never understood why Dugan hadn't moved up to be a driller. When Ryan got the promotion, he was hesitant to tell Dugan. When he finally got the courage, he was surprised how happy Dugan was for him. He had asked Dugan why he never moved up the ranks. Apparently, Dugan never wanted the responsibility. He like the money and was content keeping the easy job. *Being a helper was not an easy job.*

"Did you hear what I said? Freaking A, Ryan. You been zonin' out a shit ton. You okay?" Ryan snapped back to the present.

"Uh, sorry Dugan. Was trying to picture you pissin' your pants. I just can't see it." Ryan tried to cover his laps in focus.

Dugan smiled, but quickly replaced it with concern. "Anyways, like I was sayin', I think they tried to cover the fact that the drift had structural damage."

"What?" Ryan was fully in the present. He hadn't realized or asked about the extent of the damage. He just thought that they would seal that hole and start a new one in the drift once they got the new equipment.

"Ya, I heard from Bill that our reports didn't match. I'm not sure what you wrote down. But, because you said one thing and I another, the mine was able to cover up the issue."

"But wouldn't the quake be recorded somewhere?"

"Sure, but that doesn't mean anything happened to the integrity of the mine walls."

Ryan rolled down the window. He needed to feel the summer breeze and smell the pines before they left the mountain. It was his ritual.

“I’ve been wantin’ to know what you put in your report that was different than mine. You claimed it was equipment failure. Why didn’t you say the quake made the hole collapse, causin’ the drill to bind and finally break the housing. I mean, that is what happened, right?”

Ryan took a deep breath of the mountain air then rolled up the window.

“That’s not what I saw.” Ryan didn’t know how to explain things to Dugan, but if there was one person who would listen. He knew it was Dugan.

“I started getting’ the heebie-jeebies. Things just didn’t feel...right. I started noticing things. Then...” Ryan reached for his bag of seeds. “I saw hands, like smoke tendrils, rise out of the shadows and wrap around the housing.”

“Holy shit, the cracks were larger than I thought, and I don’t mean in the rock. I mean in your head.”

“I’m serious. How would I know to tell you to get out of the basket before the quake hit?”

“Like I said, you got some kinda sixth sense.”

“Maybe, but it wasn’t cracks in the rock. It was these ghostly hands. And the screams. The screams of a women in agonizing pain, worse than that bobcat we heard last night, that is what scared me the most.”

Dugan didn’t respond for a moment as he turned off the highway up to their run-down trailer.

“Listen, bro. Last month, I may not have believed you. However, after what happened tonight, I can’t, for certain, say you didn’t see what ya thought you saw.”

With that, Dugan pulled the truck into the dirt and weeds driveway and shut the truck off.

“Either way. It don’t matter. The only thing that matters is that you saved our lives.” Dugan reach for his wallet on the dashboard then jumped out of the truck.

“Last thing I’m gunna say about this issue. Whatever you do, don’t ever file a report that deals with supernatural shit before consulting me.”

And with that Dugan walked into the trailer leaving Ryan alone in the silent cab with the words “you froze” curled up in his lap.

Chapter 22: Nettie

After they left the drill site, Troy insisted that he drive Nettie home. She was too angry and too volatile to drive safely. Nettie assured Troy she was calm by the time they reached her truck that was parked near the outer fence surrounding the canyon. Troy had held her hand the entire way back.

“I’ll drive you home.” Troy said once they reached Nettie’s truck, holding his other hand out for her keys.

“Why?” She asked trying to prolong the moment before he let her hand go.

“Because you’re too angry still.”

Nettie laughed. “I am not.”

“You haven’t said a word since we left the drill site. That usually means a woman is still mad.”

It’s because you were holding my hand and I didn’t want to spoil the moment by saying something stupid.

“Fine. You can drive.” She admitted.

Reluctantly, Nettie let go of Troy’s hand and pulled her backpack off. Reaching into the front pocket she found her keys and handed them to Troy. He smiled at her then turned to unlock the truck.

When they had arrived at her house, she wasn’t sure what to do. *Do I invite him in?* It wasn’t like he hadn’t ever been in their house before. In fact, the three friends had the family pass which meant they could walk in without knocking whenever they visited.

“Mind if I come in to grab a drink of water before I leave?” Asked Troy, saving Nettie from having to say anything.

“I don’t care. Not like you need to ask to come in.” Nettie tried to cover her insecurity with her usual brash reply. She opened the door and walked inside without looking back. *Oh, please be following me.*

Knowing Hintza would be waiting, she quickly knelt just inside the door to calm the German Shepherd and keep her from barking and waking up her mom or grandpa. Hintza rubbed her snout and face against Nettie’s cheeks.

“I’m so sorry I didn’t take you, baby. It woulda been too hot fer ya,” Nettie whispered, burying her face in the soft fur at Hintza’s neck, and breathing in the musky but sweet smell of the dog. Hintza nuzzled Nettie’s neck back, explain how much she was missed.

The door closed softly behind her and Nettie’s heart sped up slightly with excitement as Troy walked into the kitchen, taking out a glass from the shelf. Hintza trotted over to Troy, a big grin on her face and tail wagging. Troy ruffled Hintza’s mane and kissed her on the head.

“Would you like a glass?” he asked quietly.

“Yes, please,” she replied, hanging her backpack up on the hooks by the door and sitting down at the small 1970’s style kitchen table.

Troy set the glass down in front of her. Walking to the other side he softly pulled the metal legged 70’s style chair out to keep it from squeaking on the linoleum. Sitting down he looked directly at Nettie as if he was waiting for her to say something. Nettie smiled and took a drink of water. Hintza set her head on Nettie’s lap, giving her that extra comfort. Nettie patted Hintza’s head.

“You okay?” Troy asked after several moments of silence.

“Why wouldn’t I be? I didn’t mind that you held my hand,” explained Nettie. Troy smiled and looked down at the glass in his hand then back up at Nettie.

“I meant about the mountain lion. It’s not every day that you come face to face with a dangerous predator.”

Nettie’s cheeks went warm like when tap water goes from cold to hot. She wished that she could be working on a car or doing something where she could hide her face, but make it look tough.

“Oh, that.” She paused for a moment thinking about when she turned to see the cat at eye level. “It reminded me of one of the stories Uncle Julius tells. The one where the medicine man asks the spirits for help.” Nettie looked across the kitchen, staring at nothing, but thinking of the cat. Troy waited, not needing to fill the space with empty conversation.

“I’ve always known that you each had a spirit animal. It didn’t surprise me that you were able to ask for help from the spirits. I’m thankful that they were willing to help you. I would never question their reasoning.”

“After Collin died, Blake, Wade, and I went up to the ledge of the canyon to pay our respects to Collin’s spirit. That is when we noticed the new fencing.”

Nettie was happy to hear that they had respected Collin’s death in their own way.

“Wade tried to find out why the fencing had gone up. It took him some time, but eventually he heard from the cashier at the Fruitland gas station that Tabiona had sold the land to Kore Mine.”

“Knowing the area was so important to you and Collin, we’ve been tryin’ to find out what we could do to protect the land.”

“Not much, I guess,” responded Nettie, thinking about the little town of Tabiona. She knew the town was allowing different developers to come into the area to try and bring money to the town since many children were not taking over their parent’s farms or ranches.

“Sadly, your right,” said Troy leaning forward with his arms crossed on the table. “That is when Blake remembered the story your uncle told us that first time we came out to visit Collin. I went back to Idaho and asked our elders for help. They held a sweat lodge ceremony and told me to ask the spirits for guidance.”

Troy paused and looked at Nettie. For the first time, she didn’t look away first. He held her gaze as he spoke, “That is why I wasn’t here for you after Collin died.” Nettie looked up at the ceiling trying to blink back the tears. She was surprised that her emotions had surge up from Troy’s confession.

“I made a promise to your brother to watch over you. But it was a promise he knew I had already made in my heart the moment I met you.”

