



FIRE  
KEEPER'S  
DAUGHTER

ANGELINE BOULLEY

HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY  
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*For my parents, Donna and Henry Bouley Sr.  
and their love of stories*

*I am a frozen statue of a girl in the woods. Only my eyes move, darting from the gun to their startled expression.*

*Gun. Shock. Gun. Disbelief. Gun. Fear.*

THA-THUM-THA-THUM-THA-THUM.

*The snub-nosed revolver shakes with tiny tremors from the jittery hand aiming at my face.*

*I'm gonna die.*

*My nose twitches at a greasy sweetness. Familiar. Vanilla and mineral oil. WD-40. Someone used it to clean the gun. More scents: pine, damp moss, skunky sweat, and cat pee.*

THA-THUM-THA-THUM-THA-THUM.

*The jittery hand makes a hacking motion with the gun, as if wielding a machete instead. Each diagonal slice toward the ground gives me hope. Better a random target than me.*

*But then terror grips my heart again. The gun. Back at my face.*

*Mom. She won't survive my death. One bullet will kill us both.*

*A brave hand reaches for the gun. Fingers outstretched.*

*Demanding. Give it. Now.*

THA-THUM-THA—

*I am thinking of my mother when the blast changes everything.*

PART I

.....

# WAABANONG

(EAST)

IN OJIBWE TEACHINGS, ALL JOURNEYS BEGIN  
IN THE EASTERN DIRECTION.





## CHAPTER 1

I start my day before sunrise, throwing on running clothes and laying a pinch of semaa at the eastern base of a tree, where sunlight will touch the tobacco first. Prayers begin with offering semaa and sharing my Spirit name, Clan, and where I am from. I always add an extra name to make sure Creator knows who I am. A name that connects me to my father—because I began as a secret, and then a scandal.

I give thanks to Creator and ask for zoongidewin, because I'll need courage for what I have to do after my five-mile run. I've put it off for a week.

The sky lightens as I stretch in the driveway. My brother complains about my lengthy warm-up routine whenever he runs with me. I keep telling Levi that my longer, bigger, and therefore vastly superior muscles require more intensive preparation for peak performance. The real reason, which he would think is dorky, is that I recite the correct anatomical name for each muscle as I stretch. Not just the superficial muscles, but the deep ones too. I want an edge over the other college freshmen in my Human Anatomy class this fall.

By the time I finish my warm-up and anatomy review, the sun

peeks through the trees. One ray of light shines on my semaa offering. Niishin! *It is good.*

My first mile is always hardest. Part of me still wants to be in bed with my cat, Herri, whose purrs are the opposite of an alarm clock. But if I power through, my breathing will find its rhythm, accompanied by the swish of my heavy ponytail. My legs and arms will operate on autopilot. That's when my mind will wander into the zone, where I'm part of this world but also somewhere else, and the miles pass in a semi-alert haze.

My route takes me through campus. The prettiest view in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, is on the other side. I blow a kiss as I run past Lake State's newest dorm, Fontaine Hall, named after my grandfather on my mother's side. My grandmother Mary—I call her GrandMary—insisted I wear a dress to the dedication ceremony last summer. I was tempted to scowl in the photos but knew my defiance would hurt Mom more than it would tick off GrandMary.

I cut through the parking lot behind the student union toward the north end of campus. The bluff showcases a gorgeous panoramic view of the St. Marys River, the International Bridge into Canada, and the city of Sault Sainte Marie, Ontario. Nestled in the bend of the river east of town is my favorite place in the universe: Sugar Island.

The rising sun hides behind a low, dark cloud at the horizon beyond the island. I halt in place, awestruck. Shafts of light fan out from the cloud, as if Sugar Island is the source of the sun's rays. A cool breeze ruffles my T-shirt, giving me goose bumps in mid-August.

"Ziisabaaka Minising." I whisper in Anishinaabemowin the name for the island, which my father taught me when I was little. It sounds like a prayer. My father's family, the Firekeeper side, is as much a part of Sugar Island as its spring-fed streams and sugar maple trees.

When the cloud moves on and the sun reclaims her rays, a gust of wind propels me forward. Back to my run and to the task ahead.



Forty-five minutes later, I end my run at EverCare, a long-term care facility a few blocks from home. Today's run felt backward, peaking in the first mile and becoming progressively more difficult. I tried chasing the zone, but it was a mirage just beyond my reach.

"Mornin', Daunis," Mrs. Bonasera, the head nurse says from behind the front desk. "Mary had a good night. Your mom's already here."

Still catching my breath, I give my usual good-morning wave.

The hallway seems to lengthen with each step. I steel myself for possible responses to my announcement. In my imagined scenarios, a single furrowed brow conveys disappointment, annoyance, and the retracting of previous accolades.

Maybe I should wait until tomorrow to announce my decision.

Mrs. B. didn't need to say anything; the heavy scent of roses in the hallway announces Mom's presence. When I enter the private room, she's gently massaging rose-scented lotion on my grandmother's thin arms. A fresh bouquet of yellow roses adds to the floral saturation level.

GrandMary's been at EverCare for six weeks now and, the month before that, in the hospital. She had a stroke at my high school graduation party. Visiting every morning is part of the New Normal, which is what I call what happens when your universe is shaken so badly you can never regain the same axis as before. But you try anyway.

My grandmother's eyes connect with mine. Her left brow raises in recognition. Her right side is unable to convey anything.

"Bon matin, GrandMary." I kiss both cheeks before stepping back for her inspection.

In the Before, her scrutiny of my fashion choices bugged the crap out of me. But now? Her one-sided scowl at my oversized T-shirt feels like a perfect slap shot to the top shelf.

“See?” I playfully lift my hem to reveal yellow spandex shorts. “Not half-naked.”

Halfway through her barely perceptible eye roll, GrandMary’s gaze turns vacant. It’s like a light bulb behind her eyes that someone switches on and off arbitrarily.

“Give her a moment,” Mom says, continuing to smooth lotion onto GrandMary’s arms.

I nod and take in GrandMary’s room. The large picture window with a view of a nearby playground. The dry-erase board with the heading HELLO! MY NAME IS MARY FONTAINE, and a line for someone to fill in after MY NURSE. The line after MY GOALS is blank. The vase of roses surrounded by framed photographs. GrandMary and Grandpa Lorenzo on their wedding day. A duo frame with Mom and Uncle David as praying angels in white First Communion outfits. My senior picture fills a silver frame engraved with CLASS OF 2004.

The last picture taken of the four of us Fontaines—me, Mom, Uncle David, and GrandMary—at my final hockey game brings a walnut-sized lump to my throat. I went to sleep many nights listening to Mom and her brother laughing, playing cards, and talking in the language they had invented as children—a hybrid of French, Italian, abbreviated English, and made-up, nonsensical words. But that was before Uncle David died in April and GrandMary, grief-stricken, had an intracerebral hemorrhagic stroke two months later.

My mother doesn’t laugh in the New Normal.

She looks up. Her jade green eyes are tired and bloodshot. Instead of sleeping last night, Mom cleaned the house in a frenzy while talking to Uncle as if he were sitting on the sofa watching her dust and mop. She does this often. I wake up during those darkest hours,



when my mother confesses her loneliness and regrets to him, unaware that I am fluent in their secret language.

While I wait for my grandmother to return to herself, I retrieve a lipstick from the basket on the bedside table. GrandMary believes in greeting the day with a perfect red smile. Gliding the matte ruby over her thin lips, I remember my earlier plea for courage. To know *zoon-gidewin* is to face your fears with a strong heart. My hand twitches; the golden tube of lipstick a jiggling needle on a seismograph.

Mom finishes with the lotion and kisses GrandMary's forehead. I've been on the receiving end of those kisses so often that an echo of one warms my own forehead. I hope GrandMary can feel that good medicine even when the light bulb is off.

When my grandmother was in the hospital, I kept track of how many times she blinked during the same fifteen-minute window each day. Mom didn't mind my record keeping until she noticed the separate tally marks for **LIGHT BULB ON** and **LIGHT BULB OFF**. The overall number of blinks hadn't changed, but the percentage of alert ones (**LIGHT BULB ON** divided by total blinks) had begun to decrease. My mother got so upset when she saw my tally that I keep the blink notebook hidden in GrandMary's private room now, bringing it out only when Mom isn't here.

It happens. GrandMary blinks and her eyes brighten. **LIGHT BULB ON**. Just like that, her focus sharpens, and she is once again a mighty force of nature, the Fontaine matriarch.

"GrandMary," I say quickly. "I'm deferring my admission to U of M and registering for classes at Lake State. Just for freshman year." I hold my breath, anticipating her disappointment in my deviation from the Plan: Daunis Lorenza Fontaine, MD.

At first, I went along with it, hoping to make her proud. I grew up overhearing people whisper with a sort of vicious glee about the Big Scandal of Mary and Lorenzo Fontaine's Perfect Life. I pretended so

well, and for so long, that her plan became my plan. Our plan. I loved that plan. But that was in the Before.

GrandMary fixes me with a gaze as tender as my mother's kisses. Something passes between my grandmother and me. She understands why I had to alter our plan.

My nose tingles with pre-cry pinpricks from relief, sadness, or both. Maybe there's a word in Anishinaabemowin for when you find solid footing in the rubble after a tragedy.

Mom rushes around the bed, pulling me into an embrace that whooshes the air from my lungs. Her joyful sobs vibrate through me. I made my mother happy. I knew I would, but I didn't expect to feel such relief myself. She's been pushing for me not to go away to college, even encouraging Levi to pester me about it. Mom pleaded with me to fill out the Lake State admissions form back in January as a birthday gift to her. I agreed, thinking there was no way anything would come to pass. Turns out, there was a way.

A bird thuds against the window. My mother startles, releasing me from her grip. I only get three steps toward the window when the bird rises, fluttering to regain equilibrium before resuming its journey.

Gramma Pearl—my Anishinaabe nokomis on my Firekeeper side—considered a bird flying into a window a bad sign. She would rush outside, one leathered brown hand at her mouth, muttering “uh-uh-oh” at its crooked neck before calling her sisters to figure out which tragedy was just around the corner.

But GrandMary would say it was random and unfortunate. Nothing more than an unintended consequence of a clean window. *Indian superstitions are not facts, Daunis.*

My Zhaaganaash and Anishinaabe grandmothers could not have been more different. One viewed the world as its surface, while the other saw connections and teachings that run deeper than our

known world. Their push and pull on me has been a tug-of-war my entire life.

When I was seven, I spent a weekend at Gramma Pearl's tar-paper house on Sugar Island. I woke up crying with an earache, but the ferry to the mainland had shut down for the night. She had me pee in a cup, and poured it into my ear as I rested my head in her lap. Back home for Sunday dinner at GrandMary and Grandpa Lorenzo's, I excitedly shared how smart my other grandmother was. *Gramma Pearl fixed my earache with my pee!* GrandMary recoiled and, a heart-beat later, glared at my mother as if this was her fault. Something split inside me when I saw my mother's embarrassment. I learned there were times when I was expected to be a Fontaine and other times when it was safe to be a Firekeeper.

Mom returns to GrandMary, moving the cashmere blanket aside to massage lotion on a spindly, alabaster leg. She's exhausting herself looking after my grandmother. Mom is convinced she will recover. My mother has never been good at accepting unpleasant truths.

A week ago, I woke up during one of Mom's cleaning frenzies.

*I've lost so much, David. And now her. When Daunis leaves, j'disparaîtraî.*

She used the French word for "disappear." To fade or pass away.

Eighteen years ago, my arrival changed my mother's world. Ruined the life her parents had preordained for her. I am all she has left in this world.

Gramma Pearl always told me, *Bad things happen in threes.*

Uncle David died in April.

GrandMary had a stroke in June.

If I stay home, I can stop the third bad thing from happening. Even if it means waiting a little longer to follow the Plan.

"I should go." I kiss Mom and then GrandMary goodbye. As soon

as I leave the facility, I break into a run. I usually walk the few blocks home as a cooldown, but today I sprint until I reach my driveway. Gasping, I collapse beneath my prayer tree. Waiting for my breath to return.

Waiting for the normal part of the New Normal to begin.



## CHAPTER 2

Lily's Jeep screeches into the driveway. Wearing all black as usual, my best friend hops out so I can climb into the back seat. Granny June sits in the passenger seat, headscarf tied under her chin, dark brown eyes barely peeking over the dashboard. Between tiny Lily and her great-grandmother, it's a wonder either can see the road.

Lily's been my best friend since sixth grade, when she came to live with Granny June. We look like opposites, and not just because of our height difference. I am so pale, the other Nish kids called me Ghost, and I once overheard someone refer to me as "that washed-out sister of Levi's." When Lily lived with her Zhaaganaash dad and his wife, they kept her out of the sun so her reddish-brown skin wouldn't get any darker. We both learned early on that there is an Acceptable Anishinaabe Skin Tone Continuum, and those who land on its outer edges have to put up with different versions of the same bullshit.

Lily's smile is outlined in glossy black lipstick. It grows wider as she takes in my outfit—jeans paired with one of my dad's hockey jerseys extending to mid-thigh.

“Lady Daunis in her finest gown. It’s my pleasure to drive thee.” She bows.

I grin, and it feels like when I slip off a backpack loaded with all my schoolbooks.

“I should sit back there. Too much work for you,” Granny June says, watching as I flip the driver’s seat forward and wedge my nearly six-foot-tall frame into the back. “Like seeing a baby crawl back into the womb.” She says this every time we both hitch a ride with Lily.

“No way, Granny June, you’re the best copilot.”

You do not make an Elder accommodate you. You just don’t.

We often drop Granny June at the Sault Senior Center on our way to work, depending on what’s for lunch. She compares the monthly menus for the two senior-citizen lunch programs, monitoring them as closely as bingo cards during the cover-all. If Granny June thinks the Zhaaganaash are getting a better meal, she makes Lily drop her off at the Sault Senior Center downtown. Otherwise, a tribal van picks her up for the ferry ride to the Nokomis-Mishomis Elder Center on Sugar Island for lunch and social activities.

“Did ya do it?” Lily gives a knowing glance in the rearview mirror.

“Yup.”

“Did ya use protection?” Granny June says. We all laugh, and as Lily turns a corner too quickly, even her tires add a squeal.

“No, Granny,” Lily says. “Daunis told her ma and grandma about not going to U of M. It’s official . . . Lake Superior State University, baby!” She does a high-pitched trill out the window, which startles a few tourists on the sidewalk. Lily’s tried and failed to teach me how to lee-lee, which some Nish women do to call out an accomplishment.

