

FIRST TERRITORY

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ONE

The Indian who claimed to own the Umatilla ferry was nowhere along the bank, and I wondered out loud if the governor was the kind to bristle at a delay, but Dominique merely nodded at two canoes poking from beneath willows. He smiled a petite grin for a big-shouldered man, his face leathery, brown as if stained by walnut juice, his lips and high-flung pompadour French-looking, his gaze swamp-water dark, savage from wintering and marrying in frozen caribou wilderness, but shrewd too, grim and confident from his British blood and schooling, and cajoling from factoring at Hudson's Bay posts from the Saint Lawrence to Jasper country and finally to Fort Walla Walla. He reached beneath our wagon and pulled a whipsaw from between two long boards, and we sweated like demons, cutting planks from driftwood, and we piled them into the canoes, so the wagon-wheels would not cut through, and I laid a wobbly board in, and he flung it toward the Umatilla's mouth. "No, you cannot lie out here, not to yourself, not to anyone, not about anything, never!" He glanced at the Columbia boiling and thundering three-miles wide, glaring blindingly in the mid-morning heat. "Your lie might take us across the little-piddling Umatilla, but you tell yourself weak is strong, wobbly is solid, your habit will kill someone someday." Dominique scoffed. "The governor might growl, but he's making treaties like a grizzly nipping a sow too early. The army—General Wool—would leave the interior to the Indians for now."

We unloaded the treaty-gifts, lifted the wagon's wheels into the canoes, reloaded, and I rode my bay roan into the Umatilla, and Dominique braced a log against the wagon, pried the front in, jumped on. He leaped the load jackrabbit-like. He took the reins, and I led the oxen swimming and gawking in terror, the wagon knocking and slamming, the canoes splashing and slapping. The wagon stayed high. The oxen came out un-stumbling, and we left the canoes full of planks splintered by the steel wheels.

“See?” said Dominique. “A lie is like an Indian. You must be firm sometimes, must hold a pistol to its head, so it does not rob you.”

“Plain enough.”

“Ever translated at a council before?”

“No.”

“You seem too young.”

“Well, I told you I was only five when my folks emigrated.”

“Who taught you?”

I shrugged to put him off. I yelled to the team, and he whipped them. We rode along the right bank of the Umatilla, and he left his question alone, but then a long-steep pull brought us atop a sun-burnt plain, and he caught me gazing through the white-earth shimmer toward Yakama country, thinking of Lalooh, her pretty-arched cheeks moistened by clouds of cold-air vapor, her sweet-water voice chattering mysteriously over hard-tongued words the night my brother and I had met her. Jake and I had led mounts and pack horses down a quiet-powdery trail and had reached the frozen Yakama River before we had expected, and Lalooh had stood alone in snowshoes on the ice, lurching, her eyes twinkling candle-like, her braids oiled beneath the starlight, the rest of her covered darkly by a buffalo robe. She eyed the snow on the blankets behind our saddles, the frost in Jake's beard, the raw-red flesh of my younger-peachier face. She peered quickly upriver, guessing we had been aiming for the fire-lit lodge ahead, and then she signed with her hands, showing how the snow had caved in the roof of Father's Sidalia's cabin. *Were we the black gown's new carpenter and farmer?*

Jake and I nodded, dismounting, and four braves walked from the bend behind Lalooh, carrying an old gray-haired Indian, bolstering his limbs as he sang in Yakama, his eyes roiling in trance. “Almcotty,” said Lalooh, speaking his name, adding a single word in Chinook, the old trade language. “*Plet.*” *Priest.* The braves carried Almcotty past us, and Lalooh and the braves went briskly upriver, trusting their backs to us, Lalooh glancing over her shoulder, a wisp of a smile sparkling, and Jake and I followed, and more braves descended banks, filing numerously behind us--then squaws, then children crying hunger pangs, stepping around steers and milk cows sprawled on the bank, their bones near-poking out their hides--stock starved to death. We passed cows standing where they had died stupefied with hooves frozen in snow, and then we climbed toward the lodge of tule mats, and the Yakama started to chant, and the braves lowered Almcotty. An old squaw took our guns and horses, and we were

whisked inside, left alone, pressed against a wall. One hundred Yakama whooped, then two hundred. Almcotty yelled above them all. He ordered the braves in line, the squaws, the children. He waved, and drummers pounded pom-poms, and Almcotty shrieked, leaping high, springing sideways like a deer, and every savage danced, everyone in line, jerking arms and legs, sweating, dropping to the floor, Lalooh in front, Lalooh shuffling all night, Lalooh's braids bouncing lightly, Lalooh lifting her chin like a princess, her stare flaming copper, holding me against the wall, saving me from glancing in terror at Jake.

