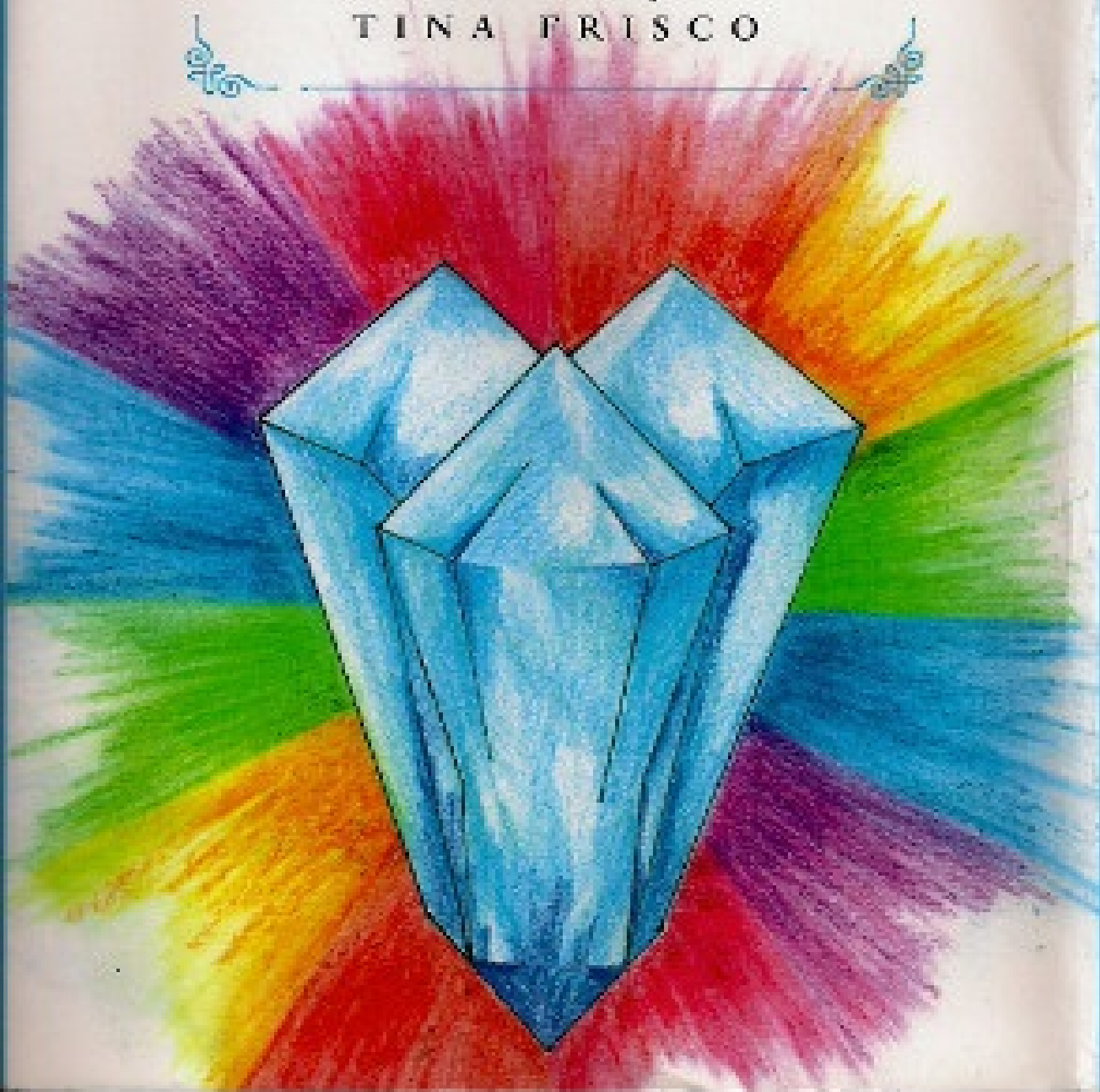


PLATEAU

Beyond the Trees, Beyond 2012

a novel by

TINA FRISCO



Plateau: Beyond the Trees, Beyond 2012

by Tina Frisco

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"One day you will remember the Great Dream, and the way will become known to you. You entered into life through the veil of the Dream, because your reason for being here must be kept secret from you until you find your way home. You don't know who you are, but one fine day you will remember. It is like creation looking for itself. You are in oneness with all life, though you are not aware of it. You will awaken from the Dream. Let the Great Mother rest within your spirit. She is the universe. She is the womb of all life. She is the light that shines from your eyes, illuminating your daily dreams. The possibilities you dream of will become your reality."