Granny June turns to look at me and scowls. I wait for her to tell me to sit up straight. It’s what GrandMary would say.

“My girl, some boats are for the river and some are for the ocean.”

I think Granny June is right. I just don’t know which one I am.

Lily gives me a sympathetic look in the rearview mirror. In science, a mixture has two or more components that don't join chemically. Like oil and vinegar. Lily knows it's how I feel: sad about not being in Ann Arbor, yet glad to share freshman year with her. Both feelings existing separately but swirling around together inside me.

We drive past gift shops along one side of the street. The other side follows the river, where a crowd of tourists watches a thousand-foot-long freighter pass through the Soo Locks.

I remember when we went to downtown Ann Arbor and took the campus tour last fall. GrandMary's enthusiasm contrasted with Mom's annoying questions about crime rates. Uncle David—who rarely sided against my mother—insisted that I needed to earn my degree far from home. But to me the University of Michigan meant more than just an education. It was freedom from the gossip that has surrounded me my whole life.

*Daunis Fontaine? Wasn't her dad that hockey player, Levi Fire-keeper? He was one of the few Indians from Sugar Island with potential.*

*I remember when he knocked up Grace Fontaine. Richest, whitest girl in town.*

*Didn't he booze it up at a party on Sugar Island and crash his car with her in it?*

*What a shame when he broke his legs in the crash! Just when the scouts were coming around. Ended his hockey career.*

*Mary and Lorenzo sent their daughter to stay with relatives in Montreal, but when she came back with a three-month-old baby girl, Levi was married to someone else and had Levi Jr.*

*I heard mousy Grace stood up to her parents when they tried keeping that baby girl from Levi and all those Indian relatives.*

*Oh, and then there was that terrible tragedy . . .*

We pass a billboard that usually advertises the Superior Shores Casino and Resort, but for the past month, the Sugar Island Ojibwe

Tribe has encouraged enrolled members to vote in today's Tribal Council election. Last night, someone graffitied it, changing one letter to make it read: VOTE! IT'S YOUR TRIBAL ERECTION.

"I'd vote for that," Granny June says. Lily and I crack up again.

Then Granny rants about how it doesn't matter who gets elected because they end up serving themselves better than any of the members.

"Now, when I die, yous gotta promise to get Tribal Council to be pallbearers at my funeral"—she pauses for dramatic effect—"so they can let me down one last time."

I laugh along with Granny June. As usual, my best friend just shakes her head.

"Teddie should've run," Lily says. "She would've cleaned up, hey?"

My aunt Teddie is the smartest person we know. She's so badass. Some rabble-rouser tribal members want Sugar Island to declare its independence from the United States. If they ever got Auntie onboard with their half-baked plan, Operation Secede might actually happen.

"Eh, Auntie says she can make a bigger impact as Tribal Health director," I say.

Granny June chimes in. "She'd never win, same as me. Teddie tells it like it is. Voters want pretty lies over ugly truths, hey?"

Lily nods, even though neither of us is eligible to vote in a tribal election because we're not enrolled.

"Too many forgot the old ways, about us being a matriarchal people," Granny June says. "Listen to me, my girls. Strong Ojibwe women are like the tide, reminding us of forces too powerful to control. Weak people fear that strength. They won't vote for a Nish kwe they fear."

Now I'm the one nodding along to my Elder's truth.

When we arrive at the Sault Senior Center, Lily does her unique method of parallel parking, pulling in nose first until she taps the rear



bumper of the car ahead. We both climb out to help Granny June. She pauses before entering the center.

“Me and Teddie got skeletons in the closet. Slept with too many of their men.” Her chin juts defiantly. “Well, that and our felonies.” Lily and I give each other wide-eyed looks as Granny June waves us off.

Back in the Jeep, we burst into peals of laughter.

“Holy shit,” Lily says. “I know Granny June’s got a past, but do you think it’s true about Teddie having felonies?” She reverses into the bumper of the car parked behind us and then merges into downtown traffic.

“Auntie says all those stories about her ‘youthful shenanigans’ are bull.”

“Speaking of shenanigans, we set for tomorrow?” Lily asks as we head toward the Tribe’s satellite reservation on the mainland.

“Yes. We need to celebrate,” I say, focusing on the positive part of my decision.

“You were so worked up about telling GrandMary. How’d she react?”

“She, um . . . she let me know it’s okay.” I am touched again by that moment between my grandmother and me, when I realized she saw the situation clearly and that she understood.

“See? You always worry for no reason,” Lily says.

We reach Chimakwa Arena. There are two polling locations for today’s Tribal Council election: one here at the community recreation facility and one at the Elder Center on Sugar Island. Cars already line both sides of Ice Circle Drive. Lily bumps over the curb to park on the grass.

She catches me scanning the lot for any tribal cop cars. Lily’s creative parking skills always attract police attention.

“Have you seen TJ yet? Do we really gotta call him Officer Kewadin?” She shudders. “You didn’t invite him to the party, did you?”

“No. I did not invite a tribal cop to our party,” I say, all peeved. “I’m not the one who gets back with my ex every other week.”

Lily eyeballs me coolly. Her mouth twitches, but she stays silent. Just as we reach the front row of cars, she slaps my back. Hard.

“Ow! What the hell!” I turn to see my best friend looking all innocent.

“What? You had a black fly on you the size of a hummingbird.” This time, she grins.

We crack up. Our laughter is as bubbly as I feel, knowing that everything will be okay.

A gauntlet of tribal members wave campaign yard signs for their favorite candidates as voters enter Chimakwa to cast their ballots. One lady perks up when we approach and offers us a plate of home-made cookies.

“They’re not enrolled,” her sidekick announces coldly.

The cookie lady sets the treats back down and impassively calls out, “Have a nice day.”

We are descendants—rather than enrolled members—of the Sugar Island Ojibwe Tribe. My father isn’t listed on my birth certificate, and Lily doesn’t meet the minimum blood-quantum requirement for enrollment. We still regard the Tribe as ours, even though our faces are pressed against the glass, looking in from outside.

“As if we wanted their moowin cookies,” Lily mutters, sounding exactly like Granny June.

I don’t mention how we both licked our lips at that plate.

The lobby is packed. Voters line the hallway to the volleyball-court-turned-polling-location. Parents drop off their children for the Niibing Program. The summer recreational program provides full-time childcare for kids who need supervised activities intended to tire them out, but is way more effective at exhausting us group leaders.

Just before we part ways to join our different groups, Lily nudges me.

“Later, gator.”

“After while, *Crocodylus niloticus*.”

We do our special handshake: high five for the tall girl, low five for the shorty, elbow touch, Hacky Sack foot bump, and palm forward to lock thumbs for the butterfly-flutter finale.

“Love ya, geek!” Lily always gets the last word.



## CHAPTER 3

When it's time for our last activity of the day, I bring my group of nine- and ten-year-olds to the locker room to put on sweatshirts, hats, and gloves for open skate. I turn it into an Ojibwe language lesson, naming each item in Anishinaabemowin as I put it on.

"Naabikawaagan," I say, wrapping my scarf around my neck as we step onto the ice.

"Hey, Bubble!" Levi shouts my least favorite nickname across the rink.

On Friday afternoons, the Sault Ste. Marie Superiors skate with the kids. The Supes are an elite Junior A league team, a stepping-stone for guys hoping to play at the college or professional level. GrandMary refers to the Supes as a "finishing school" for hockey players.

My younger brother, who will be a high school senior, was made team captain in only his second year on the team. In Michigan's Upper Peninsula, the Supes are regarded as hockey gods—which makes Levi like Zeus, possessing something special that transcends even natural talent and hard work.

We look nothing alike. I'm the spitting image of our father. But where Dad's facial features were proportional to his large frame, mine are like caricatures. Levi resembles his mom, right down to the dimples, bronze skin, and long eyelashes. Dad was a hockey god, so Levi lucked out there, too. Plus, my brother can be charming, especially when he wants something.

Levi and one of the new Supes are skating with the five- and six-year-olds, which include my six-year-old cousins Perry and Pauline.

"Auntie Daunis!"

I love when my twin cousins call me "Auntie." I ditch my group and skate over to them.

"Auntie, did you know today is Friday the thirteenth?" Pauline sounds like a teacher.

"Uncle Levi says bad luck is just made-up horseshit," Perry chimes in.

I imitate Pauline's schoolmarm tone. "Levi, did you know that responsible aunts and uncles don't swear around young, impressionable minds?" The Supe next to Levi snickers. "See, New Guy knows what I'm saying."

"It's Jamie," New Guy says. "Jamie Johnson."

"Eh. Let's see what you bring to the team before I learn your name," I say.

OutKast's "Hey Ya!" blasts over the rink sound system as I take off my extra-long scarf. Perry and Pauline latch on to the ends, and I pull the twins around the rink.

Dad used to do this with Levi and me—a kid on each end, with the middle of the scarf around his waist like a harness. My dad's scarf was jade green, the same color as Mom's eyes. Perry pleads to go faster. That girl is happiest on warp speed, with her long blue-black hair fanning behind her like jet vapor condensation trails. Impulsively, I double back to Levi, digging in my hockey skates for

four quick lateral pushes. Enough to make Perry squeal but not get Pauline rushed out.

Just before I reach my brother, I halt with a quarter turn. My hockey blades shear the ice. The shavings hit Levi and New Guy. I flash a grin as they jump back a second too late. Levi is amused, but New Guy's jaw drops with something like shock and awe.

I check the twins' trajectory. Perry tries mimicking my stop. She falls over but pops right back up. Pauline keeps going until she bounces off the dasher board and lands on her back. I'm certain she's okay, but I skate over anyway. New Guy follows me.

When I reach her, Pauline looks up at me, breaking into a jack-o'-lantern grin. Her beautiful face is the darkest amber—a perfect and precious deep golden brown. She flaps her mittens at me.

“Pick me up!” she pleads.

I remember how, as a kid, I once fell hard, my helmet smacking the ice. Dad was at my side in an instant, deep voice booming, *N'Daunis, bazigonjisen!* I scrambled to stand while my eyes saw stars. *That's my girl!*

Whenever I fall, my dad's voice is the thunder following the crack of lightning, telling me to get back up.

“Eh, you're fine,” I say.

She squeals with delight when New Guy helps her up.

“You should've let her lie there like a slug till she freezes,” I tell him. I try not to smile when he spins Pauline on the ice and laughs along with her. People are watching and I'm not giving the gossips anything to comment on.

I look around for Lily. She's surrounded by preschoolers inching forward with their colorful plastic skate helpers. She makes eye contact, as well as a lewd gesture with her hand and tongue. Clearly, Lily agrees with everyone who's been yammering nonstop about the new Supe since the team for the 2004–2005 season was announced a week ago.

*Jamie Johnson is crazy hot.*

*Jamie Johnson's scar makes him look mysterious.*

*Isn't it too bad that Jamie Johnson has a girlfriend back home? Yeah, that won't last.*

And, worst of all . . .

*Hey, Daunis, can you ask Levi to assign me as Jamie Johnson's Supe ambassador?*

I sneak a glance at him. Empirically speaking, I suppose Jamie is good-looking. He's got huge dark eyes and dark brown hair long enough for curls to go in different directions. I'm more interested in the scar that runs from the outer edge of his right eyebrow to his jawbone. I study it. It doesn't have the plump overgrowth of a keloid, so that makes it a hypertrophic scar.

"Levi told me about you. You're headed to the University of Michigan," Jamie says, watching the twins skate back to their group leader.

"Oh, I . . . um . . . change of plans." I meet Levi's eyes as he joins us. "I'm gonna go to Lake State. My mom needs me." I clear my throat. "You know . . . with everything going on."

I don't mention Gramma Pearl's warning about bad things happening in threes.

"You're staying?" Levi shouts. "Woo-hooooo!" My brother picks me up and spins me until I'm nauseous. I whack at his back, laughing. His happiness is kind of contagious.

Levi sets me down. "Now we've got something to celebrate this weekend. Party at the big house tomorrow at eight, right? Beer will be ice cold."

"Lily and I will be there."

Still cheering, Levi skates away like the Pied Piper, leading a line of kids who imitate his footwork.

"So, you're sticking around." Jamie's smile extends to his eyes, and the last traces of nausea somersault in my stomach.

Nonempirically speaking, Jamie Johnson is hot when his eyes sparkle like that.

He keeps talking. "I wish you were gonna be a senior too. But, hey, at least you get to miss out on my uncle Ron as your science teacher."

I nod even as my nose stings with familiar tingles, which I force away with a clenched jaw.

"Is that a bad thing?" Jamie's voice deepens slightly with concern.

"No. It's just . . . Your uncle is filling my uncle's job at Sault High." The image of Uncle David adjusting the gas flame of a Bunsen burner triggers a tidal wave of sadness. And fury.

Jamie waits for me to say more.

"He died a few months ago. It was awful." I correct myself. "It's still awful."

When someone dies, everything about them becomes past tense. Except for the grief. Grief stays in the present.

It's even worse when you're angry at the person. Not just for dying. But for how.

My mother fainted when she heard the news about Uncle David. Later, when the police provided details, she insisted he had been sober for over thirteen years. Not a drop of alcohol since the day Mom returned from the library on campus and found five-year-old me on the sofa reading books to my passed-out uncle. She was adamant that her brother had never used other substances. Ever.

"I'm very sorry, Daunis."

My name sounds different in his almost-husky voice of concern. He stretches my name, so it sounds like *Dawww-ness*, rather than the way my Firekeeper relatives say it: *Dah-niss*.

Lily calls my name and points with her lips toward the dashers, where Teddie is waiting. My aunt motions for me. I skate over, a bit surprised when Jamie follows.

"Hey, I came here to vote and pick up the girls, but now there's



a thing at work." Auntie notices Jamie. "Hi, I'm Teddie Firekeeper. You must be the new Supe everyone is talking about. It's a big deal whenever another Native player makes the team. Where are you from?"

"Jamie Johnson, ma'am." He offers his hand. "From all over. We moved a lot."

Auntie looks respectable, in a pantsuit with a gorgeous, beaded floral medallion. But, there's still the echo of the girl who would've throat-punched you for calling her Theodora.

"I meant which tribe," she clarifies.

"Cherokee, ma'am. But I didn't grow up around any family."

I glance at Jamie. I cannot fathom growing up without relatives. I have so many family members, not all blood-related, who have surrounded me my entire life. Plus a lot of matriarchs and mini-matriarchs-in-training.