Finally a dawn breeze fluffed the lodge, and the Indians rushed out. The snow was gone, and horses were foraging, and Lalooh laughed a softly tinkling bell beside me, naming the wind so sudden and warm, "*Chinook.*" "*Plet,*" she said again, running the two ideas together, her breath washing my cheek warmly, damply, close.

And then Father Sidalia came sloshing up the bank, walking with a shepherd's staff, bending and swaying like a thin-dark reed, his bare feet moving in a frozen crust turning swiftly into gumbo, his dimples rising blissfully as he chanted a primitive Indian rhythm and sang in deep tenor about Christ entering Jerusalem, palms cut and laid at the savior's feet.

"*Chemookdatpas,*" Lalooh had said. "Black gown." *She spoke English.*

Only a few words, she had signed, and she had raised her chin my way, and I had felt a new world as large as the valley below, the clouds lifting rapidly, her bronze face waiting eagerly, her copper eyes shining radiantly beside me.

* * *

"Did you get to kissing her?" asked Dominique.

"Traded words for a year."

"You Catholic?"

"No, Ma's reverend in Brownsville told us Sidalia had lost his laymen and needed hands, and Jake and I went to see if what people claimed was true—that Kamiakin country's could hold stock all winter."

Dominique drew in his lips as if to whistle, to show the import of knowing Kamiakin and his band. He knew by heart and years what most of us guessed by hearsay, you see. During the late

twenties he had given Kamiakin traps, shot, powder, dog sleds, even a beaver's hat with fox tails and cock feathers--all to induce his band to trade furs with Hudson's Bay Company—and all to no consequence. During the thirties he had sold American emigrants flour and tobacco and had directed them south away from the company's beaver country—also to no consequence. The British border had moved up to the forty-ninth parallel in `forty-six, the Land Donation Act had passed in `fifty, California had become a state, and gold-and-settlement fever had swept the fur brigades from the Columbia country as cleanly as locomotives would soon whistle buffalo from the plains.

Washington became its own territory in `fifty-three, and the company offered to sell Dominique cattle and horses to raise. Dominique had declined, had left his son at Fort Walla Walla and had moved with his Babine wife to Oregon City in Willamette Valley. And a week ago his express had arrived at Jake's claim above The Dalles, where I had been hewing fence posts for the boundary: *“Assistant needed to interpret at the largest Indian council ever held west of the Rocky Mountains. If he proves himself able to speak Yakama, the governor will pay five dollars in gold per day.”*

* * *

And so Dominique and I drove the team steady across the plain, and we called out Indian words, testing mine against his, and when the heat eased toward dusk, Dominique galloped the horses to a soaking lather, riding through salt weed to a hidden sink of cottonwoods, and he tossed sand on my cooking fire and passed me pemmican from the Cree on the Saskatchewan, moist with berries and buffalo juice, and we encamped invisibly, keeping ourselves as silent as the stars above us.

“Allons!” Dominique shook me in the morning, waking me in French as if I were a voyageur or bourgeois. He walked to wagon ruts at the edge of camp, grasses freshly cut for forage--signs of the governor's party—it had left Fort Dalles two days before I had arrived there, and we had been ordered to catch it.

We drove the team past noon, and we pulled up at the rim of a crest, and Old Glory flapped from a wagon in the Walla Walla Valley below, a handful of Dragoons glittering magnificently on mounts around it, white breast-belts shimmering against blue uniforms, gilt buttons and scabbards winking before the gleaming-winding river, an ocean of prairie behind them.

We rode down, and there in the wagon-bed squirmed the first governor of Washington Territory,

thumping violently against buckboards, looking hardly five-feet tall, his head oversized like a dwarf's, his legs child-sized, his pants bunched down around his ankles as if he had soiled his drawers. The governor writhed, pulling up a hernia truss, his narrow-brash eyebrows knitted in pain, his beard immaculately trimmed but wrenched from his exertion--I had read about him in newspapers--he had come from blue-blood Pilgrims in Massachusetts—had suffered an old hay-pitching injury, a rupture from boyhood—had graduated first-in-class from West Point--had taken Mexico City with General Scott--had written election pamphlets for President Pierce--so had earned his appointment and had come out here, surveying railroad routes through the highest-snowiest passes of the Rockies and Cascades.