—Lynn V. Andrews, *The Power Deck*, "Dream" card

Dedication

To my parents who gave me life and taught me resilience; and to my sisters, whose love sustains me and who are shining lights in the world.

My sisters and brothers around the world: may we all walk in beauty...

“Prayer can change the world. Your light will affect all of those around you...”

–Ruby Plenty Chiefs, as quoted in *Jaguar Woman* by Lynn V. Andrews

“Everything comes from nothing. Our universe is magnificent in its manifestations of power, but when you go to the center, when you go to the beginning of things, you move, not out into the world for your instruction, but to the interior world, the universe that lives within.
It is from the essence of that universe that all life is born.”

–Lynn V. Andrews, *InSpirit Newsletter*, Special Message, October 2010

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My gratitude also to my teachers, who wielded mirrors when I sought guidance and who proffered challenge when I sought rescue. To Lynn, who gifted me with inspiration and abiding love, and who taught me that “Prayer is always bringing the balance of the universe into harmony.” To Agnes and Ruby, who shone a light on my shortcomings and taught me to laugh at myself. And to the Sisterhood of the Shields,^{1*} who tenaciously carry the promise of wisdom and enlightenment for humankind.

"This life is like the fulcrum on a scale of balance. Your past and future lives determine the need for gathering strength in this life. There is a reason for all the pain. As you gather knowledge from the infinite sea of consciousness and life experience, you begin to evolve. You fill the gourd of your spirit with knowledge, so that one day it can be emptied and you may begin to gather wisdom. Become one with all life, and consider the true importance of what you are gathering."

–Lynn V. Andrews, *The Power Deck*, "Gathering" card

"What is time that it has such power to change all that exists back into dust? What is this unseen force like the wind that can shape the land and our lives? Learn to play with time. Time is surreal, like fish swimming in treetops. A person of power knows how to arrange time. Put on your watch and be aware of the time at which you do everything. Watch the sun, the moon, the transit of the stars. Find out the time that Venus is lowest in the sky before dawn. Be aware of your cycles – when you get hungry, when you sleep. Our society is obsessed with time, so now "become" time. If you're obsessed with something, it is better to explore it than to deny it. Then it is possible to give up your obsession and let a concept like time take its proper place in your life. Your power depends on your use of time."

–Lynn V. Andrews, *The Power Deck*, "Time" card

Preface

Throughout this text, the word “woman” is spelled “womon,” and the word “women” is spelled “womyn.” The reason for this is that we live in a patriarchal world that fears the feminine. The prefix “wo-“ (“womb”) attached to the words “man” and “men,” and the prefix “fe-“ attached to the word “male” are examples of this. In our essence, the feminine and masculine are not attached; they are separate energies, whole unto themselves. The earth’s energy is female, and from the female is born the male.

"The world is bereft of feminine consciousness. To bring Mother Earth back into balance, we must bring back our awareness of her. Language is a barrier between us, but woman has always communed with woman in an unspoken language. Her roots are entwined with the essence of Mother Earth, for she too is feminine. Woman is the Keeper of the Planet and must not let her energy be rerooted by the male systems within woman or man. We are all in need of world harmony. Mother Earth has been misunderstood, but she is the universe. She is the womb for all that lives. Feminine consciousness is the energy that embodies the wisdom you need at this moment."

–Lynn V. Andrews, *The Power Deck*, “Feminine” card

E'Ghali Glossary

A long cycle: One year
A moon: One month
A sun: One day
A'Cuni (A-Coo'-nee): Sister Chief
Ahkahcha Yoteh (A-ka'-cha Yo'-tay): You will not take me
A'Konu (A-Ko'-noo): Brother Chief
A'Pris (A-Pree'): April
B'Chai (Ba-Chy'): Mountains protecting the village to the north and west
BoDilae (Bo'-Dil-eh): One of the two Sister Chiefs
Cadichu (Ka-dee'-choo): Purification and naming ceremony
CoNubai (Co-Noo'-by): Elder who would not speak English
Covitai (Co-vee'-ty): Soul mates
DaeLunih (Day'-Loo-ny): Full moon ceremony
D'Mahnah (Da-Ma'-na): MaeHahtsu's mother
Duconchu (Doo-con'-choo): A person engaged in struggle or conflict
(The English interpretation would be "warrior")
EchChinah Curah (Ek-chee'-na Coor'-a): She who defies the tempest
E'Ghali (Ee-Gall'-ee): W'Hyani's people
FaLikai (Fa-Lee'-ky): MaeLahqui's mother
FuNicheh (Foo'-Nee-chay): Name of Sacred Clown
Gondrah (Gon'-dra): Treacherous mountain creature
Hahtsu (Hot'-soo): MaeHahtsu's given name at birth
Haiwahtu (Hy-wah'-too): River-wading; riding the currents
IchLahki- (Ick-Lah'-kee): P'Chingko's boyhood best friend
Ikchae aracumba (Eek'-chay aura-coom'-ba): "You are disgusting!"
I'Taquah (I-Tah'-qua): Father Chief
I'Wochae (I-Wo'-chay): Mother Chief
J'Lukai (Ja-Loo'-ky): Sacred Clown
JoJihah (Jo-Jy'-a): W'Hyani's best friend and apprentice Medicine Woman
JuLahweh (Joo-Lah'-way): July
KaBuno (Ka-Boo'-no): P'Chingko's Father Chief
KaPahlah (Ka-Pah'-la): One of the two Brother Chiefs
KimKanu (Kim'-Ka-noo): MaeLahqui's father
Lavina (La-vee'-na): Fire
Little ones: Children 8 years old and younger