"You need me to keep the girls awhile, Auntie?"

"Can you?" She sounds relieved. "Gotta go back to work. T-shirts came in for next week's immunization fair, and they have an owl saying, 'Be wise. Immunize!'" Auntie shakes her head. "No one caught it before ordering three hundred shirts, hey?"

"Holy." Lily skates over in time to add her succinct opinion.

"What's the problem?" Jamie directs the question to me, confused. Either Cherokees have different teachings about owls or else Jamie doesn't know his culture.

"In Ojibwe culture, the owl is a companion for crossing over when you die," I explain. "Not exactly the ambassador you want telling Nish parents to immunize their babies."

Auntie adds, "Not everyone knows their teachings. So I'm meeting the community health worker and her supervisor back at the office so we can rush-order new shirts."

"On a Friday night?" Lily's both appalled and impressed.

“Well, it’s a problem they helped create, so they need to be part of the solution.” Auntie calls to the twins in Anishinaabemowin. “Aambe, jiimshin.” They hurry over for kisses and hugs.

After their mother leaves, Pauline asks Jamie to lift her up. He does, and she poses like it’s their Olympic performance. I admire how he holds her with perfect technique, which I recognize from the years of figure-skating lessons I endured in exchange for GrandMary letting me play hockey as well. I wonder how long Jamie trained as a pairs figure skater before he switched to hockey?

Lily catches me watching him.

“I’d say it’s too bad the new Supe has a girlfriend, but I know you don’t date hockey players because of your miizii Hockey World rules.” She sounds almost mad about it.

“Yup. Gotta keep Hockey World separate from Regular World.” On the ice, I know the rules. But off the ice, the rules are always changing. My life goes more smoothly when Hockey World and Regular World don’t overlap. Same with my Fontaine and Firekeeper worlds.

“But the good stuff happens when worlds collide . . . osmosis combustion,” Lily says.

I grin. “You’re thinking of collision theory. When two things collide and exchange energy if the reacting particles have enough kinetic energy.”

“Oh yeah. How could I have gotten them confused?” She laughs. “But seriously, though, your rules are so black-and-white. Why can’t you just—”

“Lily?” A voice calls out. We both turn, and I freeze when I see Lily’s ex-boyfriend standing near the dasher door a few feet away. I tense at his familiar, hopeful smile, then look to Lily for my cue on how to react.

Back in the sixth grade, we were in the cafeteria when Lily first heard sweet, dorky Travis Flint burp the alphabet. She laughed so

hard that she snotted milk from her nose. It was the best reaction he'd ever gotten; Travis instantly fell for Lily. When he grew up, in high school, revealing chiseled cheekbones and a square jaw, girls suddenly noticed the class clown was beyond handsome. Travis was radiant, especially when making Lily laugh.

That all changed back in December, halfway through our senior year.

I watch Lily closely. If she talks to Travis, I'll have to brace myself for another episode in *The Lily and Travis Saga*. It's a show that keeps getting renewed even though they repeat the same storyline.

Fortunately, she skates away, clearly uninterested in speaking with him. Travis isn't wearing skates, but I block the half door opening to the ice anyway, channeling every inch and pound of my body into becoming an impenetrable wall. Every hockey team needs a goon, someone to start shit or avenge wrongdoing. I am Lily's goon.

"Aw, Dauny, don't be like that." The hollows under his cheekbones are concave to the point of sickly. Any softness is gone. He seems like a shell of the funny boy who once made me laugh so hard that I peed my pants a little. "I swear I'm clean. Just wanna talk to her."

"Not gonna happen, Trav." I put my hands on my hips to become even wider.

"I'm clean," he repeats. "I'm staying clean for her."

"I know," I say. I believe he truly means it, but that doesn't mean it's a good idea for him to be near Lily. I usually call guys on their crap, but the sincerity in his voice almost makes me want to hug him. It's different from the typical Guy Lies.

Guy Lies are the things guys declare in the heat of the moment, which fade with time and distance. I've heard quite a few Guy Lies thanks to TJ Kewadin, the Sugar Island Ojibwe Tribe's newest cop. *I can't stop thinking about you. Or U of M is only two hours from Central, we can make that work. And my personal favorite? I love you.*

Travis is not lying when his anguished voice cracks. "I just miss her so much. I'll do anything to get her back."

"I know you'll do anything. That's why I'm going all goon on you." Lily told me what he did: *C'mon, Lily-bit. It's a love medicine. It'll make our relationship stronger. Try it for me.*

"Trav, maybe you should stay clean for yourself. Go to ceremonies. Get healthy."

Travis's eyes brighten, and for an instant I remember how funny and beautiful he used to be. He was my favorite of Levi's friends. We took nearly every Advanced Placement science class together. Travis Flint was my friend, too.

"That'll do it, won't it, Dauny?" he says excitedly, turning as if to run for the nearest sweat lodge. "I'll promise to go to Traditional Medicine. See the healer."

"Get healthy for you. Not for her!" I shout at his back.

As I watch Travis run off, I feel unsettled. I quickly skate around the perimeter, looking for Lily. She can always use a hug after a Travis encounter. I'll listen to what she says, and doesn't say, and support whatever she decides.

I really don't like *The Lily and Travis Saga*. I only watch because my best friend stars in it and she needs my protection. And my support. After all, goons get called upon to do what other players can't or won't.

I've seen Travis in bad shape before, but this felt different. He looked desperate, like he wants to do the right thing but for the wrong reasons. I resolve to keep an eye on Travis to make sure he stays far away from Lily until he's doing better. I'm worried that Lily may be in danger of more than a broken heart.



## CHAPTER 4

After dinner, I borrow Mom's car to drive the twins home. I'm planning to stay the night at Auntie's, like I do every few weeks. Even with Pauline and Perry acting up in the back seat, the ferry ride to Sugar Island is like a five-minute meditation. I wonder if it was the same when my ancestors crossed the choppy water in birchbark canoes. If their hearts lightened because they were coming home.

I glance over to the car next to me and spot Seeney Nimkee. I quickly look away and hunch down in my seat. Seeney recently turned sixty, officially making her an Elder. She's a mentor to Auntie and works for the Tribe's Traditional Medicine Program. She once yelled at our Tribal Youth Council for sitting down at a community event while there were Elders standing. Even when I scrambled to my feet, she eyeballed me the entire time. I cried in the bathroom afterward and have been treading carefully around her ever since.

Two dogs, Elvis and Patsy, bark at Mom's car as I pull up Auntie and Art's winding driveway, which opens to a chalet-style log home

overlooking Canada to the north. The front yard is bookended with a pole-barn garage and an elaborate tree house. As soon as I park, the twins tumble out of the car and pull me toward the tree house.

Their favorite game is Castle, where we fight imaginary dragons and trolls down the entire length of the tree fort. My battle cry is always, “We don’t need no stinky prince!” Perry’s a believer, but Pauline takes some convincing.

When Auntie comes home, I help with the girls’ bath time and story time. After we put the girls to bed, I help my aunt fold laundry at the granite island in the kitchen.

“So you excited about Lake State?” Auntie asks.

“Yeah, Lily and I registered for classes, but my schedule’s totally screwed up,” I whine. “Eleven credit hours isn’t full time. What if I can’t get into that one biology seminar?”

“You worry too easily about shit. Lake State’s not gonna screw you over. Your last name is on a dorm, for crying out loud.”

I fall silent and focus on carefully folding one of Perry’s T-shirts. After a minute, Auntie gets up and fixes a cup of lavender tea for me. She sets down the mug and smooths my hair.

Sometimes when I’m around my Firekeeper relatives, my older cousin Monk will call me Waabishkimaanishtaaniish when Auntie is out of earshot. If she ever heard him call me White Sheep, even when he’s giiwashkwebii, he’d be leaving the party with two black eyes.

But, every once in a while, Auntie herself makes a comment with an edge in her tone that sinks into the pit of my Fontaine stomach.

Art comes in from his garage workshop and greets me with a bear hug, breaking the awkward silence in the room. Even if I hadn’t known where he’d been, the smell of orange hand cleanser, burning sage, and WD-40 would have been a dead giveaway.

When Art kisses Auntie, she relaxes into a softer version of Teddie

Firekeeper. With me and the twins, her love has layers—a tender core wrapped in an exoskeleton of tough love. But when she’s wrapped in her husband’s dark amber brown arms, Auntie can drop her guard.

My phone buzzes with a text from an unfamiliar number.

###-###-####: Its Jamie Johnson. Levi invited me 2 ur party. I asked 4 ur # 2 make sure u wont throw out the new guy. All cool?

My first thought is *Jamie texted me?* My second is *What the hell is Levi up to?* And my last is *Who else has he invited?*

The party Levi apparently told Jamie all about isn’t exactly supposed to be a party. Lily and I sometimes sleep over at my grandparents’ house and help ourselves to the liquor cabinet and wine cellar. We’re supposed to make sure everything is fine at the big house since no one is living there. Mom won’t consider selling it because she thinks GrandMary will want to move back home once she’s recovered. I can’t bring myself to say anything to her about that yet.

Lily had the idea that we should invite a few friends and celebrate my decision to go to Lake State. Asking Levi to help us get beer was probably not my smartest decision.

Art chuckles. “That’s one conflicted reaction to a text.”

They’re both watching me. I stuff my phone into my pocket, feeling my face heat up.

“Probably the new Supe I met today,” Auntie says with a smirk. “Cherokee. His name’s Jamie. I’m nosy about his scar.” Auntie describes it to Art, ending with “That cut’s too straight to be accidental.”

“His uncle is taking Uncle David’s job at Sault High.” My voice catches.

“Life moves forward, Daunis,” Auntie says gently.

“But it’s so unfair,” I say. I frown to keep from crying as Art gives me another bear hug.

“I don’t remember fairness being one of the Seven Grandfathers,” Auntie says.

The Seven Grandfathers are teachings about living the Anishinaabe *minobimaadiziwin*—our good way of life—through love, humility, respect, honesty, bravery, wisdom, and truth. I include one in my prayers each morning to help me become a strong *Nish kwe* like my aunt.

I get her point. Auntie’s right, as usual. Maybe my mother isn’t the only one having difficulty moving forward from unfair events.



We hang out until Auntie and Art say good night and head upstairs holding hands. I begin to get ready for bed, but before I plug my phone into the charger, I reread Jamie’s text.

I think back to today on the ice, when I first met him. Before he even opened his mouth, I’d already heard his name plenty of times from Levi, always with an awed tone. According to Levi, Jamie showed up at the open camp right before the team was announced. The Superiors had already hosted their pre-draft camp, goalie camp, and invitation-only camp. For a nobody to make the team as a walk-on from open camp, he had to be fantastic.

I review what little I know about Jamie, gathered from rumors and our brief conversation. First, I remind myself firmly, he has a girlfriend. He also has an interesting scar on his face. He used to be a figure skater. He’s Cherokee but isn’t connected to his tribal community.

I wonder if it was hard to move around all the time. I wouldn’t know. I’ve lived in the Sault since I was three months old and have always been surrounded by family. The Firekeepers are one of the oldest families on Sugar Island. In addition to the dorm on the hill with my grandfather’s name, there are streets in town named after



GrandMary's people. They were some of the first French fur traders who showed up centuries ago along with the Catholic missionaries.

I'm definitely local.

Yet even with such deep roots, I don't always feel like I belong. Each time my Fontaine grandparents or their friends have seen my Ojibwe side as a flaw or a burden to overcome. And the less frequent but more heartbreaking instances when my Firekeeper family sees me as a Fontaine first and one of them second. When they say things about the Zhaaganaash and then, a beat later, remember that I'm in the room too. It's hard to explain what it's like being so connected to everyone and everything here . . . yet feeling that no one ever sees the whole me.

Is that how Jamie feels whenever he moves to a new place? Unseen?

I sigh and reply to his text.

ME: all cool. see you tmrw.

I get cozy on the oversized sofa in the great room, with stars filling two stories of windows. Normally I drift off quickly when I'm on Sugar Island. Tonight, however, curious thoughts about Jamie Johnson seesaw with concern for Travis and how his decline is affecting my best friend. Plus, Levi's actions, inviting Jamie and sharing my cell phone number, seems suspicious. My brother always has an agenda.



Auntie's footsteps on the stairs wake me. It's still dark, with even more stars than before.

I'm instantly alert at the sound of her voice: low and harsh, whispering through gritted teeth.

"Where? Tell her not to go anywhere . . . Yes, I'm on my way . . .

No, you keep her away . . . Because it's a blanket party, not a murder scene . . . Damn it . . . I'm on my way."

I bolt upright, but Auntie just shoots me a warning look and keeps walking past the sofa. I quickly get up and follow her into the mud-room, my heart beginning to pound. A blanket party is when a guy does something bad to a woman and her female cousins take him into the woods, rolled in a blanket, and beat the miizii out of him. I asked Auntie when I first heard about it; she called it Nish kwe justice. Lily and I made a pact that if either of us finally got to attend one, we'd tell the other about it.

"Take me with you," I plead as she rummages for her keys.

Lily is usually the one who tells me about rez happenings. This would be a chance for me to have something exciting to share with her for once. Auntie's my only entry to Ojibwe ceremonies, and sometimes she brings me to full-moon ceremonies, but going with her to a blanket party would mean something different. It would be another way for the other Nish kwewag in my community to see me as part of the Firekeeper family. Not just a Fontaine.

Plus, what if this blanket party got out of hand and Auntie needed my help?

"No way." She tucks her cell phone into her bra.

"But I want to go." I'm surprised at myself. I have never talked back to Auntie; her word is law.

She whirls around and steps toward me, but I stand firm. Auntie glowers. Something shifts in her, energy imploding to simultaneously magnify and focus her anger. The hair on my arms and neck stands on end.

"This shit is ugly and messed up and I don't want you anywhere near it." She practically spits in my face, "Go to college. Snag Jamie. Live your nice life."

She turns and is gone. I stand there in the dark, hands trembling. Her dismissal stings like a slap across my face.

My cousins always tell stories about my aunt's fighting days. Tales of Fierce Teddie and her legendary shenanigans that grow more hilarious with each retelling. Like the time when she was at a bar with friends and a Zhaaganaash guy kept asking each girl if she was an Indian and how much Indian was she? He leered at Auntie and asked if she'd show him which body parts were Indian. She throat-punched him. While he was gulping for air, my aunt told him he just experienced a real Indian fist and she had another if he wanted to see that one too.

Tonight is the first time I glimpse the scary version of Auntie. There is nothing funny about it.