He finished tying his truss, and his orderly lifted him, and he braced himself against sideboards, pushing against a gold-handled cane, looking as lean and muscled as a mink on the prowl. He flashed a regal smile at Dominique, a cordial beam of his enormous eyes at me, and then everyone waited. He swung his body wincing and looked with menace at bare-wooden rails, a little square fence. He looked at Dominique again, and a kind of prayerful silence passed between them. We had arrived at the site of the old Whitman mission, and we could see between the rails the grave markers of the fourteen Americans massacred eight years ago. But all other signs of Reverend and Narcissa Whitmans' industry—the lean-to where they had first sung Protestant hymns to Indians, the fields and garden, grist mill and stock pens, emigrant house, mansion house trimmed in New England green, the medicine closet where two Cayuse chiefs had axed the reverend, the school from which a Cayuse boy had shot Narcissa, the fruit trees where Cayuse had taken Christian women, the kitchen where Cayuse had butchered a man my age, sick with measles—all were gone without a trace.

“Dominique!” said the governor. “Young Eaton! You will make it clear to the Cayuse that if any one of them gets saucy during the council, he will be seized!”

Dominique nodded coolly.

“Yes sir,” I said.

The governor wriggled sharply, and his orderly lowered him, and he lay flat again all the way to the treaty grounds.

* * *

And after dark he summoned me, and I stood by his wagon as he sat in the bed, leaning against the sideboards, working a sextant, his legs spread wide, a candle flickering on a crate beside him. He slid the index arm, fixed screws and lenses, looked and looked at the stars and a crescent moon, and then he thrust himself sideways and peered through a telescope I had not seen in the dark. He lifted a watch from the crate, then a thermometer, and he jotted notes, his face in the candlelight giant-looking, his eyebrows so painfully squeezed I dared not breathe or swallow. He reached around himself and put each instrument away in its case, and then he slid adroitly across boards, stood before me, moved instantly past, and I was ushered into his tent, and he received me sitting upon a simple army blanket on a wooden bed frame--almanacs, books and portfolios stacked in lantern-light all around him. He looked down at tables and columns of figures, hours of trigonometry awaiting him--coordinates to be ciphered by Greenwich Time, angular distances, refractions, the courses of heavenly bodies.

He looked up as if we were old friends. "Tell me," he said, "did Chief Kamiakin leave last fall to plan a federation to kill all the whites in the Oregon country?"

Lalooch came to mind again, her taps last fall at the cabin door, her hurry as she had led us deep into willows up Ahtanum Creek--Sidalia had fled with us, carrying his satchel of accoutrements. *"Kamiakin has returned," Sidalia had said. "The clouds are gathering upon all hands. The tempest is pent-up and ready to burst."*

I looked at the governor directly. "I never heard," I said.

"Can you remember last September?" said the governor. "If Kamiakin met with Looking Glass and any Cayuse chiefs? With Kahlotus? Peopeomoxmox? If he met with any Rogue or Spokane or coastal chiefs?"

I remembered how softly Lalooch had returned through the willows the next morning, how the yellow leaves had rustled so quietly Jake and I had drawn pistols before her smile had told us Kamiakin had allowed us to stay, at least through the coming winter.

I shook my head no to the governor, and he downed a cup of bourbon, exasperated. "Come on, my boy! My territory embraces eleven degrees of longitude! Six in latitude! God knows how many tongues! How many tribes! Is my question so hard?"

"I remember Kamiakin reciting letters to Father Sidalia, asking you to keep the whites out of his country. I remember Kamiakin roping his own longhorns and digging his own cabbages and turnips from his garden."

“Did the superior of the mission—Sidalia--have a squaw?”

“No sir.”

“Did he and the other Catholic priests talk against America?”

“No sir.”

“Did they sell Kamiakin extra powder and balls?”

“No sir.”

The governor glared me out, tucking in his leg tiredly, stiffly, wearily.