Eyes wide and tears lightly touching her cheeks, Nettie couldn’t believe what Troy was admitting.

“I knew you had a thing for cars and oil,” Nettie joked not knowing what to say. Putting up walls was her talent. It’s hard to break a habit you excel at.

“It was definitely the oil filter that did it for me,” Troy played back knowing all too well of Nettie’s quippy comments. He continued again serious.

“I never told your brother about my crush. I couldn’t. You were his sister, and he was one of my closest friends. I thought the feelings would go away. But, as time went on, I understood that I just needed to be patient. Why force something that may or may not be.

I know your brother suspected that I had feelings for you. I always had excuses to get you to help us with the derby cars.”

“Are you serious! You were the one that asked me to help? I just thought Collin loved my company.” For a moment, Nettie felt a little disappointed.

“Don’t get me wrong, Collin was always asking you to help. I think he purposefully waited to see what excuse I would come up with to get you to work on the derby cars with us.”

Overwhelmed from Troy’s admission and the events of the evening, Nettie put her head in her arms and cried. *Why the hell am I crying?* She was happy. Happier than she had been for over seven months. Panic crawled up her spine and made her cry more. She shouldn’t be allowed to be happy. If she was happy, then something would happen to take it away from her.

The metal of the chair across from her squeaked softly on the linoleum floor. Warmth from Troy’s hand gently touched her shoulder. Kneeling next to her, Troy whispered her name.

“Nettie.”

Hearing the compassion in his voice, made her cry even harder. How long had she wanted to hear him say her name with such sincerity. Anxiety is like a ground mole; it keeps burrowing then rising to the surface pushing the dirt of self-doubt out.

“Nettie, please. I am sorry. I didn’t mean to hurt your feelings.”

Looking up and smiling, Nettie wiped the tears from her cheeks with the sleeve of her hoodie. Her face was splotchy and no matter how many times she wiped her eyes the tears kept falling.

“I’m crying because I feel happy and that scares me to death,” Nettie admitted.

Troy pulled Nettie forward and held her tightly. Resting her head on Troy's chest she breathed in deeply. His smell of sagebrush and pine trees rooted her and brought her out of her head. She put her arms around Troy and tried to calm her after-cry quaking breaths.

"Well, I see that the moon woke you two up, too," said Nettie's grandfather as he walked into the kitchen, cream colored flannel pants barely hanging off his hips.

"Hello, Grandpa," Nettie and Troy said in unison. Troy hugged Nettie one more time before standing up.

"Can I get you something?" asked Troy, pulling a seat out for his elder.

"Well, a cup of coffee would be nice."

"Coffee? What time is it?" Nettie had forgotten to take her phone out of her backpack.

"It's about four AM, the usual time my body alarm decides to wake me," replied Nettie's grandfather, sitting down and flipping on the portable TV to the news. "I see that you two are just getting in."

"We went up to Tabiona Canyon," Nettie quickly responded.

"You sat up on the canyon ridge until four AM?" her grandfather joked without changing his facial expression. "I do not want to know what you were doing up there from noon until dawn."

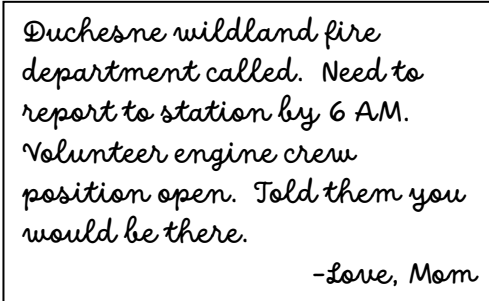
Blushing, Nettie stood up and pretended she needed to find her phone. *How do I explain this to my grandfather?*

"They're drilling at the base of Tabby Canyon, Grandpa," explained Troy.

Nettie's grandfather nodded and watched the early morning news on the TV. Both Nettie and Troy waited respectfully for his thoughts on the issue, knowing he needed a moment to think about this information.

"I can speak to the Ute Tribal executives in next week's lodge meeting. They may have some ideas that can help us." Even though Nettie's grandfather couldn't speak at the meetings, he had several Ute friends that respected him and allowed him to attend the meetings.

"Did you see the message your mother left on the table?" her grandfather asked Nettie, pushing a notepad across to her.



*Duchesne wildland fire
department called. Need to
report to station by 6 AM.
Volunteer engine crew
position open. Told them you
would be there.
-Love, Mom*

When excitement and regret meet, indecision reigns. Nettie felt torn, she had been waiting for an opportunity to be on the engine crew since she learned about wildland firefighters. But she didn't want to leave, knowing she could try to do something to stop the drilling up Tabby Canyon.

"Go," said Troy sitting next to her grandfather at the table.

"But I have to do something about the drilling." Nettie furrowed her eyebrows in frustration.

"You will only be gone for a few weeks. Maybe when you get back, we'll have a better answer and some help," Troy suggested.

“-kua' sumpaatuH, go and learn.” Nettie heard the words in the back of her mind.
Like when a mother whispers instructions softly in a child’s ear.

Chapter 23: Mother Nature

“-kua' sumpaatuH, go and learn.” I whispered to my daughter. I knew Nettie paid attention to the dreams.

Hopefully, she will listen to the advice I've prepared for her.

Fall

Chapter 24: Nettie

Jumping down from the Forest Service truck, Nettie walked around the back to retrieve her gear. Flipping down the tailgate, she hopped into the back and grabbed her state issued pack and hard hat. She smacked the back window of the cab to say goodbye to Abby, then jumped out and closed the tailgate. The truck took off before she even started walking up the driveway.

Nettie could smell herself now. Wildfire smoke, sweat, and days of dirt combined in one powerful smell that permeated the air around her like an aura. Nettie loved it. It was weird to be back home after three weeks volunteering on the wildfire engine crew. She couldn't wait to find out news from Troy, Blake, and Wade about stopping the drilling contract up the canyon.

Opening the door and leaving her stinky backpack outside of the door to be unpacked and cleaned later, Nettie walked in.

“Anyone home?” she hollered out, hoping her grandfather was home. No answer except for Hintza's barks outside in the kennel. “Just a minute, Hintza. I need to take a grime fighting shower first.”

After twenty minutes, Nettie walked out of the bathroom her hair twisted into a faded blue towel on top of her head and wearing a comfy, tide-smelling t-shirt and sweats. Her olive skin was still pink from the heat of the shower and the coolness of the air outside the bathroom gave her chicken skin along her arms. Hearing Hintza start barking again, Nettie quickly unwrapped the towel and brushed through her long black hair.

As she walked down the hall, she glanced the photo of her mother. Quickly grabbing a ponytail holder, she braided her hair in a single braid down her back, and rushed out to greet the German Shepherd who was tired of waiting for a hello.

Collin had gotten her a puppy on her 17th birthday. Since Collin had graduate that year, he didn't want her to be lonely knowing he would be away from the house more. He had gotten a job with Earl's Automotive and Towing and would be working full time. It wasn't like she wouldn't see him; he just wasn't going to be around as often. Collin knew how hard school could be. He also knew how hard it would be for Nettie to come home and not have his ear to listen to all the day's problems.

Nettie opened the kennel door and gave Hintza a huge hug. The German Shepherd bounded up, knocking Nettie flat on her butt.

"Okay, okay. I missed ya, too. I'm sorry I left ya for so long." Nettie held up her arms trying to protect her face from the lick attack.

"Go find your ball," she reminded Hintza, who bounded off across the weedy yard to find a hidden treasure. They had never planted grass or cared to. Why plant something that is not natural to the environment? Besides, her family always thought it was a waste of resources, both time and water.

As she watched the dog search for the ball, she thought about the last three weeks. Since she was only eighteen and this was her first assignment, she was placed on the engine crew. Nettie was delighted when she reached the station to find out Abby had gotten the second volunteer position. The two embraced when they saw each other, both thankful they wouldn't be stuck with Ammon for three weeks.