## CHAPTER 5

The next morning, I wake up with Perry wedged between me and the back of the sofa. Half my butt hangs off the edge. I shift onto my side to snuggle her. She sleeps with her mouth open; her breath smells like sweet corn. Just as I start to doze off again, a finger pokes my shoulder. I wince.

“You know that’s my sore one,” I grumble, rolling over.

“Will you make pancakes?” Pauline whispers loudly. Her breath smells like corn chips.

“I want pancakes,” Perry says, eyes closed, still on the bridge between asleep and awake.

Sometimes you know you’re up against forces too powerful to ignore. I reach around Pauline’s sturdy body and roll her over to smush Perry in a hug.

“Ninde gidayan.” *You have my heart.* I kiss each girl.

I sit up and spot Auntie’s car in the driveway, letting out a sigh of relief. Auntie’s dismissal last night rushes back to me, but I push away the hurt, telling myself that at least she’s home safe. By the time I finish getting ready in the bathroom, Perry and Pauline are waiting for me at

the kitchen island. They love my pancakes. I place the electric griddle in front of them and plug it in to heat up while I brew a pot of coffee.

“Tell me where you went last night,” I say once the drip-drip of the coffeemaker begins. They also love telling me their dreams. I listen while adding the pancake ingredients in the blender.

Perry found herself inside a bank vault filled with fancy jewelry. She brags, “I was the bad guy, Auntie Daunis. I was really good at it.”

“Pearl Mary Firekeeper-Birch, jewel thief!” I laugh. “And what about you, Sis?”

Pauline says a mysterious boy visited her dreams and told her she was a princess.

“You know, Pauline, you can be a princess even without a boy saying so,” I say while sipping a cup of coffee with hot cocoa mix added. Pauline rolls her eyes.

“Aho.” Perry chirps the Ojibwe equivalent of *amen*. I spit out my coffee at her response.

Today the girls want bear-cub pancakes. As I pour batter onto the hot griddle, Auntie’s words come back like a boomerang. *Live your nice life*. Distracted, I mess up the bear-cub ears. I curse under my breath and fix them by glopping on more batter and declaring them alien pancakes. Pauline pouts, but Perry happily crams hers in her mouth.

When Auntie and Art come downstairs, the twins are stuffed full of pancakes and maple syrup made at last year’s Sugar Bush, watching *SpongeBob SquarePants* on TV.

“Miigwetch, Little Sister,” Art says warmly. He always thanks me for giving them their private morning time.

I glance at Auntie, who avoids eye contact. I’m not sure what time she came home, but I can tell something happened last night. Bigger than the blanket party. I don’t know if I should say something first or wait for her to mention it. Either way, I doubt she’ll say much in front of the twins.

Sure enough, Auntie just makes small talk until it's time for me to leave. The twins sit on each foot like usual, begging me to stay as I drag them toward the door. Once I shake them off, Art gives me another hug. Ordinarily, Auntie would nod and tell me to stay out of trouble, own my power, or aim true when kicking Harry Pajog. Standard Nish kwe anthems.

Today, she makes a point of embracing me. She holds on long after I let go.

"Ninde gidayan," she says into my ear.

I feel like crying but I'm not sure why. Auntie is full of remorse today. I just wish she didn't have the need for her regrets. Or maybe the blanket party didn't solve a problem but created a new mess instead.

The blanket party stays on my mind all day. Lily meets me at the big house in the afternoon to move artwork and other valuables to my grandfather's library as a safety precaution. I want to enjoy the party instead of worrying about something getting damaged.

As we work, I tell Lily about the blanket party.

"I wonder who they got?" she muses. "Can you imagine a Council member or the mayor or, like, a teacher walking around with a black eye? Pretending they walked into a door or some such foolishness?"

"I just hope whoever the blanket party posse was helping, that she feels safer now," I say.



Levi shows up at my grandparents' house with the beer around eight p.m. Ice cold, as promised. I can tell Lily's pissed.

We set up the keg in the kitchen. Then Levi leaves to pick up his friends, calling over his shoulder, "Don't drink all the booze before I get back!"

"I don't know why you're mad," I say as we head to the library off

the dining room, where the liquor cabinet is located. “Levi just did us a big favor.”

She gives a frustrated growl. “You’re so clueless sometimes.”

“Hey. I’m not legal in Canada till October, and Auntie told me never to ask her to buy alcohol. So, unless Granny June was gonna buy us this pony keg, we were shit outta luck.” I lower my voice, teasing. “C’mon, Lily, do you know how humiliating it was to ask my younger-by-three-months brother to get us beer?”

“It’s just . . .” Lily holds back, as if choosing her words carefully. “You bitch about Hockey World, and then you invite the king of Hockey World to our party. What happened to just having a few friends over?”

“Calm your tits, Lil. We’re celebrating. Lake State. Woo-hoo!” I say with minimal enthusiasm. “It’s just Levi and his minions crashing the party. And Jamie Johnson. What can I do to make it up to you?”

“You invited *Jamie*?” She eyeballs me. “Oh, I get it now. Calm your own tits and stick your tongue down New Guy’s throat, hey.”

“No tits to calm, Sis,” I say, looking down at my flat chest. “And I’m not kissing Jamie. Levi’s the one who wanted him here. And he’s got a girlfriend.” Anticipating a comment from Lily about my defensive tone, I decide it’s grappa time.

I walk over to the liquor cabinet. My grandparents’ foolproof security system was to hide the key on the hook on the back of the fancy cabinet. The alcohol equivalent of writing your password on a Post-it and sticking it on your computer screen. I select a bottle of imported grappa. I take a big sip, and the Italian brandy burns all the way down to my gut.

“If the girlfriend’s dating a hockey god who’s playing for a team thousands of miles away—where the hell is he from, anyway? Whatever. She knew the sitch,” Lily says.

“Is that what you would’ve said to my mom?” I take another swig

of grappa. “You know she’s never gotten over walking in on my dad and Levi’s ma.”

“I know, I know. I only said to kiss him ‘cause you haven’t dated anyone since TJ, and that was two years ago. Stupid hookups don’t count.” She lets out a sigh that feels too big for her body. “I’m pissed ‘cause your brother takes over shit and makes it about him. This was supposed to be for us.”

She’s right. I take another drink. It’s only the first swig that burns. This one spreads a relaxing warmth throughout my body.

“We’re gonna have a great night. It’s still about us. Three weeks from now, we start college. You gotta tell Granny June how much your books are gonna cost so you can redeem one of her coupons.” Lily’s graduation present from her great-grandmother was a sheet of eight handwritten coupons: *This coupon is good for one semester of books and supplies for Lily June Chippeway with love from Granny June. Nontransferable.*

“You’re right, and once we’re at Lake State, no more Levi and his boys.” Lily scopes the liquor cabinet and pulls out a bottle of Frangelico. She clinks the odd bottle, shaped like a priest, against my bottle of clear liquor, which has a grapevine twig floating inside.

Before we drink, Lily holds out her left hand to begin our special handshake.

“Lake State, baby,” I say at our butterfly-flutter finale.

Lily trills a lee-lee that nearly shatters my eardrum.



Two hours later, my little goon is loudly scolding Levi for playing music too loudly.

“Do you *want* the cops to stop by?” Lily sounds exactly like Granny June giving someone hell. Levi ignores her until Lily adds, “All them tribal cops are cross-deputized to handle calls off the



rez, so maybe TJ will be the one who responds to the loud noise complaint.”

My brother immediately turns down the volume on Hoobastank.

“And I told you to play Amy Winehouse,” she reminds him.

“And I told *you*,” Levi counters, “none of your weird music that nobody else knows.”

As Lily launches into a profanity-laced speech about the genius of Amy Winehouse, I count twenty-four people in the big house. I take a swig of grappa for every half-dozen people. The pony keg won’t last much longer. Levi and his friends will leave. Lily will calm her tits. Everything will be fine. I already feel fine. So fine, in fact, that when Jamie Johnson stands next to me, I hold out the bottle of grappa so he can feel fine too. He takes a small sip and coughs.

“What is this, moonshine?” he sputters.

“Grappa. Italian brandy,” I say. “Made from the stuff left behind after the grapes are pressed for wine.” I take another swig and offer to give Jamie a tour of the big house.

Daunis the friendly host—that’s all. I’m definitely not trying to be alone with him. Some creeper girl Levi must have invited tags along when we go upstairs. Damn wannabe anglerfish auditioning for the part of Jamie Johnson’s next girlfriend.

Anglerfish. That’s what I call the hockey girlfriends. A bottom-dweller fish that bites its mate and fuses with it. A parasitic appendage unable to exist separately.

“There’s a master bedroom suite, three more bedrooms, two other bathrooms, and a secret door to the scary attic.” I fling my arm awkwardly toward all the doors.

Jamie smiles at my wild gesturing.

“Wait, so you grew up here?” the girl asks.

“Till I was six. Then my mom finished college, started teaching kindergarten, and bought a house four blocks away.” I narrow my

eyes at the anglerfish circling Jamie like a shark. "But, yeah. Sunday dinners and major holidays here."

I lead them down a paneled hallway, pointing to the hidden attic door and pressing a finger to my lips to emphasize its secret existence.

Jamie pauses to stare at my senior portrait on the wall. GrandMary made me curl my hair. I have a dreamy expression on my face. My mother's and uncle's portraits are next to mine. They barely look like who they became.

Mom graduated high school a year after her classmates, the only one with a toddler. Her dark brown hair was shellacked into a tall wave of bangs and angel wings curving around each ear before cascading past her shoulders. There is something heartbreaking about her stylish efforts, and the way she smiles into the camera, her beautiful green eyes filled with hope. I want to hug that version of my mother. She has no idea of the losses to come.

In his portrait, Uncle David looks as if seeing the Sault in the rear-view mirror cannot happen quickly enough for him. Eager to flee and go someplace where people are more interested in being colorful than coloring within the lines. He wears a boring suit and a fresh haircut to please his mother, but the purple tie and pocket square are my uncle's tribute to Prince.

"Pay no attention to the curious photos on the wall," I say. "These people will be unrecognizable soon. Even to themselves."

"You're weird," the girl says.

I shrug and take another swig of grappa before leading my tour back to the staircase.

"I can hold that for you," Jamie says, reaching for the bottle.

"Yes. A hockey god with manners. Good for you, Jamie Johnson. And welcome to Sault Sainte Marie." I gesture like a game-show hostess.

"Now, don't be like tourists and pronounce it like *Salt*. It's *Soo*."

"Noted," he says. "You're full of fascinating facts."

I catch his gently mocking tone. "Miigwetch, hockey prince." I look around. "Hey . . . where did that girl go?"

"I think you lost her," Jamie says.

"C'est la vie." *Such is life.*

"Qui n'avance pas, recule," he says. *Who does not move forward, recedes.*

I stare at him. Jamie speaks French? Before I can ask him about it, I get distracted by his eyes. He's standing close enough for me to notice that his irises are lighter toward the pupil and have a darker brown perimeter that sort of bleeds into the tawny part. Grappa must sharpen my eyesight, because I'm noticing every detail.

"You're staring," Jamie says.

"Um . . . girls are after you," I tattle. It sounds stupid as soon as I hear myself.

"Thank you for the warning." His wide smile tugs at the end of his scar.

"Hey, Bubb!" We both turn to see Levi taking the stairs two at a time to join us. My brother puts an arm around me. "Got a favor to ask."

I brace myself. Previous favors have included me being his best friend Stormy's date to Shagala last year and providing Anishinaabemowin nicknames for his friends and teammates. One guy kept pestering me for an "Indian name better than everyone else's," so I told him that Gichimeme meant the biggest and most powerful bird. He went around for weeks, loudly crowing his new name before a Nishnaab friend finally pulled him aside and explained it meant, "big pile-ated woodpecker." In other words, Big Pecker.

"Would you be Jamie's Supe ambassador?"

"Me? But . . . I'm not part of the club," I say in surprise. "Them girls call dibs on the new Supes."

"Right." Levi gives Jamie a knowing look before adding, "That's

why you'd be perfect. Jamie's got a girlfriend. So you'd be keeping all the puck sluts away."

I growl. "You know I hate that term."

"Sorry, Bubb," Levi says quickly. "What I meant is, he could go running with you, so you could tell him all about the town." He turns to Jamie. "Did you know that Daunis made the boys' varsity hockey team all four years at Sault High? Plus, she was the class valedictorian."

"I did notice she knows a lot of fun facts," Jamie says with a wink.

"Hey, this feels like a setup," I say as the realization hits me.

"It's a help-up, Bubb. Any other girl as Jamie's ambassador would result in catfights."

"Don't flatter yourself." I roll my eyes. "But if you think that's true . . . won't they be mad at me?" Did Levi just invent a word: *help-up*?

"No one will mess with you," he says. "You're a total badass. Just like Aunt Teddie."

And with those magic words, along with the pleased look on New Guy's face and the warmth of the grappa, I agree to be Jamie's ambassador.



## CHAPTER 6

**T**wo mornings later, Jamie Johnson is in my driveway, stretching his arms overhead in the dawn twilight. He must live nearby, since I don't see a car. I nod hello before putting semaa down and whispering at my prayer tree. Joining him in the driveway, I take in an eyeful of my new Supe buddy.

The guy is all lean muscles and ligaments stretched over bones. He has no body fat whatsoever. We are the same height, but I outweigh him by a good thirty pounds. Even more on puffy days.

As I size Jamie up, I imagine him doing the same to me: *Tall, sturdy chick, ginormous ass, ghostly white skin, wide mouth, big nose, and—what cruel irony—small tits.* I fight an urge to shout back that I'm powerful on defense, I'm smart, and I don't ever give up.

He interrupts my internal dialogue. "You ever run with your brother?"

"Sometimes," I say, beginning my side stretches. "He and his friends go a lot faster than my normal pace." I leave out the part about Levi's impatience with my warm-up routine.

"You're really close to your brother." Jamie squats and stretches one leg to the side.

"Um . . . I suppose. Sometimes he's a pain." I stare at the taut gracilis muscle of his inner thigh, how it forms a direct line into his loose shorts . . . I force myself to reestablish eye contact. "Do you have any siblings?"

"No siblings. Just my uncle. My parents divorced when I was little. They aren't into hockey. Uncle Ron's always helped pay for my gear and travel teams. When he got a teaching job here, I took him up on his offer to do my senior year in the Sault." He looks pleased getting the town nickname right.

I catch myself mirroring his proud smile as I go through a quick version of my warm-up. Jamie matches his stretches to mine.