* * *

But when the council opened three days later, he leaned from his cane as lithely as a lynx about to lunge, speaking forcibly, and Kamiakin seethed silently, motionlessly, a shadowy hulk seated beneath the council arbor, his face enormous, his nose broad and fleshy, his shoulders thrust backward as if to communicate his displeasure to semicircle after semicircle of surly-faced braves and squaws broiling in the sun on the ground behind him.

Dominique repeated each sentence of the governor's in the dialect of the Nez Perce, the tribe more numerous than all the others combined. One crier shouted his translation in Nez Perce, another in Wallawalla. The governor's Indian agent for the interior—Thomas Jefferson McKalb--recorded the statements, sitting on the last bench beneath the bower, his eyes sulky. The Indians listened. They muttered among themselves. They quieted, and Chief Peopomoxmox of the Wallawalla rose, his nose as pugnacious-looking as Kamiakin's, his nostrils flaring dismissively at Dominique. “I remember this one from when a Californian shot my son,” he said. “This one spoke like an owl coughing rabid mice. He said the white law would hunt and hang my son's killer. He said this many times. But the white law hunted no one but Indians.”

Chief Stickus of the Cayuse rose, a silk ascot tied to his buckskin, his small eyes squinting darkly, piercingly. “I have known Dominique Purcell since before Reverend Whitman came, but now I cannot believe his words.”

The governor beckoned me. I rose and stood beneath the bower to speak, seeing Lalooh's mother and aunts sitting in the nearest semicircle of squaws, heads alertly raised, hair-parts bare and glistening, braids tight as ropes, shiny as polished musket-barrels. Lalooh was not with them, not behind them, not

with any group of squaws, and I had heard nothing of her since Jake and I had left her people.

I repeated Dominique's translation exactly, "The Great Father will not steal his red children's land. He will pay them more than it is worth. He will draw lines, so the whites and the Indians will know what they own. The Great Father will cede his children two reservations, so they can become rich in cattle and farms. The Great Father will give the Yakama, Klickitat and Palus land up the Yakama Valley. He will give the Cayuse, Umatilla and Wallawalla land up the Snake River and in Nez Perce country. His red children will get flour and corn easier to harvest than camas and bitterroot--wooden houses sturdier than lodges—sawmills, gristmills, blacksmith shops--unbreakable axes, shovels, blades and plows. His red women will get a chance to learn to spin and weave and make their own clothes. His red men will someday be doctors, lawyers and farmers just like whites."

"Now we see the governor himself speaks roundabout, tending to evil," said Peopeomoxmox. "We will take no gifts, not a grain of wheat. The Wallawalla want our own land. We Indians here are many bands, many chiefs. We will talk among ourselves and council again with whites at a better time."

The governor raised a handbill: **Gold on the Okanogan! At Kettle Falls! At Colville!** "You have no time to waste," he said. "Miners will come, and you must let them pass. The bad ones will take any squaw found off a reservation. They will steal your children if they find them off reservations."

Dominique and I hid our chagrin behind our smiles, for no one had told us about a strike.

"We will give each chief his own house, gardens, five hundred dollars per year," I translated. "Tell me, what does Kamiakin say? Does he have no heart to help his people?"

"Kamiakin has nothing to say," said Kamiakin.

"Can this be true?" said the governor. "Kamiakin, great chief of the Yakama, does not speak? His people have no voice here today? Is he not afraid? Ashamed? No? Then speak out!"

I translated, and Kamiakin remained dead-faced. "What have I to speak of?" he said, and he slid his immense-dark gaze to columns of dust billowing suddenly down a low-sloping butte beyond the council grounds--more Cayuse arriving. Warriors painted fantastic colors fanned out, galloped down into Mill Creek, charged splashing up the bank. They raised spears and muskets, clanging shields, singing, circling Dragoons who stood stiffly at attention. The governor in his scarlet neck-scarf and balloon-sleeved blouse walked briskly past the soldiers. He stopped before Blue Hawk waiting high on a stallion, the Cayuse war chief wearing a coyote-head war cap, bear claws dangling, eagle plumes

stained vermillion. The governor gestured at kettles of white beef, and Blue Hawk jerked his stallion around, and all the warriors followed, going to eat at Kamiakin's camp, and Dominique counted, noting the number in his red-leather notebook, adding them to his previous count, making nearly two thousand.