Maediquo (May-dee'-quo): Medicine womon
 MaeHahtsu (May-Hot'-soo): Name of Mother Chief and W'Hyani's grandmother
 MaeLahqui (May-Lah'-quee): Name of Chief Medicine Womon
 Maetsu (Mate'-soo): Name W'Hyani calls her grandmother
 Mahahchu (Ma-hah'-choo): Hallucinogenic sacred tobacco
 MaHahweh (Ma-Hah'-way): March
 Mahino (Ma-hee'-no): Male young one 9 through 17 years of age
 Ma-mah (Ma-mah'): Name W'Hyani calls her mother
 MaYahi (Ma-Yah'-hee): May
 Medicine Womon: Healer; shaman
 M'Terah (Em-Tare'-a): Daughter of P'Chingko and W'Hyani's mother
 M'Wahni (Ma-Wah'-nee): Chief Medicine Womon
 O'Nahli (O-Nah'-lee): River along the east and south sides of the village
 Pahco (Pah'-co): Name W'Hyani calls her grandfather
 Panoni (Pa-no'-nee): Alcohol-like sacred drink
 Pa-Pah (Pa-Pah'): Name W'Hyani calls her father
 P'Chingko (Pa-Cheen'-ko): Name of Father Chief and W'Hyani's grandfather
 P'Solah (Pa-Sole'-a): Son of MaeHahtsu and W'Hyani's father
 RaeLingua (Ray-Leen'-gua): MaeHahtsu's father
 RoDinjah (Ro-Din'-ja): W'Hyani's favorite lover
 Smudge: To feather one's aura with smoke of, e.g., Sacred Sage
 The People: What the E'Ghali call themselves
 T'Jirah (Ta-Jeer'-a): Chief Medicine Womon before MaeLahqui
 UnCusho (Oon-Coo'-show): Uriah's E'Ghali name
 Vajenta (Va-jen'-ta): Birth-control herb
 Wanina (Wa-nee'-na): Female young one 9 through 15 years of age
 W'Hyani (Wa-Hya'-nee): Name of protagonist
 WiiChahti (Wi-Chah'-tee): P'Chingko's Mother Chief
 Womon: Woman
 Womyn: Women
 Xihilae (Zy-ee'-lay): Sex
 Young ones: Girls 9 through 15 years of age; boys 9 through 17 years of age

Prologue

"You have the choice to nourish or you have the choice to destroy with your power."

–Lynn V. Andrews, *Spirit Woman, The Teachings of the Shields*.

The latter part of the twentieth century ushered in a global obsession with doomsday prophecies. Many thought the end of the world was upon them, and their religious beliefs waxed extremely fundamentalist. Their fears were augmented by the rise in natural and human-made disasters, which they brandished as proof of the impending “Apocalypse” – “the revealing of something secret” (Greek) – and Armageddon, the final and conclusive battle between good and evil, evidenced by a cosmic cataclysm in which God destroys the ruling powers of evil and raises the righteous to life in a messianic kingdom. Each thought their religion was the sole path to God. They proselytized their religious beliefs through electronic media, hoping to redeem sinners and convert infidels, lest unmitigated planetary destruction annihilate them. They had reached a plateau in their spiritual growth and could not see beyond their limited carnal vision. They would erupt in excoriating, mordacious anger - and, at times, violence - if their credos were questioned. They became fanatical in their religious practices and rabid in their pursuit of survival. They teetered on the fringe of global chaos. And the power elite covertly plotted a means to worldwide autocracy.