"Ammon didn't make it, eh?" Nettie asked in mock question.

"Yeh, didn't you hear? Captain denied his red card. Said it wasn't his physical

abilities but his mental abilities and there was no way he was letting a racist prick on his crew.”

“Holy crap,” replied Nettie, realizing Abby must have mentioned Ammon’s bullying to the captain. She smiled at Abby to say thank you. Abby smiled back to say she was welcome.

Basically, her and Abby were given a giant checklist that they had to go through every day to make sure the engine was ready in case they were called on a fire. Luckily, her last week, they were.

It was a small wildfire in comparison to some of the major wildfires that burned hundreds of acres and burned hot during the fire season in Utah. When the engine crew reached the fire, they had to keep the fire from hopping a dirt road where several million-dollar homes were situated.

The sky was a fog of brown smoke when they arrived. Trying to break through the barrier, the light from the sun gave everything an orange hazy glow, making it feel like a giant bubble had been placed around the area. Radio feeds kept breaking the odd silence that had permeated every inch of the forest, making it feel like they were in a sound booth.

Abby and Nettie, along with Captain William drove up to the house at the top of the vacation home subdivision. The driveway opened into a clearing where a giant house sat back in the lush forest. Nettie’s house could fit on the front porch of the giant million-dollar log cabin. *If her home was situated in those trees, would they even send someone to access the situation?* She knew the answer.

“This house is not worth saving or putting lives in danger announced the captain.” He pointed out how the north side of the house had been built up too close to the pine trees and there wasn’t a safe perimeter around the entire home. Just then the radio

crackled alive with several alerts. The fire had turned their way and they needed to set up to light a backfire along the road.

“Damn it. Jump in the truck. We gotta get back down to the engine,” instructed Captain William. The three jumped in the vehicle and headed back down the road.

The fire engine was parked on the road near a wide-open field, away from the edge of the forest. As they emerged from the forest, Nettie saw the fire clawing its way along the edge of the forest.

Black smoke had replaced the brown, muting the sun. It was noon but felt like evening. An airtanker dipped low on the edge of the burn, releasing blood-red fire retardant on smoldering sagebrush. Nettie squinted in worry as the earth was spray-painted with the “fertilizer.” Too much of a good thing can kill you, including the fire retardant used. Nature understands moderation. Balance. When you try to control that balance, the scales build up power and release themselves with as much force as was put into that control.

Stepping down from the truck, the blast of wind enveloped Nettie in burnt red light. Smoke ebbed and flowed on the wind, like Mother Nature was blowing into a pot of dry ice; one moment the smoke was thick as mud, the next it had disappeared altogether. The wind whipped strands of hair out of her tight ponytail. She pulled her bandana up over her mouth and nostrils and secured her hard hat.

“Get those drip torches burning. Tyler, head south along the dirt road. Neval, you head up toward the north. Not sure we can keep her from jumpin’ that tree line. Abby and Nettie, you get the hoses. I want you to start soaking the other side of the road. We can protect these lower houses.”

Their Co-Captain, Eric, drove the truck up the dirt road as Nettie and Abby carried the hose, soaking the ground along the opposite side of the dirt road. The sounds of the rest of the crew digging grew faint behind her. A low rumble like the constant crashing of ocean waves, rolled toward Nettie, growing louder and louder. She could feel the fire beneath her feet, as if she were standing next to a waterfall.

Turning around, Nettie saw the wall of flames engulfing the juniper and mountain mahogany trees about 300 feet way from where she stood. She watched as the monstrous beast clawed its way forward, grabbing at the weeds and pulling its gigantic body forward. Nettie was stunned by the force of heat that had taken her breath away.

Continuing to guide the water hose, she watched as the beastly inferno began to morph. Smoke blew across Nettie's path blinding her for a moment and then clearing to show not a beast but a magnificent bear. It rose on its hind legs and roared at the sky as a helicopter dropped a giant bucket of water along the bear's right side. The bear fell back down to the earth and began clawing toward the left, away from the wet earth. The bear limped forward injured, still consuming the sagebrush and kindling as quickly as it could, trying to regain its strength.

The fear in Nettie's eyes turned to sorrow. The fire's anguish was heavy in the air as it bellowed loudly. Nettie understood fire brought life not death. It cleansed the earth and rejuvenated areas that had become dead or stagnant. Man's fear trapped Fire in a controlled hibernation. When Fire woke up, it consumed the land in its voracious appetite to cleans the earth of the blight and rot that had been allowed to fester. It was doing the job it was created to do and was confused for being punished.

The bear looked at Nettie with pleading eyes then it turned away trying to crawl down the open field. The backfire that had been lit by the drip torches undulated in a

snake like pattern, slithering in a wavy wriggle along the ground. Instinctually, the inferno wanted to fight the smaller fire. Yet, there was some unspoken understanding. The smaller fire embraced the roaring beast and both fires calmed into a blackened field.

The bump of a snout brought Nettie back from the scene. Hintza found her tennis ball and was becoming impatient for Nettie to throw the ball.

“Drop it!” Nettie pointed to the ground. The German Shepherd quickly dropped the ball, taking several steps backward. Picking up the slobber-soaked tennis ball, Nettie threw the ball to the edge of the fence.

“I’m not sure if wildfire is my path, Hintza,” Nettie spoke out loud to the dog, who was running back with the ball. “I want to do something, but I don’t know how to help.”

Nettie thought about the two fires, how one type of fire was seen as protective and the other destructive.

“That’s it Hintza! Two negatives equal a positive.” Nettie ran back inside the house to snag her truck keys. “I know how to stop that drill from moving any further.”

Chapter 25: Ryan

The days were getting shorter. An hour had been cut out of the day now that they were moving into August. Ryan's irrational fear of the dark had not subsided. *Thank God, I haven't seen any more shadows.* Ryan thought as he looked at his watch. Eight o'clock.

The crew still had problems with the ground, but there hadn't been any major issues for a few weeks now. No more lost tools, no animals, no more apparitions. Ryan felt like they were in the eye of the storm. Everyone else had begun to relax. But relaxing led to forgetting, and the weird sightings were starting to move backward in everyone's reserve memories. Why hold onto the unexplainable? Especially now that they were beginning to get better footage.

Once, Ryan had loved the night. Playing ghost in the graveyard, or kick-the-can, the one streetlight creating an orange-yellow haze, their only light at the far end of the street – base. Sleeping by himself throughout the summer on the trampoline, just so he could stare at the milky way as he fell asleep. Nature was comforting not frightening, but now she had become terrifying.

Ryan watched the shades crawl along the dirt and wondered if he would ever stop fearing them. The wind picked up and blew Ryan's ball cap off his head, rolling it toward the doghouse. *Oh no!* Thought Ryan. *Something's changed.* Their luck was no longer going to continue.

Weeks earlier, the LP mining company had sent animal control up the canyon and around the area to find the mountain lion.

“Wish I could be up there with them huntin' that cat,” said the tracker helper.

“Why?” Ryan didn’t know why he had asked the question when he didn’t care to know the answer.

“It has huge paws. That thing would be an awesome prize to add to my collection.” The helper flashed one of those “you know” smiles. Just because they were in the same job environment didn’t mean they had the same values for the land and the animals. Ryan often found himself at odds with driller conversations. Maybe that is why people respected him in the industry, he shut up and didn’t participate in the man-speak language of drillers. If only they knew his true personality, he would be harassed out of the job.

The helper continued, “Yeh, I live up in Montana and we go big game hunting every year. Hey, you wouldn’t wanna buy any coyote pelts, would ya? I got a bunch. There was a time the government was paying good money for coyote, but now they ain’t worth much.”

“No,” was all Ryan said and walked away. He was thankful that they never did find the mountain lion, or the other animals for that matter. *I’m so glad that it moved on. Smart.*

Ryan grabbed his hat that had rolled near the doghouse steps. Placing the frayed bill cap back on his head, he looked at the sky that was becoming water colored with orange and pink. His favorite color of sunset was the moment that the pastel pinks turned to a bright orange.