"Ready, buddy?" I jut my chin and lips toward the road.

"Yes, Ambassador." The smile hasn't left his face.



I take my normal route through campus.

"Hey, look," Jamie says when we pass the new dorm. "It's got your last name on it."

"Yup."

He laughs. "That's all you got to say?"

"Yup." I flash my cheesiest smile.

When we reach the overlook behind the student union, I stop.

"Hold up," I say. Jamie walks back a few steps to stand next to me. "Over there, a few miles away, is Lake Superior." I point to the west before following the river. "It feeds the St. Marys River, which is the international border with Canada. The city on the other side is also called Sault Sainte Marie, but it's a lot bigger than our town." I end with another game-show-hostess flourish. Something about Jamie

makes me want to show off. “The river curves around the east end of town, and those pretty hills are part of Sugar Island. That’s where my dad’s family is from. Mine and Levi’s, I mean.”

“Wow. It’s beautiful.”

The awe in his voice makes me feel the same as when I ace a quiz.

“Ready?” I ask, easing back into our pace. We follow the road from the bluff to the river a half mile away.

Jamie watches a freighter moving slowly and quietly into the nearest lock. As he observes the long ship, I sneak a look at his profile, the side of the face that isn’t scarred. The freighter blasts its horn fifty feet from us. Startled, Jamie swears loudly. I laugh.

“I’m gonna need my ambassador to explain all this,” he says.

“Remember when I pointed to Lake Superior?”

“Five minutes ago?” he says dryly.

“Yes, smart-ass. So, ships pass by on their way to or from the other Great Lakes to reach Lake Superior, which is twenty-something feet higher than everything downriver. There used to be rapids here. It was a major gathering spot for Anishinaabek, with fishing villages on both sides of the river and on Sugar Island. The government took over the area and cut through the rapids to build the Soo Locks, which work like a water elevator to raise or lower the ships.”

Jamie’s eyes are on me instead of the freighter across the street. “What happened to all the Anishinaabek people and their villages?”

I raise an eyebrow. I’m not sure if Jamie knows what a big question he’s asked. Tourists like Jamie never think about the ones who got pushed aside for progress. I don’t know if he really wants to know my tribe’s history, or how I’d even begin to tell him.

“That’s a story for another time,” I say. “Now it’s your turn to talk. Tell me about you.”

“That’s a story for another time,” he says, grinning. “I have more questions.”

I smile back. “How did I get stuck with the most curious one of yous?”

“What’s the deal with ‘yous’?” Jamie asks.

I laugh. “Ah, that’s the most important question. Yous is the Yooper version of y’all.”

“And . . . Yooper means a person from the U.P., or Upper Peninsula?”

“Wow. I got the smart buddy.” I point for us to take the next turn.

We fall easily into a comfortable silence that lasts for a few miles. When we turn by the Dairy Queen, he gestures toward a small house.

“That’s where my uncle and I live,” he says, continuing to run beside me. “Oh, one more question. When people say Anishinaabe, do they mean Native or Ojibwe?”

“Anishinaabe means the Original People. Indigenous. Nish. Nishnaab. Shinaab. Mostly we’re referring to Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi tribes from the Great Lakes area. Ojibwe language is called Anishinaabemowin or Ojibwemowin. Levi calls it Ojiberish.” I roll my eyes. “If you hang with him long enough, he’ll give you a Nish nickname.”

Jamie quickly looks my way. “Levi said to ask you how to say Scarface in the language.”

We burst into laughter at the same time. I inhale some spit and have to stop for a coughing fit. Once we catch our breath, I motion toward EverCare, surprised at how quickly the miles flew by with Jamie.

“I end my run at that nursing home. My grandmother’s there. She had a stroke.”



“I’m sorry,” he says. “That’s a lot to deal with after losing your uncle, too. How are *you* coping, Daunis?” The directness startles me. Something about the way he asks makes me wonder if he might be familiar with loss, too.

Other than Lily, no one really asks how I’m doing. People ask about Mom, or what will happen with the big house. It’s odd to have the person who has known me the least amount of time ask how I’m doing, and in such a genuine way.

“It’s okay,” Jamie says as I fumble for words. “Tell me when you’re ready.”

By the time we reach the parking lot, I still have no answer. I look over at Jamie. His skin glistens like a shiny penny, smooth and new. His hair is damp with sweat, the curls going in every direction. My thoughts about Jamie go in every direction as well.

Regular World needs some Hockey World rules, I decide.

“Miigwetch for the run, buddy,” I say. “Tomorrow, it’s your turn. You can tell me about your last hockey team, your last school, your uncle, and your girlfriend, hey?”

Jamie smiles, gives a thumbs-up, and jogs away.



After I visit GrandMary and walk home, I fill Lily in on my run with Jamie. She and I text our guesses as to what Jamie might reveal about the girlfriend.

LILY: car accident they bonded over their scars

ME: nah auntie say his scar 2 str8 2b accident

LILY: her jealous ex cut him

ME: not evry relatshp a drama shit show

LILY: all the 1s I seen r

Lily doesn't say much about her mom or her life before coming to live with Granny June, but sometimes she'll take Mom's side when I gripe about the overprotective stuff.

LILY: ok fancy nancy drew whats ur hypotenoose

ME: lost V 2gthr btw its hypothesis

LILY: GEEK



It rains hard the next morning, so I text an alternate plan to Jamie before dawn. He swings by in a black pickup truck and we go to the fitness center at Chimakwa. I don't like running indoors, but it's better than going through the day feeling like something's off.

We hop on our treadmills and, a minute in, I notice that Jamie's settings are the same as mine.

"You know, you don't have to keep pace with me," I say. "That's the upside of running on a treadmill. Go as fast as you want."

"Nah. It's good. I still have practice and conditioning with the team later," Jamie says.

I shrug and keep running, but secretly, I'm pleased. It takes two miles for me to find my rhythm. That's the downside of a treadmill, right up there with feeling like a hamster on a wheel.

"You're quiet today," Jamie says. "Everything okay?"

"I was waiting for you to talk, remember? It's your turn."

"Ah. That's right," he says. "Well . . . what do you want to know?"

I want to know everything. My prayer this morning, though, was for manaadendamowin. Respect. Respect for relationships—my ambassador thing with Jamie and his relationship with his girlfriend. I won't be a wannabe anglerfish, trying to latch on to a guy who is already taken.

“Whatever you want to tell me, buddy.”

“Well, Ambassador, I was born on a dark and stormy night . . .”

I look over to see his full smile tugging the bottom of his scar.

“I don’t like talking about myself, I guess,” Jamie says. “My dad’s Cherokee. Him and my mom got divorced when I was little. She and I moved around a lot. He got a new family. Uncle Ron checked on me more than my dad. I played hockey all over. That’s it.”

Jamie’s background is kind of like mine. Native dad. Parents not together. And an uncle who stepped in because his own dad wasn’t around anymore. Maybe that explains why it feels easy to be around him.

“And you figure skate,” I say. “You left that part out.”

“How do you know that?” I feel Jamie eyeballing me.

“I dunno. The way you lifted Pauline the other day?” I shrug again and feel a painful twinge in my shoulder. “My grandmother, the one I call GrandMary, she made me do figure skating for a few years. I hated it. But it was the only way she let me play hockey.”

“What about your mom? Didn’t she have a say?”

“Ha! You never knew GrandMary. She was like Eta Carinae, and my mom and I were kinda like wobbly planets sucked into her gravitational pull.”

“Eta Carinae?” Jamie asks.

“The largest star in the galaxy,” I say quietly. Something sinks inside me as I realize I used the past tense about someone who is still alive. I increase my pace setting. Jamie seems to sense the shift and cranks up his setting too, quietly keeping pace. We go silent for the rest of the run.

On the drive home, I ask Jamie to drop me off at EverCare.

“But it’s still coming down.” He gestures at the frantic wiper blades.

“Eh, I won’t melt.” I open the truck door and steel myself for the

sprint to the building. I glance over to him. “Thanks for the run and the ride, buddy.”

“You’re welcome, Ambassador.”



I kiss GrandMary before applying her red lipstick. Mom hasn’t arrived yet, so I retrieve the blink notebook from the top shelf in the small closet. Settling into the chair beside her bed, I talk to my grandmother, pausing to make tally marks in the two columns: LIGHT BULB ON and LIGHT BULB OFF. She seems tired today; I stay only for the fifteen-minute data-collection session.

When I leave, Jamie’s pickup truck is still in the parking lot.

“You didn’t need to wait,” I say, climbing in. Surprised yet grateful.

“Eh,” he says, mimicking me. “I wanted to.”

As Jamie pulls into my driveway, I remember the girlfriend. She needs to be real to me.

“You didn’t say anything about your last town or team . . . or your girlfriend.”

“My girlfriend’s name is Jennifer. Jen,” he says. I try to imagine her, but all I see is a cool girl with long, shiny hair and a long side bang over her left eye like the late singer Aaliyah. “We’ve been together for three years. Her dad’s military, so she moves all the time too.” I should feel happy for Jamie, having a girlfriend who understands being the new kid in school. “It’s just nice to have something solid no matter how much everything else changes. Know what I mean?”

I nod, though I don’t know what Jamie means. Ever since Uncle David died, nothing’s felt solid. Even before he went missing, my uncle began acting strange. Distant. We found out about his relapse afterward. The last time my life felt solid was . . . Christmas?

“Well, I’ll see you tomorrow morning . . . and, Jamie? Chi miig-wetch.” *Big thank you.* I say it to cover everything—the ride and

telling me stuff about himself, even though he has difficulty sharing details about his life.

“You’re welcome, Daunis.”

I don’t understand why I’m jealous of a girl who can relate to the closed-off parts of Jamie.



By Friday, the line between Hockey World and Regular World has blurred as if drawn in charcoal pencil that Jamie smudges a little more with each morning we run together. I wake up, brush my teeth, pull my hair into a thick ponytail, throw on running clothes, and grab a pinch of semaa from Gramma Pearl’s birchbark basket on the entry table. Jamie is always in my driveway when I whisper my morning prayer. Then we do our warm-up and hit the road.

When we pass the row of gift shops across from the Soo Locks, I smile at a memory.

“Levi sold sweetgrass to tourists here when he was little,” I say.

“What’s sweetgrass?”

“It’s one of our traditional medicines that smells really good, like a mellow, sweet spice. In Ojibwe it’s called wiingashk, and in science it’s *Hierochloe odorata*. There’ll be some for sale at the Tribe’s powwow this weekend.”

“I’ve never been to a powwow. Are you going tomorrow? Can you show me around?”

“Sure,” I say, surprised at his eagerness. I remind myself that he hasn’t grown up around his tribe like I have. “How about an ambassador-guided powwow experience?”

“That’d be fantastic,” he says with a grin. I have to force myself not to grin back. “So, Levi sold sweetgrass to tourists?”

“Yup. He and our friend Travis picked and braided it. Levi told people he was descended from a powerful chief and a medicine

woman. He claimed that his sweetgrass was magical. You know, that hokey stuff tourists like to believe." I roll my eyes.

"That sounds like Levi," Jamie laughs. "Natural businessman. I'm sure Stormy was in on it, too. Those two are trouble." Stormy Nodin is Levi's best friend, since their tribal Head Start preschool days. He made the team, along with Jamie, after bombing at Supes tryouts last year. True, Stormy's mom was in jail at the time for fighting some Zhaaganaash guy at a bar downtown, but hockey doesn't give a rat's ass about your personal problems.

"Nah, Stormy's dad didn't want him collecting medicines with people outside the family. His dad is kinda scary, like it's not just Zhaaganaash that he doesn't want to be around. Even some tribal members don't make the cut with Mr. Nodin. They only did it for a couple of summers, though. Then the casino opened, and per capita started."

"I heard some guys on the team talking about it. Tribal members get money from the casino? That's kind of crazy." Jamie shakes his head in disbelief.

I stiffen. "It's no different than Walmart or Ford paying dividends to shareholders." I keep my voice smooth while awaiting Jamie's reaction. Hoping he won't reveal himself to be a jerk.

"Wow, I never thought of it that way," he says. I feel my shoulders relax. "Can I ask how much? Or is that rude?"

"It's okay," I say. "I've heard Levi blab that adult members get thirty-six thousand dollars a year. Not sure how much it is after taxes. Kids who are tribal members get a third of that amount."

"Don't you get it?" Jamie sounds confused.

"I'm not enrolled. My dad's not listed on my birth certificate. One of many decisions that my Fontaine grandparents made because my mom was only sixteen when she had me."

Jamie must have heard the shift in my tone because he pauses and asks, "Are you okay talking about this, Daunis?"

“Yes,” I say, realizing my ease at sharing about myself. Maybe not everything, though. I’m not ready to admit how angry I feel over their decision that affected my tribal enrollment.

“It’s hard when being Native means different things depending on who’s asking and why,” he says.

“And to some people, you’ll never be Native enough,” I add.

“Yeah. It’s *your* identity, but it gets defined or controlled by other people.”

His words mirror my exact thoughts. What GrandMary and Grandpa Lorenzo took from me when they meant to exclude my dad.

Jamie meets my eyes and I know that we see each other.

We’re both silent for the rest of the run. There’s a steady breeze off the river and not a cloud in the sky. The cool air feels wonderful and tingly on my arms and legs. My breathing is deep and steady. I feel so good. As if the rays of sunshine aren’t landing on me but coming from inside me. Jamie looks over and I smile back.

Then, it happens. The zone. My body feels strong, as if I could run like this forever. I’m both in my body and somewhere else. I’m whole. Running is where all the different parts of me fit together perfectly, like a jigsaw puzzle. The zone is where I’m a step removed from the puzzle, so the lines fade, and I can see myself clearly.

By the time we reach EverCare, we’re both panting. Jamie usually gives a thumbs-up and jogs the rest of the way home. Today he doesn’t make any move. Just stands next to me, running his hands through his wet hair, leaving waves from his temples to the back of his neck.

“Would you like to meet my grandmother?” I ask impulsively.

“Yes,” he says, looking surprised but pleased. “I’d like that very much.”

We pass the front desk, both easing into regular breaths. I feel nervous as we walk into my grandmother’s room. I’m not sure why

I've decided to invite Jamie along. Not even Lily has been here to see GrandMary.

"GrandMary, this is my friend Jamie," I say after kissing her cheek.

LIGHT BULB OFF.

"Bonjour, madame. C'est un plaisir de vous rencontrer." Jamie kisses her hand, where raised blue veins thread beneath wrinkled skin. He looks across GrandMary's bed to me.