One group of indigenous people had little knowledge of this. They were sequestered in a village high on a plateau, sheltered to the north and west by a treacherous mountain range skirted by a dense forest, guarded to the east and south by a mighty river with a jeopardous waterfall, and protected by thick woods bordering the crest of the plateau’s escarpment on the opposite side of the river. The outside world had no knowledge of their existence. They were a peaceful people, and their spiritual beliefs and practices were conceived of nature and her many cycles. Their path to The Divine was innate and instinctive. If they *were* to have knowledge of other humans, they would wonder why these others could not see the forest for the trees...

Chapter 1

The Crystal Shard

"A boat can represent your voyage toward the islands of higher consciousness. That boat is made from your treasured innocence. We are all born wild and innocent, like a blue heron. To live in civilization, at a very young age we become like sheep trying to fit in with the crowd. To maintain your receptive innocence is to listen to your own inner voice. Know that the powers of the universe are within you."

-Lynn V. Andrews, *The Power Deck*, "Innocence" card

W'Hyani lay on the cool grass under the warm sun, her long dark hair blanketing her brown legs. She turned the heart-shaped crystal shard over and over in the palm of her hand, as she had done before so many times. The sun struck it at an angle, and a clear blue glint caught her eye. Suddenly, a prismatic rainbow circled her hand in a wild glistening flash, and she remembered...

Her mother, M'Terah, had given her the shard on her fifth birthday, nestled inside a little leather pouch that she strung around W'Hyani's neck. Her mother told her that the shard was very important, that she should keep it with her always and never take it off. "This is the key to your destiny," M'Terah said. "You will understand more when you are older. But remember this: we create our own destiny. There are many signposts along the way to guide us; we need only recognize them for what they are. You may take the shard out of the pouch once in a while to look at it, but you must take great care when doing so. And never, ever allow anyone to see it. This is only for you and me to know, and you must hold its existence close to your heart, as you would an entrusted secret. Do you understand?" W'Hyani acknowledged that she did. Her mother tucked her into her tiny bed of grass, twigs, and hides, patted the little pouch where it lay on W'Hyani's chest, and kissed her goodnight. W'Hyani soon fell asleep, unaware this may be the last time she would see her mother.

That was almost ten years ago. W'Hyani's eyes filled with tears. Her heart swelled with longing. She so loved her mother, the tall, slender, beautiful daughter of P'Chingko, their I'Taquah. W'Hyani called him Pahco. Her father,

P'Solah, was the son of their I'Wochae, MaeHahtsu. W'Hyani called her Maetsu. Her grandparents were wise and strong, and she loved them with her whole being. They were her parents now. Her father, the same height as her mother, was lean and handsome, brave and strong. When W'Hyani was five years old, she was told that her father disappeared over the great falls. Everyone said it was an accident. They said the MaHahweh moon made the waters too strong for rafting. But P'Solah knew that netting was especially bountiful downriver that time of year, and he wanted to provide for The People in a great way, for the winter had been long and harsh. He set out one morning and was never seen again.

W'Hyani mourned grievously for her father, because she was very attached to him. She would not be consoled. So one sunny day, her mother took her to the edge of the great falls and gave her a wondrous gift. She told W'Hyani to cup her hand and then poured a little water into her palm. "What do you see, my little one?" she asked. "Water in my hand," W'Hyani replied. "How much water," M'Terah asked – "as much as the great falls?" "Oh no, ma-mah," answered W'Hyani, "just a little bit." "And what makes up that little bit of water in your hand?" asked M'Terah. W'Hyani had to think. She stared at the water, her eyes crossing with intensity. Suddenly she began jumping up and down, shouting, "Raindrops, raindrops!" Her mother clapped her hands together in delight. "Yes, my little one, raindrops! Raindrops make up the water in your hand, and raindrops make up the great falls. The only difference between the water in your hand and the water in the great falls is the number of raindrops in each of them." M'Terah gathered W'Hyani into her arms where she sat next to the waterfall.

"We, all The People, are like single raindrops, solitary in our power. But together we are like the great falls, cohesive and mighty. Before it rains, all the drops of water gather in the big puffy clouds, waiting to be born. While it is raining, each drop remains alone until it touches the earth; then it joins with other drops to become water. After a while, Grandfather Sun pulls each drop back into the sky, bringing it home. The water is a great being; it separates into raindrops, and then becomes whole again. We are born just like each drop of water that falls from the sky. We live on Mother Earth for a while, until The Sky Father calls us home. Then there is great rejoicing and much celebration. So you see, my little one, your father has merely gone home.