Clanking inside the doghouse made Ryan go rigid. He looked around the area. Dugan and the others had already made their way up to the drill. Ryan still had a few minutes before their cross-shift briefing and he wasn’t in any hurry to get up to the surgery room. He just needed a moment to enjoy the area as it should be.

Damn it. Do I go see who is inside? Thought Ryan. He looked around up at the platform to see if he could count heads. Lenny wouldn't be out until tomorrow morning and the rest of the guys were bullshitting around the sample table. Bill was at the controls laughing at something the guys had said. Everyone was accounted for.

"The window got left open," he said out loud to rationalize the sound. "The wind picked up, knocked something over."

The pop of a heavy tool landing on the diamond plate steel flooring suggested Ryan's guess was incorrect. *Great, now I'm gunna need to check it out.*

Ryan was grateful it was still light outside. The sun may have set, but he still had a good thirty minutes before it got dark. Walking up the stairs with intentional stomps, Ryan jiggled the handle of the door, pretending to unlock it. Whatever, or whoever was inside, he didn't want to find them. And he didn't care if they were stealing something either. It wasn't his job to protect the tools. Besides, the company would buy a replacement like they purchased toilet paper.

Cautiously walking in, Ryan saw the one window to the trailer was open. The old playboy pics that had been tacked up on the cork board above the computer were flapping gently in the breeze. But nothing else seemed out of place. In fact, Lenny had left his stale coffee mug next to the computer that morning, adding a flat, musky smell to the old Copenhagen and dirty man sweat aroma of the doghouse.

Slowly walking in Ryan looked around at the wrenches that had been hung on nails and dirt caked tools on old metal shelving. Again, nothing seemed missing.

Ryan's steel toed work boots made hollow thumping noises on the skid proof flooring as he walked further into the trailer. The generator sat at the far end, silent for the moment since Lenny had left. A long table sat just under the window with a computer

at one end and a microwave at the other end. Two rolling chairs that had been repurposed from an old cubicle office were pushed under the table. Across from the table was a giant bench littered with the men's bags, jackets, dirty pants, and old socks. Things that had been changed at some point but not picked up, because, why? There was no partner to tell you to put things away. It was a dirty job, who cared if the place you used for a break was dirty, too.

Seeing that everything looked normal, and not caring to investigate further, Ryan pivoted around to head back out of the trailer. Stopping mid-turn, his heart began to race as he saw a figure darker than the shadows squatting under the table in the dark corner nearest the welder. Its head tilted to the side, black hair falling forward realizing it had been seen. Creeping forward, the black figure put one leg out in front of its body as it seemed to writhe forward. Ryan had been underground, seen shit that no man has ever laid eyes on before. Been in complete black, riding in shoddy elevators down thousands of feet into mines. But he could not move or take his eyes away from the thing crawling toward him.

Finally, it stood up to its full height. Hands raised in the sky.

"Okay, you caught me," a female voice spoke up.

Ryan rubbed his eyes. A beautiful young woman, only about 5'2", stood in front of him wearing a grungy, dirt covered t-shirt and grey sweats. Several strands of onyx hair fell over her rosy cheeks, having fallen out of the single braid that rested on her shoulder. On her back was a large government green backpack that seemed to be giving off a campfire smell that mixed with a smell of honeysuckle.

Regaining some resemblance of the man he was, Ryan became pissed.

"What the hell are you doin' in here? You're trespassing, ya little piss ant."

“I got lost. Thought there might be a phone I could use to call home.”

“Nice try. Where’s your phone?”

“It’s dead.”

“Show me.”

“I’m not showin’ you anything.”

Ryan rubbed the bridge of his nose. *Why was his brain seeing things that were not there?* Knowing that there was a person under the desk instead of something ominous made Ryan think about what Dugan had told him several weeks back. *There was an earthquake, not arms. Had he cracked like the walls of the mine?*

Ryan pulled out both chairs and pointed to one for the young woman to sit down. He thought that she wouldn’t sit because the chair was nasty, but she didn’t even look twice as she plopped into the seat. She rocked from side to side in the chair, looking around the building.

As the light from the setting sun began to dim, so did the light in the trailer. Ryan looked at his watch. He had five minutes before he had to be up at the drill. Walking over to the generator, Ryan prepped the generator, turned the ignition, and yanked the starter cord. The engine sputtered on and moved into its low hum. The lights of the trailer bathed the room in florescent sunlight.

Sitting down in the empty seat, Ryan stared at the woman for a moment. *Where had he seen her before?* He hated that feeling. Maybe she was from around here and he’d seen her in the convenient store.? He wasn’t sure.

“I’ve got five minutes before my cross shift. I’d prefer not callin’ the police and being able to walk up to the drill station knowing you’re gone.” The girl stopped looking around and listened intently.

“You can let me look in your pack and then you can go on your way. Or we call the police and I make a huge deal out of this because you made me late.”

The girl listened without interrupting. It didn't take her long to decide. Pulling the pack from her back, she opened the large pocket and pushed the bag over to Ryan with her foot.

Ryan recognized the type of pack. It was a government issued pack. The thing wreaked of fire smoke.

“So, you're a wildland firefighter?”

The girl didn't say anything.

“Seems weird that a firefighter would get lost in this area.”

Still, she said nothing.

Ryan looked through the bag, there was nothing inside. It was completely empty. Even the front pockets were void of content. *Well, she was clearly planning on filling this thing full.* He thought.

“Weird that a wildland firefighter would want to steal things from a drill site.”

“I wasn't stealin' anything. There isn't anything in my bag. You just looked.”

“That's what's interesting. It's completely empty. Didn't you say you were hiking and got lost?”

“Did I say I was hiking?”

“Well, you'd have to be to make it this far up the mountain.” Ryan took a closer look at the girl. She didn't look like the usual thieves that they caught stealing tools to sell at a pawn shop. Actually, she looked indigenous to Ryan. Growing up in Roosevelt he had a lot of friends that were from the Ute tribe.

“So, you're Ute?”

“What does that have to do with anything?” The girl had taken a rock out of her pocket and was rubbing it between her fingers.

“Well, you look Native American. And it doesn’t take much to realize that, if you are, you’re upset we’re drilling’. This ain’t my first rodeo, miss.”

“I’m Timpanogos, not Ute,” the young lady fired back.

“So?”

“Do you know the mountain you’re on?”

“Nope.” Come to think of it, he really didn’t know. The contract was the Tabby Contract, and he just assumed the company had shortened the name of the town.

“You’re on Tabby Mountain and drilling at the base of Tabby Canyon. It’s named after my ancestor Tabby-To-Kwanah, or Tabiona.”

“Wow, impressive,” Ryan said robotically. “I’m assuming this is sacred ground for your nation. So, why aren’t the local tribes makin’ a huge fuss?”

The young lady looked down at the rock she held in her hands. Rubbing her thumb slowly across the smoothed surface, she seemed to be lost in thought.

“Any day now, we have about three more minutes,” Ryan said breaking her concentration.

“It is sacred to my brother and me. Besides, there aren’t enough of us to put up a fight anymore,” the young woman sighed. “We used to fight, thousands of my people protected the land in Utah. Betrayed, massacred, and finally, since we had been reduced to such a small number, the federal government lumped us in with the Utes, left to disappear.”

The generator hummed and sputtered in the silence between the two allies. Ryan stood up and smoothed his pants down. Pushing the chair back under the desk, he looked

down at the young woman. The look in her hazel eyes, determination, and fire, sparked a flashback of the apparition he had seen after the multi-cat incident. His fear was replaced with resolve.

Looking at his watch, he walked to the end of the trailer and picked up a plastic bucket. With his hands on the doorknob, he turned to the woman who was standing tall, stoic, waiting for his reply.

“We keep the extra diamond drill heads in that metal toolbox.” Ryan pointed to the large white metal doored cupboards next to the tool shelves. With that, Ryan opened the door and stepped out of the trailer. It was now in her hands what she wanted to do with that information.