And I wrote that evening in the governor's tent, finishing his dispatch to Major Wells at Fort Dalles, "*Three thousand warriors surround us as if to annihilate us, but Kamiakin and all the other chiefs see the wisdom of extinguishing their titles and accepting reservations. Five hundred more troops will keep the hot-blooded young ones cool with fear of our howitzers.*"

* * *

The orderly announced Lawyer, and we went out, and the Nez Perce chief raised his cheeks high in the long, yellow, evening heat, his raven-hair fluffing thickly to his shoulders, a crucifix hanging against a naked chest puffing proudly--Nez Perce lodges stood around our little treaty camp as thickly as cattle bunched inside a corral, protecting us with thirty times more warriors than the forty-five Dragoons the army had previously allotted us.

A Nez Perce boy dashed between lodges, bringing a little goat of a white man in a cowpoke's clothing--a shirt sleeve tied at the stump of his left arm, a long-tongued quirt strapped there. A second Nez Perce boy appeared with a magnificent strawberry roan, and One-armed Jacobs slung himself into the saddle so instantly and smoothly I wanted to see the feat again, but he was off on his express ride, and I felt pretty thick, knowing what he carried.

"*Itehlecum,*" I said to the governor, telling him I was going to a Yakama bone game. But I made for Kamiakin's camp, not really intending to play. I gambled instead on a stronger urgency, but the sound of a squeezebox slowed my step. Father Sidalia sang in Yakama, a peace song from France, his tenor bellowing as deeply through the evening's heat as it had through the morning's chill the Sunday after the Chinook had melted the snow—Ahtanum Creek had turned into a torrent, holding four and five canoes abreast—the Indians had landed for Easter Feast Day--Sidalia had leaned against his cabin, sinking to shins in mud, singing, playing his squeezebox. Macis the dwarf-girl had greeted the dugouts, dragging her club-foot, pretending to serve communion, tearing bits of bread, and Kamiakin and three braves had carried a freshly killed bear on a pole and had laid the sow at my feet. They had joined the

other Yakama sitting on logs and boughs a few rods away, and I had knelt with my knife and considered the bear—the rope Kamiakin had slipped into her den and then around her neck, the withes around her snout, her sheer bulk, and I looked up for Jake, needing buckets, and the bright-eyed squaw peered down, standing soundlessly above me, her pretty cheeks drawn solemnly, a bladder sac in her hand.

“Laloooh,” she said, nodding her name. “Almcotty. Kamiakin,” she said, signing for the grease. *For their tah, their power. To dream.*

Laloooh knelt beside me, laid a slender finger upon the fur, named the places to cut, her tone grave with her chiefs' authority, her tongue-tip curling with clucks, some sounds too sharp to repeat, others too deep and thick inside her throat. She dressed the bear, naming the parts, and I mangled her words, and she laughed quietly as Sidalia sang, shining her eyes playfully, squeezing grease into the bladder sac, and then she grew very quiet, staring at the ceremony. The dwarf-girl stood before Sidalia, repeating his verses, older than I had thought, her hips just a year younger-looking than Laloooh's, her face flat-nosed but her lips thin, her eyes beaming at Sidalia.

Macis spoke the Ascension in English, turning r's into *acks*, her only mistakes, and Sidalia bowed and handed her a painted stick, a Catholic Ladder, and Laloooh hissed quietly in Chinook. “*Swahale.*” *Prayer stick.* “Macis *pel'ton.*” Laloooh thought Macis a *fool* for accepting the black robe's Ladder? She disliked Sidalia? All whites?

* * *

The creek had stayed high a month, and a day or two after it had dropped inside its banks, Laloooh had busted up through silt-laden willow, raising a team whip, yelling, “*Wah'kpuch!*” *Rattlesnake.* She had snapped the whip behind Sidalia's cabin, her arm jerked, the whip caught, and another lashed backward, untangling from hers, and I saw Sidalia jerk its handle. He was behind the cabin, and he turned and lashed the ground, and a snake leapt, spraying blood in a pop of dust. The rattler lifted its head. It coiled. It *burred*, and Sidalia drew his whip, and a crack snapped at his hand. His whip-handle flew from him, he grabbed his hand, sucked it, eyed Laloooh disbelieving, and she stepped evenly toward him, raising her whip again, and I could not think in Yakama, though I had been on my way to help Sidalia and Laloooh list words in his Yakama dictionary.