"We are never truly separate. This is the great illusion we will speak of

many times as you grow. You miss your father because you cannot touch him; you cannot see him with your physical eyes.” “But what other eyes do I have?” W’Hyani inquired. “Your inner eyes,” M’Terah replied, touching her finger to the middle of her child’s forehead. W’Hyani crossed her eyes in an attempt to see what might be on her brow. M’Terah giggled playfully and said, “Once again, you are trying to see with your physical eyes!” “But how do I see with my inner eyes, ma-mah?” “This will come to you as you grow wiser. It is not something that is expressed easily in words; it must be experienced,” M’Terah explained. “Ma-mah...” W’Hyani paused. “When will I be wise?” “Wisdom has no beginning and no end,” her mother replied. “It grows as we grow. It is not something we become, but rather something we are. And as we grow, it makes itself known to us, unfolding like a blossoming flower. There are many seeds of wisdom within each of us – budding, ripening, and waiting to bloom. Now close your eyes and imagine you can see your heart.” W’Hyani complied. “Do you see it?” “Yes, ma-mah.” “Good,” said M’Terah. “Now see yourself standing there, and see your father reaching out to you.” “I see him! He is here!” W’Hyani exclaimed. “Wonderful!” commended M’Terah. “Now go to him and have a very big hug. Hug him as long as you wish. Feel the love flow between you. This love is eternal. It has always existed. It was not born and it will never die. And know that you can always go to this place in your heart whenever you are missing your pa-pah.”

W’Hyani sat very still for several minutes as a gentle smile slowly crowned her face. Her grief had lifted. She now understood that her father was not apart from her; he was with her and waiting for her on the other side. She would see him again someday. She was holding Dilly close to her heart, the little doll her father had helped her make from twigs and vine, and which she dressed in small pieces of tanned hide. She loved Dilly, her pride and joy. But suddenly she was moved to let her go over the falls to be with P’Solah, so he would have something of her until she was called home. She said a blessing, lovingly kissed Dilly, then laid her on the water and watched her flow quietly into the falls. Her mother hugged and kissed her, and they made their way back to the village, hand-in-hand.

The following day, W’Hyani woke to find her mother was not in their hut. She searched the village, but to no avail. As she ran toward the forest to search there, MaeHahtsu snatched up her frantic granddaughter and held her close. In her softest and most nurturing voice, she told W’Hyani that M’Terah

had gone in search of P'Solah's spirit and may be away for a long time. Although W'Hyani did not fully grasp the depth of her grandmother's explanation, through sobs of grief she said she understood. But it would be many years before she was able to reconcile M'Terah's abandoning her for P'Solah.

W'Hyani pondered all of this as she gazed into the shimmering piece of crystal cradled in her palm. She wondered how this tiny shard would manifest the realization of her destiny. Hearing footsteps approaching, she quickly placed the shard into its pouch and tucked it under her shirt. "What is that you have there?" asked JoJihah, her best friend and constant companion. "I have nothing," W'Hyani answered. "But I saw you tuck something into your shirt," JoJihah insisted. "Oh, that," said W'Hyani. "I burped - one of those indurate burps - and I was rubbing my chest because it hurt." "You should not eat so much in one sitting," JoJihah admonished. "Burping after a meal is good; it aids the digestion. But indurate burping suggests there is too much in the stomach at one time. It is bad for the digestion and heavy on the spirit." W'Hyani felt a grimace crimp her face, thankfully out of sight of her friend. JoJihah was apprenticed to their M'Wahni, MaeLahqui, and had become an astute observer, a trait necessary in one studying to become a medicine woman. She was a plethora of plant wisdom but could be overbearing at times. W'Hyani usually overlooked this, because JoJihah loved deeply and her intentions were honorable. And in this moment, W'Hyani was simply grateful that her friend accepted her clarification. But she would not have been surprised if their J'Lukai were hiding behind a tree, quietly laughing. "We must prepare for the DaeLunih," JoJihah reminded. "And you, my little papoose, are The Giver tonight." Small and frail and two years older, JoJihah delighted in attenuating W'Hyani's tall, lean stature. The girls locked their arms around each other's shoulders and skipped off toward the village.

Chapter 2

The People

"The structure of your daily spiritual life must be built on a strong foundation in the physical world, like a pillar of selected shaman's stones balanced carefully one on another. Take care of your body through diet and exercise. Express your strengths in acts of power, and bring great awareness to the exchange of money. Protect and nourish your family, and express your integrity by bringing balance into society and nature. Then you will be prepared in the physical for higher spiritual learning. Your being is like a spirit lodge, the foundation of which is rooted in physical manifestation – strong against the storms along the trail to higher consciousness. To take power, make your spirit available. Take your power and bring your physical and spiritual natures into balance."