“Where the hell you been, Ryan?” shouted Dugan. “Your late.”

“Sorry guys.” Ryan said holding up the bucket. “Looks like a long night for me. I’ve got a serious case of the shits. Must of eaten somethin’ bad.”

Chapter 26: Nettie

Motionless, Nettie stood alone in the trailer. The sound of the door closing behind the man, still echoed in her head. *Do I run or do I stay?* She was left standing, gripping her grounding rock, and wondering if he had gone out to call the cops and if she had time to get out.

Ookwan. Advised the rock.

Nettie looked out the window, it had grown dark outside, providing her the cover she hoped for when she first climbed through the open window. Daring to move, after several seconds of staring, she quickly walked over to the door and peaked out. It was dusk outside, leaving still a little light to see by in the dark. She couldn't hear any voices near the trailer, and it looked like all the men were still up at the drill station.

Cross shift.

The driller had mentioned he had five minutes before his cross shift. Nettie closed the door and looked at the toolbox that the guy had pointed out. She didn't have much time before the day shift drillers caught her in their trailer. Somehow, she knew they would not be as forgiving as the man that just left.

Kneeling in front of the toolbox, Nettie took off her pack. The doors screeched open revealing two shelves full of black cylinder-shaped metal objects with grey metal teeth. They reminded Nettie of her 6th grade castle project and cutting castle turrets out of toilet paper tubes. *Are these drill heads?* The metal objects were as big as a bottle of spaghetti sauce, Nettie hoped they weren't any heavier. They weren't.

Grabbing two drill bits, Nettie zipped up the bag, and flipped it around on her shoulders. She moved some of the other drill bits forward so nothing seemed missing if someone looked in quickly. Standing up and closing the toolbox doors, Nettie ran over to

the window. Stepping up on the wobbly table, she lowered the backpack out the window and then let it drop. Putting one leg through the window and then the other, she slid backward with her feet first. Nettie pushed herself over the ledge and lowered herself with her hands.

As she landed on the ground, she heard footsteps and voices. She paused against the trailer, hoping it was dark enough that she was hidden. Hearing the door to the trailer open and the voices move inside, Nettie grabbed the backpack and took off sprinting. She thanked the rocks for rolling out of her way and the bushes for not snagging her toes as she ran.

Reaching the barbed wire fencing, Nettie stopped to catch her breath. She could see the lights of the drill station brighten the sky like a giant searchlight. The trees leaned away from the awful light, stuck in a frozen run. Turning east and staying in the dark, Nettie followed the fence line as it curved around the mining area.

Walking along the perimeter, Nettie thought about her epiphany from earlier. Realizing that fire can stop fire, she thought that maybe metal could stop metal. Without much of a plan, she rushed to the drill site and watched carefully as all the drillers left the trailer. Seeing the open window, she quickly made her way inside. As she stepped down on the table below the window, she thought it would be solid since it had a microwave and a computer on it. It wasn't. The slight wobble made a metal coffee mug fall off the table. Ducking under the table to grab the mug, Nettie heard the door handle jiggle.

Quickly pulling both chairs under the desk, Nettie squatted as far back into the shadow of the table as she could. Breathing shallow, Nettie watched as the driller looked around the trailer. He had obviously heard the crash.

Please, don't let him see me. Maapiüatu ~ tümaapiüatu. The Shoshoni words came to her mind as she prayed for help. This was her chance to do something. She couldn't wait any longer. Her heart ached every time she thought of the drill, a core pain that radiated through her body as if she was being drilled into. She felt like she was being tormented, forced to watch as someone she loved was being tortured, and all she could do was scream. She closed her eyes against the misery she felt for the Earth.

Opening her eyes, she realized that the man was staring in her direction. *Does he see me?* She thought tilting her head. As she did, the man's eyes went wide with fear. *Is he afraid of me?* Knowing she was caught, there was nothing she could do but step forward and face the consequences. Crawling out from under the table, Nettie stood tall in front of the man. Chin raised, like the picture of her mother in the hall, she stood with as much dignity and certainty as her mother had.

Nettie was booted out of her thoughts as she reached the dirt road that led to the drill area. Stepping back behind a medium-sized pine tree, Nettie listened carefully. She hadn't paid attention to the cross-shift crew and knew they would be leaving. *Have they left already? Did I hear a vehicle earlier?* Nettie hesitated.

Not hearing the crunch of rocks or the sputtering of a truck engine, Nettie stepped out from behind the tree. Just as she did, a little skunk came wobbling out of the bushes on the other side of the road. It would stop and sniff, as it meandered around with its flag-like tail ready for any attack. Stopping dead in her tracks and easing herself as softly as she could back behind the tree, she watched the skunk. Nettie smiled as the little creature twirled and snuffed the ground, searching for grubs or insects around the base of the trees and shrubs.

The small critter halted in its pursuit and looked up the road. At that exact moment, Nettie heard the hum of an engine. The skunk took off in the bushes, just as the truck rounded the bend in the road, high beams on. Nettie shrunk closer to the tree, praying again that she wouldn't get caught. The truck bounded past her and down the mountain. Nettie stood there until the only sound that was left was the distant thrum of the drill.

“Thank you, Brother Skunk for distracting me until they passed,” Nettie whispered toward where the skunk had run off. “But, please, if you don't mind, I need to follow the fence around to the other side.” Hoping the skunk had moved further west, Nettie crossed the dirt road and headed to the other side of the drill station.

Thirty-minutes later, Nettie found herself sitting in her small hideout she hid in the night she discovered the guys had asked for help from their spirit guides. She had pulled the drill heads out of her bag and set them in front of her on the ground. *Now what?* She thought as she stared at the metal cylinders.

She knew that she wanted to throw them down the drill hole, but she hadn't even thought about how she was going to do that. She had run up to the drill site with a partial plan to steal tools she could use from the trailer. She hadn't thought about how she was going to get them down the hole.

Crawling out of her hideout and near the drill platform, Nettie watched as the drillers went about their usual business. The driller that had helped her was at the controls, a Styrofoam cup in his hand, which he continually spit sunflower shells into. Two other drillers, the ones that had run after Wade and the foxes, were helping with the drill. The fourth, the one the mountain lion had protected itself from, was cataloguing large pieces of rock. Everything seemed to be running smoothly.

Suddenly, Nettie notice that the driller at the controls had spotted her. *How in the world can he see me? It must be dark past the edges of the light.*

The man looked around at his crew, as if he was making sure they hadn't seen her either. Then looking directly in her direction, he mouthed the words "not yet," and shook his head. Nettie backed up and went back to her hiding place.

"Not yet, what the hell does he mean 'not yet?'" she whispered out loud to herself. "When will 'yet' be 'now'? And what the hell am I supposed to do when the time is 'now?'" Nettie looked up at the stars through the trees and sighed. She knew it was going to be a long night.

Guessing she needed to watch for a signal from the driller dude, Nettie left her hiding spot. Clearing a spot near a large sagebrush bush, Nettie sat on her empty backpack. She figured that the other dudes wouldn't be able to see her and wouldn't even be looking for her. But if the one driller gave her a signal, then she was in position where she could run up to the drill and drop the cylinders down.

After about an hour of watching the drillers monotonous routine, Nettie pulled her knees up to her chest and rested her arms on them. She hadn't brought anything with her and was now regretting her knee-jerk reaction. Setting her head on her arms, she thought she would rest her eyes for just a moment. *There hasn't been any change for an hour. I bet he is waiting for a break time or something.* Nettie's eyes grew heavier with sleep and any rational decision making went out of her mind as dreams moved in.

Finding herself walking along a lush riparian area of a forest, Nettie paused to look around. A blue-green stream purred over rounded rocks, sparkling in places where the sun shone through in heavenly rays. Flourishing ferns and foliage rippled with laughter as the stream whispered its secrets, sharing knowledge it had gained from further up the

hill. The wind picked up the whispers and pirouetted up to the treetops, a mix of aspen and pine. Their branches giggled with delight at the news.