I do a double take. For as much time as I have spent this week with Jamie, I still know so little about him. He spoke French at the party last Saturday and now again to my grandmother. The line between Hockey World and Regular World isn't blurred; it's been rendered nonexistent by the new guy on my brother's hockey team. Dangerously nonexistent.

"Who are you, Jamie Johnson?" I ask, perplexed.

He looks down as if embarrassed or uncomfortable. When he meets my eyes, there's something determined in his expression. He speaks French again, this time to me.

"Je suis celui qui attend avec impatience demain." *I am the one looking forward to tomorrow.*





## CHAPTER 7

Saturday morning arrives with the same excitement as my former game days. Because of today's powwow, the Supes have an early-morning practice. I run by myself at a quicker pace than usual. During GrandMary's alert moments, I tell her about Jamie's visit and my plans to take Jamie to the Tribe's powwow. She doesn't show much of a reaction until I mention my other activity for the day. The news that I'll be pricing textbooks with Lily merits as big a smile as my grandmother can manage. I wrap GrandMary in a hug and kiss her cheek. It makes both of us feel so happy that I hop around to kiss her other cheek before leaving.

Later that morning, Lily drives us to the campus bookstore.

"All that pep in your step wouldn't have anything to do with a certain hockey player, would it?" she comments as we walk through the parking lot.

"Just excited to check out our textbooks and highlighters," I say.

"Yeah, right," Lily says. "The old magic-pencil theory." She doesn't share my belief that the perfect pen or pencil can improve my academic performance.

We laugh, sharing a good mood that evaporates the second we're staring at the prices of the books required for American Literature.

"Holaaaay." Lily's voice carries over to the next aisle.

"You ain't kidding," a stranger shouts back.



After Lily drops me off, I eat an early lunch. Mom texts from EverCare while I wait for Jamie.

ME: Ill be at pw all day

MOM: Be safe. Who r u going with?

ME: Lily. LOVE YOU

Protecting Mom from full disclosure isn't the same thing as lying. She won't care that Jamie is just a friend. Once she learns he's new in town, Mom will launch the inquisition: *Who is this boy? Where is he from? Who are his parents? How do we know he's a good person?*

It's a kindness to us both, really, to spare her from anxieties kicking into high gear. My mother's superpower is turning my ordinary worries into monsters so huge and pervasive that her distress and heartache become almost debilitating. I can protect her from that hurt.

Jamie's truck pulls into the driveway. I slide my cell phone into the pocket of my cutoff jeans while jogging over to the passenger side.

"Hey, buddy," I say, climbing into the truck. "Thanks for the ride."

After I told Lily everything that happened during yesterday's run with Jamie and at GrandMary's room, I decided I needed to pull back and emphasize the *buddy* part of the new friendship.

"No problem. Thanks for letting me go with you and showing me around, Daunis."

"It's my duty as ambassador. Everything you ever wanted to know

about powwows but were too afraid to ask?" I say. My back pocket buzzes.

LILY: Can I PLEASE text sex stuf about jj and u not b mad

ME: This seems v imprtnt 2u

LILY: VVV IMP

ME: u have free pass 4 filth let it fly my fren

Jamie takes the scenic route to the powwow grounds. The Superior Shores Casino and Resort spans across a massive amount of riverfront. It looks like it should be on the Las Vegas strip rather than in our small town.

"Okay, I got a question. Why's the Tribe called the Sugar Island Ojibwe Tribe, but the casino's on the mainland?"

"The Tribe had claim to land along both sides of the river," I say. "They settled a land-claims case with the federal government twenty years ago and used the money to buy an old factory and dock. Ten years later, they opened the casino and just kept expanding. Per cap started about five years ago."

"It sounds like you have some feelings about the per capita payments."

I pause to read the incoming text.

LILY: tell jj ambassadors reward their supe 4 evry goal

ME: u lil perv

"Sorry. Lily needed something," I say, shoving my phone into my back pocket. "Auntie says per cap isn't good or bad. It just kinda amplifies whatever's going on with a person or family." I point for Jamie to turn toward the satellite rez. "People judge how a few

members spend their money and say petty stuff. But there's lots of good things happening too. Families travel. Buy a nice car or put a down payment on a house. Go to college."

My words instantly echo with the biting tone from Auntie last Friday as she left for the blanket party. *Go to college. Snag Jamie. Live your nice life.* My giddy buzz about bringing Jamie to the powwow deflates a bit.

This weekend, she and Art are parking their RV on the edge of the powwow grounds by the woods. They'll visit with friends from other tribal communities who travel to powwows across the country and into Canada. The twins will play with cousins and powwow friends. It would be a good time to sit with Auntie and tell her what's still on my mind from the night of the blanket party.

Jamie opens his mouth to ask another question.

"So, buddy," I cut him off. "Do you speak other languages besides French?"

"Spanish. What about you?" He follows the small directional signs that are on nearly every corner the closer we get to the powwow grounds.

"Eh. French, a little bit of Anishinaabemowin, and a bit of Italian . . . but that's mostly for the swear words." He turned my question back on me, I notice. "Oh, and another good thing about per cap: More Nish kids play hockey. Figure skating too. When my dad played, the Firekeepers took up a collection for new skates and gear. He always said there were other guys on Sugar Island who should've been on the best teams with him." Another text buzzes.

"Sorry." I apologize again, with the explanation, "Lily."

LILY: Tell him u lost ur v in a ice shanty. Thats so yoop

ME: More yoop than losing it in a deer blind?

LILY: i was 12 dint kno bettr

This time I turn off my phone and set it in the drink holder between our seats.

“Can I ask what happened?” Jamie asks. “To your dad, I mean.”

I blink in surprise that Levi hasn’t filled him in yet. “Um . . . bit of a scandal back then. My mom was sixteen when she got pregnant, and my dad was a poor Nish from the rez on Sugar Island.”

I’m not sure why I am telling him this. Maybe because I get to be the one to tell him, rather than someone filling him in with juicy gossip.

“The night my mom told him she was pregnant, they got into an accident on the island and my dad broke both legs. He didn’t get the right medical treatment, so his legs didn’t heal properly. It was before the casino opened, and he couldn’t get work anywhere in the U.P.”

“It must have been really high unemployment back then, huh?”

I stare at my buddy. Has Levi really told him nothing? “My dad couldn’t get a job because my Zhaaganaash grandpa was the mayor of Sault Ste. Marie and owned one of the biggest construction companies in the U.P. And he and GrandMary didn’t care much for Indians. Especially ones who’d knocked up their only daughter.”

“But . . .” Jamie lingers at the intersection even after the other cars turn. “You’re Indian.”

“Yup.” I stare out the window when he resumes driving. “Anyways, he needed a job so he followed a cousin to northern Ontario. I didn’t have much time with him before he died in a logging accident when Levi and I were both seven.”

“Daunis, that’s awful. I’m so sorry.” Jamie’s compassion is his best trait, I think.

“Miigwetch,” I say.

“You and Levi were both seven? How does that happen?”

I shrug. “I heard it was the whiskey.”

Jamie waits for me to say more, but I’d rather stay quiet until the

complicated feelings—which arise whenever my Fontaine and Fire-keeper worlds collide—make sense. And there’s no telling how long that might take.



The lot at Chimakwa is filled to capacity with powwow overflow. Jamie manages to find a narrow spot along Ice Circle Drive and demonstrates expert parallel-parking skills.

“That’s Lily’s Jeep.” Cell phone in hand, I point to the lone vehicle in a clearing beyond the ice arena.

“Why does she park all the way out there? Is she worried about getting blocked?”

“No. She’s just really bad at parallel parking.”

“I could teach her,” Jamie offers.

“Eh. She thinks her method is fine.” I smile mischievously. “I’ll bet if you spoke French when you offered, she’d agree to anything.”

Jamie blushes, and I feel my giddy buzz return.

We follow one of the many clusters of people spilling from the sidewalk into the road. Drumbeats grow louder with each step toward the powwow grounds. A steady breeze and intermittent shade from puffy cumulus humilis clouds save us from frying in the August sun like ants under a magnifying glass. Perfect powwow weather.

A tingle runs the length of my spine as I observe a hulking figure squeezed behind the steering wheel of an approaching tribal cop car. TJ Kewadin.

*I love you, Lorenza.* The only person to call me by my middle name. We dated for two months before we started snagging. But once we did, he thought it was pervy to use my first name, which translates to “daughter.”

He dumped me without explanation one month later. Stopped calling. Wouldn’t look at me in the AP classes we had together.

I flip the bird in a smooth pan motion as Officer Kewadin passes by. So much for staying under the radar.

Jamie gives a low chuckle. "Not a fan of law enforcement, huh?"

"Nope." I change the subject. "Have you been across the river to Sault, Ontario?"

"Yeah, my uncle and I went to the mall. I had to get a new suit for game days."

"I'm guessing you get searched at the border on your way back to the U.S.?"

"Yeah," Jamie says slowly. "Why?"

"I just assumed your uncle is also . . . um . . . visibly Nish."

Jamie nods, confused, and I continue. "Border guards in Canada ask if you're bringing any firearms into their country. On this side, they just wanna know about cigarettes. Unless you're visibly Nish. Then you get the full questioning. And if you're Nish and Black, like my uncle Art? You get a gun pulled on you at the border with your Nish wife and baby daughters in their car seats."

Jamie studies me. "Man, Daunis, I had no idea that racist bullshit happens here. It makes me angry that your aunt and uncle had to go through such a horrible experience."

"And *that's* why I'm not a fan of law enforcement. Among other reasons." I look down. "My aunt Teddie rarely crosses the border now, and when she does, she never has Art or the girls with her. As soon as I could drive, she had me shop for them across the river. Not only am I the palest Nish, but I have a Canadian birth certificate because I was born in Montreal, so it makes my border crossing less complicated."

Jamie's been incredibly sympathetic throughout our conversation, so I expect him to respond the same way now. Instead, he remains quiet and focuses on the birch trees nearby.

"Do you ever wish you could do something to truly make a difference?" he says finally. "Solve a problem and improve things for

people? Not just for those you know, but something big enough to impact even people you'll never meet?"

"Of course," I say. "I want to become a doctor and help people heal. And do research that can benefit tribal communities. But for now, I do small things to help. Like go across the river to get my aunt the Limpa rye bread she likes from the Swedish bakery. My mom has me bring back over-the-counter medicine that's way cheaper over there. Plus, Tim Hortons coffee for Art." I glance down and pull at a thread on my cutoff jeans. "It probably seems insignificant, but I know it makes a difference to my aunt and uncle."

"Kindness is something that seems small, Daunis, but it's like tossing a pebble into a pond and the ripples reach further than you thought." Jamie smiles and—as if confirming his words—the warmth of his kindness ripples through my body.

I hope I am not blushing.

"You must think it's strange," I begin, eager to change the subject. "A foreign country is right next door and I go for coffee and Sudafed. And Canadians cross the river for gas and milk. But when you live somewhere forever, I suppose everything seems normal."

Jamie gives me an odd look, curious and melancholy at the same time. "I never live anywhere long enough to find out what normal feels like."

He hesitates, like he just admitted something he shouldn't have. Before I can ask him more, we're interrupted by a group of skateboarders rolling past us. Like a flock of birds, they curve their route in unison to avoid a cluster of people in the road ahead.

There is a startling *POP! POP! POP!* sound.

In the next instant, I am facedown on the road.





## CHAPTER 8

Something is crushing me. Jamie. He's thrown himself on me, pressing me into the ground. A moment later, he pushes himself off and the absence of his weight instantly expands my lungs, and I gulp deep breaths. My vision comes into focus just as I realize it's gone dark. Jamie's hand is on my back, forcing me to stay down.

"What the hell?" I push myself up anyway, shaking him off. Firecrackers. Tossed onto the road by local boys stirring up mischief. A few years ago it might have been Levi and his friends.

The boys laugh as they skateboard away. Most people are turned in their direction. An older man shouts at their backs. A few people gawk at Jamie and me.

I get up and bend over to dust off my legs, observing my bloody knee an instant before it begins stinging.

"Shit," I say, as the pain grows and blood trickles down my leg to my running shoe.

"Daunis, I'm so sorry. I thought . . . I panicked." Jamie kneels to inspect my injury. He quickly removes his T-shirt, and even in my confusion I am struck by how lean he is. Sleek. His tanned chest is a

human anatomy lesson; each muscle is clearly defined. His hand on the back of my knee feels so hot that I wonder if it will leave a mark. With his other hand, he pours water on it from a bottle that someone hands him and dabs at the wound with his shirt.

I focus on his bent head. His curls look soft. A few strands shine copper under the sunlight.

“You thought it was gunshots?”

His hands freeze for just a second before he resumes cleaning my knee, as if I haven’t said anything.

I continue. “You lived in some dangerous neighborhoods?”

He doesn’t quite meet my eyes. I fight an urge to trace the length of his scar. I read about scars once. Hypertrophic scars are reddest in the first year; they fade with time. Jamie’s scar is fresh. *That cut’s too straight to be accidental.* If what Auntie said was right, then someone cut him on purpose. Recently.

“Danger can turn up anywhere,” he says.



As soon as Jamie and I reach the powwow grounds, the twins shout my name. They’re dressed in Jingle Dress regalia. Skirts with waved rows of small, silver-colored cones clink melodically as Perry and Pauline run toward me, Auntie close behind. Their eyes go to my knee.

“Holy. What happened to you? Something bloody?” Perry asks hopefully.

“Someone set off a bunch of firecrackers. Caught us off guard, and we dove for cover. But Jamie patched me up.” I make it sound like an exciting adventure. Jamie shoots me a grateful smile.

When Auntie approaches, I hear her before I see her. Sewn onto her yellow Jingle Dress are bands of orange and white ribbons, and attached to those are 365 jangling golden cones. She bends over to inspect my injury.

“Looks like you cleaned it pretty well,” she tells Jamie. “There’s antiseptic spray in the first aid kit in the RV,” she reminds me. “Get some on your knee right away.”

Lily approaches in her Fancy Shawl regalia, which includes a simple black floral fabric dress with black ribbon around the skirt hem. She holds a black shawl fringed in long black and silver strands. She eyes Jamie’s shirt, which still has traces of my blood, and wrinkles her nose at my threadbare yellow GIRLS ON THE RUN T-shirt, cutoff jeans, and old running shoes.

“Holy wah. Yous look like you fought a pack of rez dogs and lost.”