–Lynn V. Andrews, *The Power Deck*, "Balance" card

W'Hyani's people were called the E'Ghali. They were tall and adroit, brown-skinned and sinewy. All wore the same type of clothing: shirts and leggings made of hide. The womyn tended the fires, healed the ailing, facilitated the ceremonies, and were the keepers of the stories. The men fished, hunted, tended the harvest, and prepared the food when they were not gone from the village. That only men hunted did not hinge on prowess; womyn were equal in strength to men and slightly larger. A good hunt drew many days away from the village, and the fire-tenders could not venture far. Womyn and men lived separately and were not bound to a single partner or sexual preference. Collectively, they reared the children and sat in council. All was done with great respect - respect for The Great One and respect for each other. Their ruling body was the Council of Elders, comprised of the I'Wochae, I'Taquah, M'Wahni, J'Lukai, and all those sixty years of age or older. Also seated on the Council were two A'Cuni and two A'Konu, who looked after village affairs when the I'Wochae and I'Taquah were away at the same time. To become an A'Cuni or A'Konu, one had to be five years past coming of age, must have completed a vision quest, and must have acquired great honor.

For all time, the E'Ghali's home was the valley, bordered on the south and

east by the prodigious O’Nahli, the river that was their Mother. She gave them water and food. Looming high above the village to the north and west stood the majestic B’Chai, treacherous mountains that no human feet ever scaled. Even on the clearest of days, their peaks were garnished with clouds. The B’Chai sheltered their village, tendering protection and beauty. The western B’Chai were peppered with many small caves of crystal, which the E’Ghali deemed sacred rock. Only few dared travel there, because it was purported that the gondrah lived high up in these mountains; yet no E’Ghali had ever encountered one. The gondrah was fabled to be a fierce and monstrous creature: jet black with a colossal body, huge wing span, muscular tail, acute eyesight, strong wide beak, and enormous talons. Stories were told of the gondrah’s deceptive and perilous gaming exploits. It would appear as if out of nowhere, swoop down with lightning speed, snatch its prey, then whiz high and disappear before it was barely seen. W’Hyani had always prayed that her mother did not meet with such a fate.

The People lived in shared huts made of wood, slanted reed roofs covered with hides stitched tightly together with sinew, and long heavy pelts for protective doors. In the center of the village sat three large huts. The Great Hut, looming large against the skyline, housed the image of The Great One carved from a flawless piece of wood by their I’Taquah of long ago. It was here where The People gathered for ceremonial feasts and rituals. The Medicine Hut housed innumerable medicinals and medicinal supplies. It was here where the M’Wahni proffered healing of body, mind, emotion, and spirit. The People’s Hut afforded the E’Ghali a large space in which to gather daily for meals, socializing, and recreation. There were also several smaller huts clustered at the edge of the village opposite the forest. They were called felicity huts and provided a quiet place for intimacy.

For many hundreds of life cycles, the E’Ghali knew no others. They were a peaceful people - loving, generous, and always grateful. They were grateful for the sun and water that grew their harvest, for the river and forest that proffered them food, for the stars that tended their dreams, and for The Great One who gave them life. They shared all things and knew nothing of war, avarice, or dearth. They existed in harmony with nature and with each other.

Soon after her mother disappeared, P’Chingko told W’Hyani a story about The People. “One sun, many moons ago, a white-skinned mahino emerged from the woods on the opposite bank of the O’Nahli. He waved his arms and called out in a tongue The People did not understand: ‘Hello! Hello!’ The

People were astounded. Thinking it an ominous aberration, none were able to move. Just when they were about to take root and become trees, the mahino dove into the river and began swimming across. The People jumped in terror and bolted toward their huts, leaping and hooting all the way. It was a hilarious sight! The great E'Ghali frightened by one so small! I was but a mahino myself at the time and prided myself on my audacity. I had started toward the river bank when I heard our J'Lukai call out, 'E'Ghali! Halt! He is but a mahino! What have you to fear?' Feeling reproached and chagrined, The People turned back and faced the white-skinned beast, albeit with a bit of trepidation. In their flight, they failed to notice that he was about to drown. The O'Nahli was mighty under the A'Pris moon, and the mahino was unable to endure her power. Adept in the art of haiwahtu, I jumped in upstream, wrapped his arms around my neck, and brought us both to safety downstream. It was a sun I will always remember.