Following the stream up the hill, Nettie continued to walk. Her heart fluttered with the joy at the Earth's happiness. Ahead she could see light in a clearing and felt a curious pull.

Stepping out of the forest, Nettie fell to her knees. Before her was a magnificent vista, and in the distance, she saw Tabby Canyon. Its towering sentinels a brilliant red, accented by a stream flowing down the ravine, giving life to thousands of wildflowers across the fields. Yellows, purples, pinks, and blues of petals rustled in surprise when Nettie stepped into the clearing.

In front of Nettie sat four magnificent creatures, the bobcat, the fox, the wolf, and the mountain lion. As in her Uncle Julius's story, the mountain lion had the head and feet of a man. Each animal sat with their hind quarters down and their front feet firmly planted in front of them, like regal Egyptian cats. Though their air was not of a haughty nature, Nettie felt compassion as they looked at her.

Dahwe sumbanraduxande sunni e -kahte, Nettie. We know why you are here, Nettie.

In her dreams, Nettie always understood the Shoshoni language. She listened intently as the mountain lion spoke to her.

Are you afraid? asked the mountain lion.

"No, I do not fear you. I have heard the stories of the great medicine man who was sent to ask for your help."

Is that why you are here? To ask for help from Brother Wolf, your spirit guide.

Her guide? Nettie thought for a moment. The question seemed more rhetorical. *Had she been seeking their help?*

“Yes, I do need your help? A drilling company has taken over Tabby Canyon and is drilling to search for precious metals. If they find what they are looking for, they will mine the area and the canyon. This beautiful area will be destroyed and turned into an open pit like the open pit on Oquirrh Mountain.”

It is sad that man has become obsessed with consuming the land. Too many have forgotten that what they see in front of them, the trees, the mountains, the ocean, is the representation of the Divine. There are too many that are blinded by this that we can no longer stop their destruction. Why is this small part of the world so important to you? What makes this area so special?

“This canyon meant everything to my brother and me. His spirit guide was the wolf.” Brother Wolf nodded his head in acknowledgement as Nettie continued. “He protected his pack, which was more than his family, but also his friends and the earth.” Nettie swallowed the lump forming in her throat. This was not a time to grieve, but to show strength. “However, it would be selfish to ask you to protect this land based on my need to connect to my brother.”

Is that so. Then why are you seeking our help?

“I feel her. Mother Earth. She screams for help, in my dreams, on the wind. Her pain writhes in the back of my mind. A sixth sense that something is wrong. I can feel it crawl up my spine. I smell it in the air, the decay. I see it in the weariness of the trees.

I watched as she tried to cleanse herself with fire. I feared for the fire itself more than the destruction it carried.”

Tears threatened to brim over, but Nettie pulled that pain inside and transferred it to fortitude. The time for tears and sorrow had passed, just as the season. And just like the season, life revolved in a circle, death, and life. Nettie realized that Earth understood this balance.

“She understands, their needs to be balance in all things. This may be a small part of the world, but the balance must be restored. And even a small canyon and a small mountain, in the middle of Utah, can be part of that balance.”

We understand this balance. Because it is this balance that you seek, we will help you. But you must promise us that you will not forget this moment. You must continue to fight for this balance. Like the wolf, you must keep your pack safe. You must protect not only this canyon, but others like it. Those small corners that seem to be forgotten but are corner stones to harmony.

Standing with courage and resolution, Nettie nodded her head in agreement.

Chapter 27: Nettie

Yelling above the throttle of the drill jolted Nettie out of her sleep. Her legs had cramped up and her neck ached all the way down to her shoulder blades. Stretching her legs in front of her, Nettie flinched as a charley-horse gripped the muscles in her right leg. Pulling her toes forward, she worked the tightness out of her calf.

Sitting up, she peered around the bush. The drill had been reversed, and the two helpers were now taking rods off the drill instead of placing them on. Nettie realized that the sun had woken up and had begun stretching its arms across the cloudy sky in an intense red and yellow yawn. *Crap, how long did I sleep?*

“She is almost there Dugan. I’m thinking we finish tripping her out and let the day shift change the drill head,” Nettie’s accomplice called to his helper that was placing a giant rod on the rack filled with rods.

“Hell yeah, I second that motion,” said the other helper, hocking brown spit on the ground.

The others agreed. Nettie saw that her accomplice was staring straight at her. She nodded her head and looked at the time on her phone. *It’s six thirty! How the heck did I sleep that long?* Nettie scrunched lower in the bushes realizing that the dark could no longer help hide her. She looked toward the west, the night sky waved at her and shrugged. She smiled knowing that Night had helped her to sleep.

With the dream still vivid in her mind, she knew what she needed to do, and she knew she could do it.

As the sun rose over the mountain, and peeked over the peaks the drillers pulled the last of the rods out of the hole.

“Jake-ass go grab the drill bit for the next crew,” pressed the driller with the overalls.

“Nah, it’s been a while since we just debriefed in the doghouse,” said her ally at the controls. “I don’t know about you guys, but I would like to sit down for once while we tell them where we are at with the footage.”

Everyone else agreed. Packing up their stuff, the four drillers headed one by one down toward the trailer. Nettie’s friend nodded toward her and turned to leave.

There was no time to wait. Just as the four were heading out of the drill area, Nettie could see a pickup truck pulling up alongside the trailer.

Slinking around the far end of the bushes, Nettie stayed low. As swiftly, but as stealthily, as she could Nettie stepped toward the drill platform in calculated steps like a wolf. Keeping her eyes continually on the men that were walking away, Nettie squatted down near the rod rack.

Waiting until the last of the men walked into the trailer, Nettie ran up to the drill. Looking down into the small hole, Nettie felt nauseous. It was as if she were looking at a deep puncture wound in her own arm. Around the wound the ground looked infected and inflamed as the dirt rose up around the site.

Taking the first drill bit out of her pack, Nettie flipped the object, so the turrets were facing upward. Fire fights fire. She knew that the metal teeth of the two drill heads would have to meet, cancel each other. Holding the cylinder just above the rim of the hole, Nettie let go. The object disappeared quicker than a penny in a well. Grabbing the second drill bit, she sent it down the hole to disappear forever.

Nettie backed out of the drill site, swiping at her tracks as she walked backward into the safety of the juniper trees and sage brush. Guilt gripped her as she ran back to her hiding spot.

“What have I done?” she whispered. She had a sinking feeling that those drill pieces would be stuck in the ground forever. A nail had been hammered into Earth’s side and now Nettie just made sure it would never come out again. *Won’t that wound fester and spread?*

No, it’s fine. It will stop the drilling. This must be what my dream meant.

The reverberating sound of the drill starting up again, made Nettie pause. *Should I wait around?* Nettie looked at her phone. It was almost eight and she knew that she would have messages waiting for her when she got back into service.

Pulling up to her home, Troy’s truck was parked in the driveway. Excitement and anxiety filled Nettie. She was excited that Troy was there, but guilty she hadn’t told anyone where she would be.

Opening the door as softly as she could, Nettie walked into the house to find her grandfather and Troy sitting at the kitchen table. Hintza jumped up on Nettie, placing her front paws on Nettie shoulder and licking her face, lecturing her for leaving. It helped to ease the tension that Nettie had walked into, like a thick tent of web worms.

The chair whined as Nettie pulled it out from under the table and sat next to Troy. Nettie braved a look at Troy. His golden eyes held concern, not anger.

“Good morning,” said her grandfather. “Glad you made it home safely. You sleep up by the lake again? How come you didn’t take Hintza? She was very mad at you last night.”

Nettie smiled and patted the dog's neck where she was the fuzziest. She wasn't surprised that her grandfather wasn't upset. It was not unusual for her to take off and sleep up in the mountains.

