

Chapter Seven

Seth, Beth, and Christy walked along River Road, silenced by what had taken place in the bookstore. As they passed the well-kept homes and historic landmarks, Seth's vision altered. He saw the town as if viewing a photograph with its negative superimposed on top. Hope Springs' colonial glamour peeled away to show what lay beneath—the carcasses of old houses built upon a landscape cursed by a powerful Native American shaman. A veil of thinnest gossamer lifted before his eyes, allowing a better detection of the two realms that had momentarily blended. One was the physical world, while the other revealed the theft of native lands and the destruction of the environment upon which Hope Springs was founded. The gauzy world of hidden truth bled into the material world, their intersection marked by fuzzy light shafts that blurred his eyesight.

He fell into a waking dream, while his friends receded into a background mist, two indistinct bodies floating through space. Keta appeared and moved his whiskered lips, but no words came out. He planted his meaning directly into Seth's brain as an infusion of understanding, or gnosis. "I am Ketanētūwit—'Great Spirit' in the Orenda tongue. I exist in all living things, whether they be flesh, tree, or stone. Manitowuk, the lesser nature spirits, cry to me that this land is poisoned by the spell of a righteous chief. It didn't used to be this way. My people were gentle, existing harmoniously with each other and the natural world. They lived simple lives, and were content with what I provided. No one owned the land—the Earth, our Mother. Now the Earth is parceled out and ripped open, her insides taken for profit. Our Mother is in the process of dying."

The bustling colonial settlement of Hope Springs materialized in Seth's vision, reflected in the pooling waters of the Orenda. Leaning on his staff for support, Keta raised his hunched body and sternly pointed a long-nailed index finger towards the ground. A clear understanding came to Seth: "The curse on Hope Springs must be lifted, or the town and the river will be destroyed."

Keta continued, "Ghosts and magic are real, not a figment of the imagination. As a result of the chief's curse, black magic is easily practiced here by those foolish enough to be tempted by its rewards. The old woman who stared at you is a wise woman of considerable powers. She knows the use of roots and herbs as deeply as my people do. Julia is a medium who's manipulated by spirits as well as by those who seek her skills. To assess your psychic gift, she needed to make physical contact with you."

The nausea that overwhelmed Seth in the presence of the ghost and the old woman returned and forced him toward the pavement. He stumbled and righted himself, subliminally aware of the grip of his friends' arms upon his. Keta said, "You are powerful because you sent the spirit away. Your power threatens others who are not as innocent."

Why? Seth asked without speaking. *I have no power.*

A shimmering rainbow appeared, fusing the blurry light shafts that been tormenting Seth's eyesight into a luminous prismatic globe. Keta presented the globe to Seth, then touched Seth's forehead. The old guide's wrinkled face relaxed into a crooked grin as he said, "The rainbow of psychic wisdom and understanding, and the ability to receive messages from the spirit world, this is my gift to you."

The veil began to fall, a curtain descending across an enchanted landscape. Seth's dual vision snapped back into sharp single focus. He saw the trees and the street and Christy's Toyota ten paces ahead. His friends released their steadying grip on his arms so he could climb into the car.

While Christy drove down River Road and the hot breeze blasted through the open windows, he understood, *My power is about to change my life.*

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