“But we put up a good fight,” Jamie says. I snort and Lily raises an eyebrow at me, eyes glinting. Just as I’m bracing myself for one of Lily’s pervy comments, we hear the emcee make the final call for dancers to line up for Grand Entry.

Lily heads off while Jamie and I jog over to Teddie and Art’s RV at the edge of the powwow grounds. I douse my knee in antiseptic spray, swearing at the fresh sting.

I rummage for a shirt and hand it to Jamie. “Hurry up, we’re going to be late,” I say. It’s one of mine from the last time I went camping with them, and is too big on him, but at least it’s clean.

Jamie turns away when changing, but I can’t resist taking a peek at his back muscles. For science.

We make our way to the covered bleachers forming a perimeter around the dance arena. At the very center is a large, cedar-covered arbor with more than a dozen drum groups warming up for Grand Entry. Each drum is the size of a round coffee table. Men are seated around it, each one beating it with a drumstick that has a leather-wrapped bulb on the end, while the women stand behind them.

We all rise for Grand Entry. Carrying a staff of eagle feathers, the head veteran leads the procession. Each veteran in the color guard brings in a different flag: U.S., Canada, Michigan, Tribe, and several

Clans. The head dancers come next, a man and woman in regalia, dancing side by side. They're followed by the two teens who are the junior head dancers. Then a seemingly endless line of dancers enters the arena by category, announced by the emcee.

Jamie is on the edge of his seat, taking everything in. He has questions about everything. When a woman near us makes a high-pitched trilling sound, a few other women join in.

"What's that?" he asks, wide-eyed.

"Those are called lee-lees. Nish women trill them, mostly to honor someone. Other times there's more to it. Something else. But I'm not sure what." I make a mental note to ask Auntie.

I point out Granny June at the front of the Women's Traditional dancers.

"That's Lily's great-grandma. She named her dog Tribal Council just so she could yell at him." I imitate Granny. "Fetch my slippers, Council. No, Council. Bad Tribal Council."

Jamie throws his head back and laughs. I scold myself: *Don't be That Girl*. I think of Levi's mom, Dana. The one who got to take the Firekeeper name. *Sometimes That Girl wins*.

Auntie and her girls pass our section with the rest of the Jingle Dress dancers. My aunt is like a golden flame flickering around the arena. When the twins raise their tiny feather fans at the honor beats, I feel so proud that the breath catches in my throat.

The Fancy Shawl dancers are the last to enter the arena. Lily's shawl drapes over outstretched arms. The fringe blurs as she spins. A lone black butterfly surrounded by color.

I lean into Jamie, speaking into his ear as he scans the panoramic kaleidoscope.

"All these dancers. Imagine that each one is an atom, forming molecules of dancers for each category: Traditional, Fancy, Grass, Jingle. You see the whole entity."

I point with my lips at the sea of dancers. They entered the arena single file, but their line has spiraled around the drum arbor. Not a speck of grass is visible in the space.

“Now focus on just one dancer—say, a Jingle Dress dancer.” Jamie dutifully fixes his gaze. “Every atom has subatomic parts. Her regalia includes a dress, belt, moccasins, and a lot of other items. Dancers don’t start out with their full regalia; they get it bit by bit. Each piece is a connection to her family, her teachers, and even to ancestors generations back. If you know the story of her regalia—who and where and why each item came to be—then you know her.”

We all remain standing as the singing is led by drumbeats so powerful they reverberate through the bleachers to my feet, as if pulsing my own heart. I can feel Jamie’s gaze.

I breathe deeply, inhaling the songs, then meet his eyes. “You know the saying ‘The whole is greater than the sum of its parts’?”

Jamie nods.

“Grand Entry is the whole,” I continue. “It’s the synergy of all the teachings.”

My macro theory of Nish connectivity may not make sense to anyone except me, but seeing Jamie’s excitement, I want to share it with him.

After a long moment, Jamie says, “I like how you see the world, Daunis.”

We watch in silence until the flags are posted and the veterans’ honor song has finished. As we take our seats, Jamie turns to me suddenly. “Hey, why aren’t you dancing? You didn’t skip it to show me around, did you?”

I look down at my hands. “I’m taking a break for a year, as part of grieving my uncle.” Even though I’m angry at Uncle David, I thought it would help me get past what he did.

"I'm sorry." Jamie seems embarrassed. "I didn't mean to pry."

"You can ask me anything, Jamie. We're friends."

His smile reaches his eyes. "You have no idea how much that means to me."

I will not be That Girl, no matter how much Jamie's eyes sparkle with delight that ripples warmly to every cell in my body.



After, we roam the vendor booths that form an outer ring surrounding the bleachers. I keep an eye out for Lily. We run into her and Granny June near the first aid booth.

"Hey, we wanna sit with yous when it's time for the twins to dance," Lily says.

I tell Jamie it's the first time the girls are dancing in a competition category. "Last year they were still in Tiny Tots. They're so good . . . better dancers at six than I'll ever be."

"I bet you can dance," Jamie says, grinning. "Levi's always talking about what a star athlete you are."

"Eh. I have the endurance. Just not light on my feet. Or graceful."

Granny June nods. "Your brother is the dancer in your family."

"Yeah, but Levi never wanted to dance Fancy or Grass. Just hip-hop," I say.

Lily nudges Jamie. "You'll get to see Levi in action at Shagala. All you Supes hafta go. You should take Daunis."

"I'm sure Jamie's *girlfriend*, Jennifer, will visit for that." I glare daggers at Lily.

"Shagala," Jamie says slowly, like it's a foreign language. "Is that Nish—"

"No," I say. "*SHA* for Sault Hockey Association. And *gala* because it's a fancy dance."

"Shag-ala, *snag*-ala," Lily says. We all crack up, except for Jamie,

who may not know that *snagging* is what we call . . . Eh, I'll let Levi explain that one.

"You a hockey player?" Granny June narrows an eye as she scans Jamie head to toe.

"Yes, ma'am." He straightens himself up a bit taller.

"Hockey players are all hype, hey," she grumbles. "Best lover I ever had was an accountant." Granny June lowers her voice in a conspiratorial whisper. "Zhaaganaash."

"Granny June, he's not a boyfriend. He's a boy who's a friend," I clarify.

"And I thought you were a smart college girl," Granny June says. She takes a second look at Jamie before pointing her lips in my direction. "You gonna do right by her?"

Jamie stares at Granny before answering. "Yes. I will."

"Good. Because things end how they start," she says before wandering off to haggle with vendors for senior discounts.

"Granny June's got opinions." I roll my eyes and hope I'm not blushing.

"I like her," Jamie declares.

"You like her now," Lily begins. "Just wait till you realize everything she says is either raunchy or a quote from a fortune cookie."

"Don't forget her rants against Tribal Council," I add.

Jamie grins. "Her dog? Or the actual Tribal Council?"

"Both!" Lily and I say in unison, followed by, "Jinx!" Before she can say "double jinx," I shout, "Jinx infinity!" I give her a bratty smirk. "Infinity wins."

Lily tells Jamie, "Never argue with a geek. They use science and math like weapons."

His laughter reverberates through my body, and for just one second, I let myself imagine what it'd be like if there wasn't a Jennifer. But, isn't this how Dana started?

As a shiver runs the length of my spine, Travis suddenly appears at Lily's side. Without a thought, I put myself between them. A buffer for Lily. A pause for Travis.

"Hold up, Dauny. I just want to talk." Travis attempts to peer behind me. "Lily, can we talk?" He has the audacity to glare at me. "Without your goon?"

"That's a bad idea," I announce while raising my fists. If he wants to call me a goon, I'll act like one.

Travis shifts from foot to foot as he attempts to soften his stance. He flashes a familiar smile that reveals the beginnings of tooth decay at the gumline. *Oh, Travis.* A pang of sadness seeps through a crack in my goon armor. Then he transforms his face into his *Please, Lily, just one more chance* expression. His hands shake as he grips a two-liter bottle of Mountain Dew; a coffee filter floats inside like in a snow globe. I see Jamie notice it too, and we lock eyes.

"Not here. Not now." Lily looks nervously in the direction Granny went.

"Aww, c'mon, Lily-bit." I've heard Travis call her that nickname a million times, but this time, there's an edge to it. The hairs stand up on the back of my neck.

"Just go, Travis," I say, tensing.

"Hey man, let me help you." Jamie offers a hand to shake.

"Who are you?" Travis snarls, the pleading look on his face evaporating immediately.

"Stop, Travis. Jamie is Daunis's friend. He's a new Supe." Lily tugs Travis's arm. "Just go. Okay?"

Travis snorts, his expression twisting. "Dauny finally got herself a puck fuck?" The ugliness of his mean-spirited glee reveals a Travis I don't recognize at all. Where is the boy who convinced me to place my textbook beneath my pillow the night before a test in case its contents might permeate our brains through osmosis?



“Shut up, Travis.” Lily shoves him. “Please, just go.”

“I’ll go if you promise you’ll come find me later, Lily. I just want to talk.”

“Fine, but only if you go now.”

“Okay, you promised.” Travis flashes a grin, all smiles again, before darting away.

“Holy shit, Lily,” I say. “Don’t talk to him. He looks really rough. And you know what that coffee filter stuffed into his pop was laced with. He can’t even get through a day without it. He’s in deep.”

“I know,” she sighs. “But what am I supposed to do? It’s Travis. I’ll talk to you later. I need to find him now—Granny can’t see him, or she’ll raise hell.”

“Lily, don’t.” I reach for her arm, but she moves away.

“No! I can take care of myself.” Lily rushes off.

“C’mon, Lily . . . ,” I call to her before realizing I sound exactly like Travis trying to cajole her into doing what he wanted. Lily can take care of herself, and Travis won’t try anything with so many people around.

“So that’s Travis,” Jamie says as we watch the small black figure disappear.

“Yup.” I’m still disturbed by the change in Travis, and my trying to get Lily to do what I wanted. And my embarrassment that Jamie saw what just happened. I clear my throat. “Travis used to be sweet and so funny. In school when it was time for announcements, he’d do this drumroll thing on his belly.” I shake my head. “He looks so bad.”

“Has he always been like this?” Jamie asks. I’m relieved he doesn’t seem rattled by Travis’s behavior.

“Well, he’s another Lost Boy.” I shrug, but it’s a hollow gesture that causes a familiar jolt of pain in my left shoulder. I don’t know why I tried making light of it; Jamie’s demonstrated unexpected compassion again and again. “People call them Lost Boys, like from Neverland,

never taking anything seriously and seeming stuck in place. But I think there's more to it."

"What do you think is going on?" Jamie asks. His voice is low and calm.

"My aunt once described a rough patch in her life as self-medicating the pain. Maybe that's what's really going on when guys like Travis quit school and fixate on video games and weed—well, more than that now . . . and drinking garbage. Literal garbage."

Jamie's expression reminds me of Uncle David during class, waiting for the final answer.

And I've known the answer for several months.

"Travis is a meth head," I admit. Lily made me promise not to tell anyone, but Jamie doesn't know anyone in town. Besides, if Travis is showing up at powwows drinking meth tea, then everybody will know soon. The moccasin telegraph is powerful.

I reach for my phone to check on Lily.

ME: Sorry 4 grabbing u. R u ok?



## CHAPTER 9

The powwow emcee breaks into my thoughts:

“Intertribal dance. Everybody welcome. Swish and sway the Oh-jib-way!”

I nudge Jamie. “Let’s walk around before we go back to our seats. I’m too worked up about Travis.” The latest episode of *The Lily and Travis Saga* has set me on edge. Damn meth ruining people’s lives. Travis’s and . . .

Nope. I don’t want to think about him.

“Hey, would you mind if I went for a quick run or something?” I ask. Suddenly, I’m feeling anxious, like maybe I’ve shared something that I shouldn’t have. “You can browse the vendor booths, or I’m sure Levi is around somewhere. I just . . . I don’t like feeling like this.”

“Daunis.” The intensity of the way he says my name grabs my attention. “I’ll come with,” Jamie says. “You wanna talk, I’ll listen. If you don’t, that’s okay. We can just run together.”

Jamie is doing it again, being kind and sympathetic. Making it so easy to open up to him. I realize that running with Jamie has become the best part of my day—the only normal part in this New Normal.

I nod gratefully. We make our way past people leaving the powwow grounds.

"You know what would help?" I say as we reach Ice Circle Drive. "Set the pace. Push me so I burn off this anger. Okay?"

"You got it." He grins, and something flips in my stomach. As if I've swallowed magnets and Jamie is made of steel. *Don't be That Girl*. I force myself not to smile back.

"Let's see what you've got," he says, launching into a sprint.

It works. We do a fast two-mile loop that requires all of my physical and mental energy. I give a thumbs-up as we catch our breath. Running is good medicine.

"Do you want to talk about it now?" Jamie asks.

"Travis drank at parties," I say as we walk back to the powwow grounds. "He didn't make any teams, so he wasn't under any player code of conduct. Two years ago, he started dabbling in other stuff."

There's a relief in telling a secret. A burden lifted, just by sharing it with someone. And Jamie listens patiently. When I tried telling Levi last fall and winter, he didn't seem to take my concerns about Travis seriously. I saw my brother giving Travis hell after that, so I guess Levi did listen; he just wasn't sympathetic in the moment, the way that Jamie is.

"Meth's cheaper than booze and lasts longer. His mom got into meth. People call her the Meth Queen. Travis started skipping school a lot and took fewer AP classes. Lily caught him making meth over Christmas break. Like, actually cooking it, Jamie. Since then, it seems like more people in town and on the rez are using." I take a deep breath before adding, "Sometimes it's people you never in a million years thought would get mixed up in it."

Even though Jamie is listening without a trace of judgment, I cut myself off. It feels disloyal to say anything more. I'd be revealing the

worst parts about someone I love. I never thought about secrets being like a bull's-eye. The smaller the circle, the bigger the secret.

We reach the vendor booths. "Thanks for listening, Jamie, but I think that's all I want to say for now. Let's just browse a bit. Okay?"

"Whatever you want, Daunis," Jamie says gently. "Any recommendations?" he asks, pausing at a table of books for sale.

I scan the titles quickly and point to *Custer Died for Your Sins* by Vine Deloria Jr.

"Auntie got me that book when I was fourteen. That was the year we made my Jingle Dress skirt. Each day, she had me sew one jingle cone on my skirt. Three hundred sixty-five days, three hundred sixty-five teachings."

"You're so lucky to have her in your life," Jamie says, paying for the book.