"Actually, I took a hike up Tabby Canyon." It was better to tell the truth than to lie. There was no point in hiding her truth.

"And?" continued her grandfather.

"I fell asleep."

"Did you have any dreams?" was her grandfather's first question.

"Yes." Nettie told her grandfather and Troy about the dream and how she dropped the metal cylinders down the drill hole.

There was silence for a moment when she finished.

"If the spirit of the mountain lion said that he would help you, I believe that he will," explained her grandfather. "I understand your guilt about throwing something into the earth that may never be retrieved. Balance must be restored."

"I understand," Nettie said looking down. Troy reached over and took Nettie's hand linking his fingers with hers.

"With that said, have faith that the promise that was made will be fulfilled." Standing and hitching his jeans up near the large rodeo belt buckle, Nettie's grandfather walked toward the door. "Keep an eye out tonight. Sounds like a storm might be heading our way." And with that, Nettie's grandpa walked out the door.

"Well," said Nettie turning to Troy, not knowing what to say now that they were alone. It had been three weeks since they had spoken. Doubt crept into her mind. Even though he held her hand she worried that perhaps the fact that she had run off without contacting him may have changed things.

“Well,” said Troy flashing his sly grin and gently cupping her cheeks in his hand.

“I’ve missed you.”

Nettie closed her eyes as Troy tenderly kissed her lips.

Chapter 28: Ryan

He hadn't slept much. His mind looping through a million scenarios where he was caught aiding the young woman. He also couldn't get the vision of her standing in the trees, a stunning force of nature.

Dark clouds were boiling along the southwestern sky as Ryan and his crew arrived at the drill sight that evening. Since they started up the mountain, the wind had picked up, blowing dust into the men's eyes as they hopped out of the truck.

"Well, shit! That's what we get for having a productive night, yesterday," exclaimed Dugan pointing to the clouds.

"Isn't there a saying, like sailors in the morn are forlorn, or something like that?" asked Mike opening the door to the doghouse and throwing his bag on the bench. He stopped short when he realized Lenny was sitting in a rolling chair on the phone. His face set to the usually angry purple.

Ryan grabbed his hard hat from its post and his PPE jacket for cold weather. In a rough whisper, not caring that Lenny was on the phone, Ryan continued the conversation.

"It's 'red sky at morning, sailor take warning, or shepherd take warning,'" Ryan said taking off his ball cap and putting his hard hat on.

"How the hell do you remember that shit," asked Dugan, pulling his arms through his jacket. "Did we have a red sky this morning'? I didn't pay attention."

"Yeh, we did," piped in Jacob. "It was really red. Don't you remember Mike pointing it out as we drove down the mountain at the end of shift?"

“Dude, my brain goes into shutdown mode when we drive. All I can focus on is staying awake long enough to shower and collapse into bed,” replied Dugan.

“That’s what your mom...” Jacob replied but was cut off by Lenny. All the guys laughed.

“The rods are stuck,” Lenny said placing the phone back on the receiver.

“Not a big deal,” said Ryan, hoping that guilt wasn’t showing on his face. “Not like we haven’t gotten them unstuck before.”

“This time they are really stuck. Bill’s crew has been trying to get the rods to move since about midnight. They won’t move up or down.”

“That’s what...”

Lenny put his hand up before Jake could even get the rest of his sentence out. “I don’t need your immature bullshit right now, Jake. So, shut up.”

Ryan’s crew just grinned at each other.

“Do you want me to continue to try to get them unstuck?” asked Ryan.

“Yeh, I ain’t leavin’ until we can get this thing movin’ again,” said Lenny, pushing past the men and opening the door. “I will meet you up at the platform.” Lenny didn’t look back as he walked out the door.

All the men groaned in unison.

“How the hell did they get the rods stuck so bad?” asked Dugan. “We set things up perfectly for them last night.”

“Maybe Jake’s little saying is true. We have been warned,” said Ryan grinning at the men and following Lenny out the door.

Several hours later, Ryan sat at the controls. Nothing had changed since they started their shift, except that the wind had picked up and dark clouds hung ominously above their heads like a death shroud.

After Ryan’s encounter with the young woman, something had clicked in his head. He looked up at the canyon walls, their protective stance against the coming storm gave him comfort instead of fear. It was as if they looked at him differently, like they knew he was on their side.

Ryan smiled as he thought of what was below binding up the drill and forcing them to abandon this hole. *They will just move locations.* Thought Ryan. But for right now, he didn’t want to worry about the next hole. He was content to enjoy watching Lenny become more agitated as the night wore on.

“They’re calling’ it,” said Lenny walking up to the drill with his two-way radio. “Grab the welder. We’re gunna need to cut the rods and seal the hole.”

“The welder?” asked Dugan. “Ain’t the welder for putting things together?” He knew the welder could be used to cut, he just wanted to mess with Lenny.

“Yes, the welder. It will work. Now go grab it,” hollered Lenny.

“Ain’t that a bad idea,” said Ryan. “With this storm, won’t it blow too many sparks? It’s August and things are quite dry right now.”

“Seriously, you are worried about that. It’s going to rain here soon. Look at that storm that is moving our way.”

Ryan looked up at the sky. Further to the south he saw light ripple through the clouds. *Those clouds ain’t bringing rain.* He watched another flash of light pulse above the clouds.

Sparks flew from the welder as Dugan slowly cut through the rods. Jacob and Mike packed up the sample table. The wind was tantruming, throwing dust and particles in its quarrel with the drillers. Ryan watched as the wind grabbed the sparks from the welding machine and tossed them toward the tree line. It didn’t look like any spark stayed alive long enough to land on any of the dead trees they had pushed to the side to make way for the drill platform.

Just as Dugan finished the last of the cut, a huge crack of thunder burst through the air, making all the men recoil.

“Dude, that was too close,” said Ryan to Lenny. “We need to call this for tonight and move where it’s safe. That’s an electrical storm headin’ our way.”

Lenny hesitated but quickly jumped on the radio.

“Dugan, grab the welder and head inside. I ain’t waiting for corporate to give the permission to get out of this storm.” Dugan nodded to Ryan. Ryan helped Dugan push the welder cart across the bumpy dirt down to the doghouse.

Hauling the welder inside the trailer, another blast rocked the ground.

“That couldn’t of been more than a mile away,” said Jacob.

“Why the hell did you leave the platform,” scolded Lenny barreling into the doghouse.

“I ain’t waiting fer corporate to tell me there’s an electrical storm headin’ our way when I can obviously see and hear it all around us,” argued Ryan.

A blast of sound rocked the door and window of the doghouse. Every man flinched.

“Corporate said we should wait it out,” said Lenny once the sound died down.

“Oh, how nice of ‘em,” replied Dugan, plopping down on the bench where Mike and Jacob sat. Ryan took off his jacket and hung it back on his hook.

“The storm looks serious. I’m thinkin’ we’re gunna be waiting this out for a while.”

Ryan sat in the second rolling chair and crossed his arms to make himself comfortable.

Just then Lenny’s radio squealed, “Lenny, ya there? Over.”

“Yeh, we’re in the doghouse waitin’ out the storm. Over.”

“Just got word from the National Fire Service. They want the area cleared. Over.”

“Why? Over.”

“They’re prepping for lightning strike fires. Over.”

“Are we leavin’ the equipment? Over.”

“Ya, you’ll be back in the morning. Just a safety precaution. Over.”

“Got it. Over.”

The men groaned. Sure, they had the night off, but a night off meant no footage. No footage, no extra money.

“You heard ‘em boys. Let’s head out. Go complain to someone who cares,” Lenny said placing the two-way radio back in its station and powering down the computer.

“Cut the generator, would you?” Lenny demanded pointing to Jacob.

“What about the light towers,” asked Mike.

“Leave ‘em on,” said Ryan. “No way I’m lettin’ you get under those giant lightning magnets.”

Rushing quickly to the trucks, the men piled into the cab just as lightning struck the top of the canyon wall.