"Drenched, famished, and wilted, the mahino could barely stand. He lay on the ground gasping, like a great smoke horn. He wore clothing The People had never seen - bulky and heavy and, now, waterlogged. We marveled at how he stayed buoyant for as long as he did! When finally he caught his breath, he stood wobbling and shaking the flaxen hair from his neck. 'I'm Jacob,' he said in a quivering voice. The People did not understand his words. But not wanting to substantiate their prior invertebrate behavior, they approached him and began poking him to demonstrate their bravery, albeit tenuous. They muttered among themselves that he had arms, hands, fingers, legs, and feet like theirs; his hair, head, and neck were like theirs; and he stood upright and spoke language like them, though quite unintelligibly. When they were sufficiently convinced he was, after all, only a mahino, they stood back and eyed him with suspicion. Who was this creature? From where did he come? Why was he here? What did he want? All this and more filled The People's thoughts as he stood dripping before them. He repeated, 'I'm Jacob,' as he patted his chest. 'I'm from America.' He turned and pointed across the river. I was beginning to understand. 'I am P'Chingko,' I said in our native tongue while patting my chest. Jacob and I smiled at one another and locked hands on arms. Thus began the E'Ghali's exposure to the world outside our village.

"I led Jacob to the Great Fire to warm him. The waninas were giggling and pushing each other in coquettish playfulness. Several of them approached him and began removing his clothing. 'Wait. WAIT!' Startled, Jacob jumped up

and away from the girls, stuttering, ‘What are you doing?’ The girls giggled even louder. ‘We must remove your clothing or you will become deathly ill,’ they commanded. Not understanding their words and overpowered by their numbers, Jacob was helpless against their tenacity. He survived his father’s abuse and his mother’s neglect, he survived his arduous journey, he survived the perilous climb up the rugged escarpment, he survived the dangerous woods and threatening river, and he would survive these girls! They warmed him and fed him, and he came to learn they saved his life.

“As the suns passed, Jacob and the E’Ghali came to know one another. Slowly we learned the other’s native tongue and shared stories of our cultural heritages. Jacob told us he left home because his mother was a negligent drug addict and his father, an abusive alcoholic. He lived near the embarcadero and dreamed of stowing away on a ship bound for a faraway land. He kept his pack equipped with gear and always carried it with him when he left his house. One night, while walking the streets to escape his father’s belt snapping in a fury of drunken breath and sweat, he found himself boarding an unguarded ship ready to sail. He spent no time questioning his fortune. He furtively lodged himself behind some tall boxes in a small cargo room. Exhausted from suns of dodging his father’s hand, he quickly fell asleep. How long he slept he did not know, but he awoke dazed and starving. He knew he must find food and water. As he stealthily explored the decks, he again was surprised to find the ship unguarded. It was docked near a densely wooded land, and for miles he could see nothing but trees, sky, and water. Quickly, he disembarked and fled into the woods. He survived on nuts and berries for what seemed an eternity, only to exit the woods at the base of an enormously high cliff that extended for miles in all directions. It was growing dark, so he made camp for the night. At first light, he gathered his rock-climbing gear from his pack and began his ascent, which took until the sun was beginning to set. He pulled himself to the top and brushed the dirt from his clothing. When he finally looked up, he was exasperated to find himself facing yet another densely wooded expanse. Exhausted, he decided to make camp and get an early start in the morning. He said he was certain there were people somewhere not far away. After several suns’ journey, he eventually found his way to the river.

“Jacob and I taught each other many things. I schooled him in the art of haiwahtu, and he taught The People his language, which he called “English.” But one single-minded elder, CoNubai, would hear nothing of this. He feared

the younger E’Ghali would lose proficiency in their own tongue and that it, and all its nuances, would eventually be lost forever. The other elders thought his fear gratuitous, for E’Ghali would always be the first tongue spoken to the little ones. Although CoNubai did come to understand English, he pretended he did not, and he would not speak it. When young E’Ghali approached him proudly speaking English, he would throw his arms in the air, shrug his head, and walk away.

“One sun, a few of the young ones played a trick on him. While he was alone in the Great Hut, they started a small fire behind it. Two of them blanketed the smoke toward the hut, while the others ran to the front, screaming, ‘Fire! Fire!’ The old man sprinted from the hut like a young deer, gasping and wide-eyed and jolting his head from side to side in frantic search of the source of the lavina. The young ones laughed uproariously, falling to the ground and rolling in pain. One of them pointed at CoNubai and yelled, ‘He understands English after all!’ And even though the elders reprimanded them severely, they could not help being quietly amused.