I lead Jamie over to my cousin Eva's stand with her gorgeous beadwork: strawberry earrings, floral medallion necklaces, and even an ornate checkbook cover. She's also set out braids of sweetgrass for sale. Since Eva is in deep conversation with customers, I tuck a twenty-dollar bill beneath her bottle of pop and take two green braids of grass the length of my arm. I hand one to Jamie and we hold the sweetgrass up to our noses. Jamie closes his eyes as he inhales the fresh, delicate sweetness.

I catch a whiff of fry bread and my stomach gurgles. "Oh man, you've got to try this." I pull Jamie toward a small trailer with a big window and order one piece of fry bread for us to share, hot out of the fryer. I add butter and maple syrup, and Jamie and I sit down at a nearby picnic table. I tear one half for Jamie, and he holds it in a paper towel until it's cooled off enough to eat. It's perfect—crispy outside and fluffy inside.

I sit up straight when Jamie moans. "Oh, Daunis. This is so good,"

he says, mouth still full of his first bite. "We gotta run extra miles tomorrow." He swallows and takes an even bigger bite. "So worth it."

"So worth it," I mumble in agreement, cramming more into my mouth.

As we split up to go to the bathroom and wash the sticky syrup from our fingers, I text Lily, who still hasn't responded to my previous text. She'll see it when she checks her phone after the intertribals finish. She's more likely to reply to a raunchy one anyway.

ME: jj moaned while eating frybrd. his gf vvv lucky



During the dinner break, I bring Jamie back to Auntie and Art's RV. The twins are in shorts and T-shirts now; they've decided to skip the evening dances to play with their cousins and conk out early. Auntie finishes unbraiding Pauline's hair, pulling it into a high ponytail and wrapping it into a bun. Art calls Jamie over to the grill to fix a plate for supper. When Art cracks a joke, I feel Jamie's hearty laugh all the way to my toes.

When Pauline runs off, it's my turn. I walk over to the picnic table where Auntie is still perched. I plunk myself on the bench, my back facing her. She picks up the hairbrush and starts working through my thick mop, pulling it into a high ponytail like Pauline's. Jamie sets his plate down at one end of the picnic table.

"Will you fix me a plate, too?" I ask sweetly. Jamie grins and heads back to the table where the food is spread out.

"Auntie, why did you snap at me about the blanket party?" I ask.

"Daunis, I love you like my own daughter. The Nish kwewag who show up at those blanket parties . . . they know that violence firsthand." Auntie's hands move quickly, dividing my ponytail into thirds, which she will braid separately before weaving the three

braids together into an elaborate braid that she'll wrap into a bun. It's her favorite hairstyle for me, one she's done many times since I was a child. "It's just . . . in that moment I was pissed you were so eager to go. I hate going, but I thank Creator each time that you're not with me. I keep hoping your privileges will keep you safe. Your last name. Your light skin. Your money. Your size, even."

Auntie spots Jamie heading back from the grill area and finishes with "I'm thankful for you having those advantages. But I get mad and scared because my Black and Ojibwe daughters don't."

She's right. All the things I've been uncomfortable with, advantages I've done nothing to earn, they are privileges. The twins will face struggles that I never will. I think back to how I begged to tag along to the blanket party and feel ashamed.

She kisses the side of my head as Jamie hands me a plate with fried whitefish, potatoes, and green beans. I accept it gratefully, her words still ringing in my head, and we both dig in.

"So, Jamie, I see Daunis has been showing you around our town. Is she also taking you to the minor forty-niner?" Auntie asks.

"A minor what?" Jamie looks up from his plate.

"Powwow parties are called forty-niners," I explain. "When it's not for adults, it's a minor forty-niner."

"So it's a party just for teens?" Jamie asks as if to clarify for himself.

"Yeah." I motion taking a sip of an imaginary bottle. "Beer and shenanigans." Jamie glances at Auntie to gauge her reaction.

"It's okay to have fun and not be stupid about it," Auntie says, then gives me a pointed look. "I mean, throwing a party at your grandparents' big, fancy house in town would not be smart at all. But, I suppose, having a beer or two in the woods with friends while one person stays sober"—she eyeballs Jamie—"and sleeping over at a relative's house on the island is a more intelligent and safe option. Right, Daunis?"

“Yes, Auntie,” I say meekly. Of course Auntie knows about my party last weekend. I can never hide anything from her. Even when I try, my aunt has informants everywhere, it seems.

“Don’t worry about Elvis and Patsy,” she tells me. “The dogs are staying at Seeney’s this weekend.”

“Make sure they don’t come back all mean like her,” I grumble.

Auntie gives a wry smile. “You think you’re the only one Seeney ever made cry?”

When we leave, Art shakes Jamie’s hand the way Nish guys do, reaching around to grasp Jamie’s thumb rather than the fingers.

Auntie hugs me, whispering, “I’m sorry I took out my fear on you. I’ll do better. I love you, Daunis.”

“I know,” I whisper back, squeezing her tight. “I’m sorry, too, Auntie.”

As we walk away, Auntie calls after us.

“Let your mom know you’re going to the island, so she won’t worry about you.”



On the ferry ride to Sugar Island, I text Mom. Auntie knows that I have to strike a delicate balance by giving my mother enough info so she won’t fret, but not too many details and trigger new worries.

ME: Hanging with lily and friends on island. Will stay at aunties.

DONT WORRY ILL BE SAFE.

Technically, I’m not lying. Jamie and I are friends. Lily will be at the party after she deals with Travis. I shoot a text to Lily. Still no response to either of my previous texts.

ME: Headed to 49er with jj. What happened with Trav?



“Hey, if you need to let your uncle know where you’re at, text him now. You can’t get a signal except on the north side where it’s close enough to some Canadian cell towers. Rest of the island is a dead zone. Plus, the east side is all cliffs and caves, so signals just bounce around.”

“Cliffs and caves?” Jamie asks.

“Yeah, it’s really remote. Some caves are only accessible from the water.” Jamie raises an eyebrow, so I go into tour guide mode again, lowering my voice to a whisper. “Did you know that Al Capone smuggled liquor across the border during Prohibition? He’d go to Waishkey Bay over in Brimley. Supposedly he also had a stockpile on Sugar Island.”

“Did you know that Al Capone’s nickname was Scarface and he had syphilis and gonorrhea when he went to prison for tax evasion?” Jamie says. “But we just have the nickname in common.”

I laugh and then feel compelled to mention the girlfriend. “Jennifer is a lucky girl. Will I get to meet her at Shagala? It’s the first Saturday in October. You should tell her now because there are only two flights a day into the nearest airport.” I force myself to stop babbling. As we approach the next intersection, I motion for him to turn. Roads narrow until it’s just a two-track—two ruts on an unpaved trail. Cars fit into spaces between trees. He backs into a spot.

“Thanks for the guidance,” Jamie says. “About the directions here . . . and about the dance. I’ll let Jen know.” Hearing him say her nickname makes her more real to me. “Jennifer” is too formal, while “Jenny” is too cutesy. But I could imagine sitting next to a “Jen” at the round dining tables in the Superior Shores ballroom and helping her to feel welcome. I’ll need to line up a date for Shagala before Levi asks me to be Stormy’s escort again.

Lily. I’ll ask her to go with me. We can kick off our shoes and dance to every song.

We follow the sounds of people singing forty-niner songs, funny songs about rez life set to drumming. The singing and laughing grow louder as we approach an old barn. A group of guys stand in a circle, each with a small, handheld drum. One guy sings and drums while everyone else listens.

*Have you seen my powwow snag  
Prettiest girl, ain't no brag  
Dancing barefoot on the grass  
Red tube top and flattest ass  
Can filet a fish and gut a deer  
Works at Indian Health, got a career  
Showed her off around my rez  
That's your cousin, my kokum says*

The beer is ice cold and goes down like water, so I get another. I feel a prickle of worry when I look around but don't see Lily anywhere. I don't bother checking my phone because there's no signal out here.

My brother shouts my god-awful nickname, repeated like a chorus by his friends and fans. My former teammate Macy Manitou chants it the loudest.

"Bubble. Bubble. Bubble."

It feels like swimming upstream to reach them across the barn. Macy's shiny, long brown hair covers one eye, but her other eye takes in my GIRLS ON THE RUN T-shirt, cutoff jeans, jacked-up knee, and old running shoes. She wrinkles her nose as if I stepped in miizii. In contrast, Macy wears a black bandanna top, low-cut jeans with an unfinished waistband, and black Chuck Taylor All Star low-top sneakers.

Levi throws an arm around me. He pulls Macy next to him with his other hand.

“Jamie, you never talk about your girl! Is she like these two?” Levi asks Jamie. “Mad hockey skills, but perfect princesses off the ice?” He tilts his head each way. “This brat is Macy.”

“So, what’s the deal with your scar?” Macy dives right in. Rude as usual.

“Car accident,” Jamie says. He turns to me. “So, Bubble, huh? What’s with the nickname?”

I chug my beer and pretend I don’t hear him, but Macy gleefully pipes up.

“Bubble is short for Bubble Butt. Chi Diiyash Kwe. Big Butt Woman.” Her laughter is a wind chime of glass shards, quick and pretty but with dangerous edges.

Everyone cracks up, but Jamie doesn’t join in, just gives me a small smile. Macy spins out of Levi’s grasp and over to the drummers.

“Guilty,” I say with a shrug, but my face is burning. *I’m going to kill Macy. Then Levi.* I scan the crowd for Lily again; she’d help me kill them. Be my alibi. Or be Thelma to my Louise.

“In middle school, I wore oversized glasses and had a growth spurt so all my pants were too short and everyone called me ‘Urkel.’ Even my teammates,” Jamie tells me before stepping away to refill my cup. I flash him a grateful smile. I try picturing him as the dorky television character, but it doesn’t align with the athletic, confident guy I watch. Maybe his compassion stems from that early teasing.

When Jamie returns with my beer, we join the crowd watching Macy twirling around the drummers. As annoyed as I am with her, I have to admit she’s mesmerizing to watch. She does Fancy Shawl steps to a forty-niner version of the theme song to *SpongeBob SquarePants*. She’s another one with smooth dance moves. Macy holds her arms out, as if to display an imaginary shawl. Her black Chucks barely touch the concrete as she dances.

I finish my third drink as quickly as my first and start heading

back to the keg. I offer to get Jamie a drink, but he shakes his head. I notice he's been sipping the same can of pop since we arrived. Lots of hockey players won't drink for the whole season. Maybe Jamie's a rule follower too.

As I refill my cup at the keg, Levi appears. He swipes it and downs the entire thing.

"You being a good ambassador to the new 'skin?"

I bristle. Levi knows I hate it when he calls Nishnaabs *'skins*. As if using the redskin slur ourselves makes it okay.

"Yup," I say, grabbing the cup back.

"You gonna make your move tonight?" he asks with a sly smile.

"Hells no. Levi, he's got a girlfriend."

"Eh," he says dismissively, watching me refill it once more.

"I don't poach boyfriends," I say evenly. Levi and I have both grown up with the rumors of what his mom did. "Besides, you know I don't date hockey players. I'm not some clingy-ass anglerfish girlfriend." I exaggerate a shudder.

"Don't tell me this is because you're still not over Toivo Jon," Levi groans.

My brother gives everyone a nickname, except TJ. Levi always uses his real one—the Finlander name TJ shares with his dad and grandpa even though they go by different versions.

"Hey," I snap. "We don't do this. Stick our noses in each other's relationships. Because if we do, I'd be saying shit about all the girls you use and toss away like Kleenex."

He raises an eyebrow. "What am I supposed to do when they make it so easy?"

"Um . . . maybe treat them with respect?"

"I always say *miigwetch* afterward," he says.

I've never wanted to smack the smug from my brother more than at this moment.

“Levi, I hope someday a girl you really truly love walks away from you. And that you know that it’s totally your fault.”

“Why? Oh right, what do you call it . . . Guy Lies?” Levi clicks his tongue and shakes his head in mock pity. “Toivo Jon really messed you up.”

“Screw you, Levi.” Something churns in my stomach like magma. The music, laughter, and conversations fill the pole barn, suddenly overwhelming my senses. I push my way to the barn’s side opening.

Weaving around the maze of parked cars, I swat away the image of TJ. His face illuminated by the glow of a tiny woodstove inside the ice shanty. Intertwined in a large sleeping bag on a camp mattress. Whispering how much he loved me between gasps.

Toivo Jon Kewadin. The rotten lying liar. My introduction to Guy Lies.

*That’s not true. He wasn’t the first one to lie to you.*

I am dizzy and queasy. My feet find every stone and exposed tree root as I stumble on the way to Jamie’s truck. Something flaps large wings over my head. I veer a few steps into the woods, and the sick erupts from inside me.

I collapse on my knees, one still sore from earlier today. As I wipe my mouth, I hear strange sounds. I pause, listening. Arguing. Crying.

I jump up as I see Lily and Travis walking down the two-track, ten feet away from me. Lily looks upset and she begins to speed up. *That jerk.*

I open my mouth to call out to Lily and ask if she needs help when suddenly Travis halts. He grabs Lily’s arm to stop her from walking away. When she yanks free, he pulls a gun from the back of his jeans.

My scream is trapped in my throat; only a gurgle escapes. Lily snaps her head in my direction, and I see the fear in her eyes, knowing it’s reflected in mine.

I freeze as Travis spins around to aim the snub-nosed revolver

at me. Only my eyes move, darting from the gun to Lily's horrified expression. Gun. Shock. Gun. Disbelief. Gun. Fear.

My ears are pressure-filled by the pounding of my heart. There is no other sound.

*THA-THUM-THA-THUM-THA-THUM.*

Travis's hands shake with tiny tremors. We sat next to each other in every AP class. I rooted for him to get his act together.

I'm gonna die. Lily will watch me die.

The oily sweetness is familiar. Art's garage. Someone used WD-40 to clean this gun. More scents: pine, damp moss, skunky sweat, and something sharp. Cat pee?

*THA-THUM-THA-THUM-THA-THUM.*

Suddenly, Travis acts as if the gun transformed into a machete. He makes odd diagonal slicing motions toward the ground at invisible targets surrounding him.

Maybe he'll forget about me. Lily and I can run away or jump into Jamie's truck.

Terror grips my heart. The gun. Travis aims at my face again.

Mom. She won't survive this. One bullet will kill us both.

A brave hand reaches for the gun. Lily's fingers outstretched. Demanding. *Give it. Now.*

*THA-THUM-THA—*

I am thinking of my mother when the blast changes everything.