“That’s too close,” said Dugan, putting the truck into drive and heading back down the mountain.

Chapter 29: Mother Nature

Embracing the tiny ember, I cradle the tiny spark in the dry leaves under the drill. Discarded and forgotten the leaves sit huddled under the machine waiting to be released from their prison. Like a tiny caterpillar, the ember nibbles away at the edges of each leaf, kindled by the nourishment the dry leaves provided.

Keeping their promise, the Spirits sent lightning. Each arrow of light struck true, igniting tired brittle trees straight into their core. Trees thriving with life could withstand the firebolt but were left with a scar in remembrance of the day they fought to survive. Though the Spirits sent the lightning to chase out the invaders, I was the one who empowered the fire to thrive.

Caressing the hibernating bear, I whispered in its ear.

Tüpunih.

Hungry from its long hibernation, the weak bear rolls out of its den inside the hollow of an empty tree that smoldered with lightning sparked fire. Sniffing along the dried brush and dead branches, eagerly my creation climbed the adjoining tree, voraciously engulfing the victual.

The grizzly, fully awake, knows her strength. She must consume fuel to sustain her throughout her next hibernation. She knows that by doing this, I will restore what she devours. The grizzly bear protects her family.

Yet, the balance of things has been thrown off. Moderation in all things. A hungry bear, set free to feast in overgrown, dying forests, will change from a protective mother to a rabid beast. I understand this, and my heart fractures into pieces as I watch my child morph into a monster. No longer able to be contained.

A mother never wishes harm on her children. I cry in my hands and the wind carries my words. My words are accepted by the animals, trees, rivers, and rocks. Though many ears are deaf and no longer understand my language. Left with the tools that are destabilized, I try to replenish and restore, but my attempt grows out of control. I must wait until Fire exhausts herself.

Yet, the little ember, that was given the small amount of food is finally ready to morph. It changes and grows becoming a beautiful monarch, bright orange and yellow wings reach around the drill. Igniting the fuel tank, it consumes the gas and the machine. It twirls high into the sky, spreading its wings in enormous black, stained-glass, patterns.

Rising into the air, the monarch flies away, no longer needing the leaves, drill, or fuel for support. Unlike the bear, she only used what she needed to transform, and moved on. The bear no longer driven by a need to store energy, its gluttony races through the sage and juniper and up the canyon toward the pine.

Chapter 30: Nettie

“You’re my fastest hiker,” said Captain William, handing Nettie the drip torch. “I know you can make the canyon wall before the fire.”

Given the drip torch, Nettie raced along the edge of the barbed wire fence. She remembered their fight and thanked the fence for not going easy on her. She needed its lesson.

Moving west toward the canyon wall, Nettie could hear the bellowing of the grizzly. She could only see the ridges in its shoulders as it walked toward her. She hoped that she had enough time to make it to the rock formation of the canyon and the natural barrier against the beast.

Placing each fire drip along the dried brush, Nettie watched as the fire morphed into a snake. It slithered and grew, winding its way toward its feasting friend. The two creatures had battled throughout time in endless combat. Though the snake understood as it grew, twining itself around the feet of the grizzly in an infinite loop, it brought harmony. Circling tighter, the snake constricted around the force of the inferno, calming the grizzly though it still moved forward in a meandering gait.

Powering up the hill, Nettie raced against the blaze. Hiking with power and precision, she reached the canyon wall 300 feet in front of the approaching fire. She could hear shouts in the distance as her engine crew worked to hold the line and keep the snake from switching directions.

With a final embrace the snake helped the exhausted grizzly back into hibernation.

Across the blackened ground, Nettie saw four regal figures, their magnificent glow creating an aura of light. Beyond them, Nettie could see a new forest, green with life.

Aisem ma'i tsa'i. Nettie whispered to the wind that happily carried her message to the Spirits as they disappeared.

Winter

Epilogue: Nettie

Nettie watched as the huge trailer pulled the last of the scorched drill out of the area. Frost covered the ground and laced the trees with diamond glaze. Nettie stood with Troy near the new fencing that surrounded the canyon. Instead of barbed wire, regular wire ran between the wooden posts. They watched as the cleanup crew hitched up the trailer to pull the last of the remaining equipment out of the now preserved area. Wearing his usual brown corduroy Wrangler jacket, Troy wrapped his arms around Nettie, pulling her into the warmth of the sherpa lining.

The Tabby Mountain fire had burned roughly four acres before it was contained. Relatively small in scale, it could have been worse had the Duchesne wildland fire crew not acted quickly.

When given the green light by the forest service, the LP Drilling Company sent its crews to assess the damage. Nothing had been destroyed except for the drill. Yet, it was unclear how the entire drill was consumed by fire. Even though the surrounding area had burned, there was no way the fire would have been able to burn across the clearing created for the drill pad.

Before they could bring in a new drill, the company found itself in a lawsuit with the Ute nation.

“It is illegal for them to drill,” explained Nettie’s grandfather. “My friend informed the executive leaders that the LP Company was doing exploratory drilling.”

“Why is it illegal for them to drill?” Blake asked. All three friends had stopped by to check up on Nettie when they heard about the fire.

“Well, I guess back in the 1970’s the U.S. Forest Service acquired the property in a land swap, since the land is on the historic boundaries of the reservation. The forest service can make money off the land by allowing ranchers to let their livestock graze, and through hunting permits. But no matter who owns the land, the subsurface remained with the tribe because of the cultural significance.”

“No way,” replied Wade who had paused in his wrestle match with Hintza to engage in the conversation.

“If the land has cultural significance, since it is named after the Timpanogos leader Chief Tabby-To-Kwanah, shouldn’t that include us?” asked Nettie.

“Well, now, there lies an even larger issue,” explained her grandfather. “I wouldn’t push your luck and be thankful the Ute tribe stepped in when they did.”

Nettie gripped Troy’s hand. “I am thankful,” she said, easing up on Troy’s hand.

“Hey, at least you no longer need to climb over barbed wire fences to enjoy the mountain,” suggested Troy.

They were right. She had asked the Spirits to protect the land and they kept their promise. It was not her place to fight a battle over material ownership of the land. Her pledge had been to restore balance, and she would honor that agreement.

Not wanting to miss seeing the drill company leave the area, Nettie and Troy had rushed up to the canyon to watch their final departure. Nettie waved at the diesel driver that towed the burnt drill. It had taken several months in court before the LP Company could retrieve their property. As the first light snow drifted down, the company was finally allowed back to clean up the area and leave.

Just as Nettie and Troy were turning to leave, a pickup truck pulled over to the side.

“Hey there,” the driver waved at Nettie.

Recognizing the face, Nettie smiled and walked over to the truck.

“I’m Ryan, by the way.”

“I’m Nettie.”

“It’s nice to finally put a name to the face,” Ryan said.

“Same.”

“Well, just to let you know, Dugan here, and I, were able to get all the rods out of the ground before we capped the hole.”

“Really? Thank you,” was all Nettie could say.

Ryan tipped his hat toward Nettie and Troy, then drove off down the dirt road.

Troy gently took Nettie’s hand.

“Shall we go for a hike.”

“Yes, please.” Nettie smiled, standing on her tippy toes and kissing Troy.

The red cliff walls blushed brighter as the two, along with Hintza, began the zig zag hike to the top of Tabby Canyon.

Vita

Jamie Rae Meyer is from the greatest snow on earth, Utah. She graduated from Westminster College with a bachelor's degree in English/Education. She has worked as an English teacher for fourteen years at North Davis Junior High. "Once a Norsemen, always a Norsemen." Currently she teaches 9th grade English and Yearbook.

She loves all animes from Hayao Miyazaki, but her favorite is Totoro. Her favorite things are the sound of crickets, the crackle of a campfire, shooting stars to wish on, a good book on any day, especially on rainy days, and the heartbeat of Native American drums. She gets her writing ideas from her life experiences as a teacher, daughter, wife, and mother.

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