“Jacob and I became inseparable. Together we fished and hunted, tended the harvest, and prepared the food. I longed to see the great city my friend described. When I imparted this to Jacob, he suggested we venture to the city together. I was elated. Warily, I approached our I’Taquah to ask permission, certain I would be denied. ‘You may go,’ I’Taquah said, but this adventure must be a vision quest. You must be gone no longer than thirteen moons and then return to us. A vision quest is not to be taken lightly, and you must bring back something of great value. Otherwise, The People learn nothing from your journey, and we do not grow in wisdom.’ It was then when I fully realized the depth of my request. For I’Taquah to even mention a vision quest before a mahino’s eighteenth long cycle was a great honor; few are privy to such distinction. Feeling the weight of my destiny, I gratefully thanked our I’Taquah and assured him I would return within thirteen moons.”

That evening, the womyn were to hold ceremony for the two boys. While they sat eating their dinner, P’Chingko told Jacob a story. “One sun, my father invited me and my best friend, IchLahki, to go hunting. It became the sun I will always remember as my ‘Birth into Humility.’ I was tracking a large buck, and just as I drew back my bow, IchLahki jumped down onto my shoulders from a tree limb high above. We hit the ground hard. IchLahki was already laughing, but before I could react, my father was upon us. ‘When will you learn, Chingko? You must have eyes and ears all around you. I have told

you this many times, and many times you forget. If you truly had been attentive, you would have known IchLahki was above you. Then perhaps you could have avoided his attack or alerted him to remain motionless. You must see and hear the whole forest at all times. You must become one with the forest. This way you will see any movement, hear any sound, sense any danger. Yet still you do not see the forest for the trees!’ My father stormed off toward the village, leaving us to ponder his words.

“We decided to practice becoming one with the forest and set out to track the buck. We weaved through the trees, quietly and stealthily. Not far ahead, we saw antlers poking through the leaves of some low-hanging branches. We were furtive in our approach, and my arrow was swift and accurate. The deer was killed instantly. This is important, because a sentient being should not suffer at our hands. We knelt beside the buck and thanked him for his giveaway. We stood and thanked The Great One for the great blessing, scattering sacred tobacco to give back for what we had taken. We hoisted the deer up and across both our shoulders and made our way back to the village.” P’Chingko drew a long breath, pausing to stoke Jacob’s curiosity.

“Well... What happened?” asked Jacob, anxiously. “My father was greatly pleased. ‘So, my son, you have finally seen the whole forest!’ he exclaimed as he approached me. A group gathered and, in turn, each patted us on the shoulders, applauding our mastery. We all sat down and began skinning the deer. We make use of all parts of the animal – the hide for clothing, the flesh for food, the sinew for tying and binding, and all other parts have uses as well. This ensures that we remain grateful for our blessings and cognizant of the sentience of all life.” Jacob pondered this deeply and long. Finally he spoke: “Thank you, Chingko. I am honored to call you ‘friend’.” The boys smiled together and then made their way to the Great Hut.

An E’Ghali’s eighteenth birthday – the beginning of the nineteenth year - was the age required for boys to vision quest before entering manhood. For girls, the age requirement was sixteen. As a boy, P’Chingko did not understand this. “You are too eager,” his father explained. “It is the fluid that runs through your body like sap through a tree. It carries with it many properties. Females have a strong protective instinct. They pull inward and scrutinize their surroundings before taking action. Males also have a protective instinct, but they push outward, quickly ready to fight or flee. They see only what is in front of them and ignore what surrounds them. This can bring great danger, even death. Mahinos need two more long cycles for the

properties in this fluid to mature. It is the design of the Great One and an attribute we must honor.” Although feeling a little dejected, P’Chingko accepted this. And now, as he stood in the place of honor with his blood brother, Jacob, he finally understood.

As the MaYahi moon rounded over the horizon, the womyn bolstered the Great Fire with much kindling and many logs. Their I’Wochae and M’Wahni blessed the boys with sacred oil, anointing their entire bodies while praying for a safe and fruitful journey. The People donned their best hides and leathers, replete with crystals, brightly painted tree nuts and stones, and their most colorful feathers. They sang and danced in joyful gratitude. They drank panoni and smoked mahahchu. They dreamed as one, and the elders had many favorable visions. When the early sun broke through the clouds, Jacob and P’Chingko embarked on their journey.

P’Chingko returned in thirteen months and one day. Jacob was not with him; he had joined in love with a young woman and decided to stay in the city, but he vowed never to tell anyone of the E’Ghali or the plateau. P’Chingko had grown a little taller and leaner, and he had many stories to tell. He had had a great vision, but their I’Taquah said he must keep this close to his heart until The Great One gave him a sign to enlighten The People. That time was yet to come.

Notes

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* The Sisterhood of the Shields is a group of indigenous shaman womyn from around the globe who are the guardians of ancient teachings of universal consciousness.