“Whoa!” I yelled in English, “*Kopet!*” in Chinook. *Stop.*

Laloo raised her whip higher, and Sidalia lifted his crucifix, thrust it toward her, planted his feet, his robe billowing in the wind as he stiffened. “Here I am, Laloo! Strike me! Behold my medicine! My *tah!* Christ does not fear! I do not fear!”

“*Chemookdatpas pel’ton!*” said Laloo. “Only Almcotty kills *Wah’kpuch!* Only the Indian doctor! No white! No devil robe!”

I ventured toward Laloo, waving my hat at the snake, “It’s gone, Laloo!”

“Gone?” Sidalia arched a glare toward me, keeping the crucifix aimed at Laloo. “Would you die in the garden, Andrew? Would you have Jake die?”

“*Wah’kpuch* knows the bad medicine,” said Laloo. “*Wah’kpuch* will send his men, and they will bite the bad father.”

“And then I will know the sweet sound of grace which speaks without a sound,” said Sidalia.

His dimples rose, his eyes shone brightly, and Laloo’s whip cracked. The crucifix flew, its chain burst. Sidalia’s hair fluffed, barely missed. “Laloo, Sparkling Water,” he said, translating her name. “The good father loves Laloo.” He signed to sprinkle holy water on her head, mine, Jake’s, and Laloo looked at me, lowering her whip, not understanding, and I thought of locust-eyed preachers sweating, speaking heatedly in Illinois, emigrant camps, Brownsville, other towns in Willamette Valley.

Laloo looked at Sidalia, “Kamiakin told me, yes, I can put Yakama words in your book. But you go against Kamiakin. He told you black robes do not kill *Wah’kpuch.*”

She walked down into the creek again, mounting her pony, a huckleberry roan waiting on the opposite bank. But she returned the next Sunday--perhaps ordered by Kamiakin--or curious about Young Andrew?

* * *

Jake had let Sidalia baptize him. He had taken communion regularly, pretending, hoping to strengthen his place in cattle country. I had not, nor had Kamiakin or Laloo or most of the other Yakama her age or older. But Laloo and Macis had attended most of Sidalia’s feast days, and so when Agent McKalb had arrived at Ahtanum several weeks ago, each had easily named the Creation, Mary’s Assumption, the cross and Eternity pictured on the new Catholic Ladders he had unloaded.

“The governor said I must deliver them myself,” Agent McKalb had said, greeting Sidalia. “The Ladders came down the Mississippi by steamboat. They crossed Panama by mule team. They came up the coast by steamship, and I nearly started from Olympia without them. But the governor called me back.” McKalb stood admiring the Ladders—he was so tall his head was nearly even with his horse's, his ten-gallon hat was upturned like a stage driver's, his legs and shoulders were strapping-big. His eyes beamed amicably as he grinned, and his mustache—a ruddy auburn—wiggled so minutely it made his face and freckles appear larger than they already loomed. “The governor's having a council in May. He's inviting every chief in the interior, every priest.” He handed Lalooh a red ribbon, and she fingered it unsmiling, and he gave one to Macis, and the dwarf-girl tied it to a braid and skip-hopped giggling as we moved toward Sidalia's cabin, McKalb with a bundle of letters for the priest, myself carrying a cask of wine for the mission.

“The governor's going to give chiefs legitimate title to reservations.” McKalb ducked through the door, put a little metal box on Sidalia's table, unlocked it, pulled out a government form. “He's ordered me to designate chiefs.”

Sidalia lowered a sober glance, and Lalooh and I were off at once—she to fetch Kamiakin, I to hew fence posts. Jake and I were merely working hands that short while ago, you see. We had built and improved cabins for the priests, had put up wood, had made shingles, had ridden after pine resin for incense. We had branded and herded their stock, and so two days later, while Sidalia had sung his dawn prayers, and McKalb had readied himself to leave, we were out counting horses and cattle, but the stable-gate hung open, and a squaw moaned gibberish inside--Macis lay on a mess of hay, covered only by a government blanket, pig-snot on her legs, blood caked and running down her loins, her breasts bruised and heaving, her breath heavy with sleep-talking, smelling of whiskey, a false-ruby brooch in her fist at her hip.

We had followed the drag of her tracks backward to McKalb's camp and had found no horse, no mule, no tent or agent. “He thinks he gets off early, don't he?” Jake had said, and he had stared a long moment at the empty horizon, resigning himself, knowing Ahtanum had ceased to be a place to secretly dream a ranch.

* * *

Sidalia's squeezebox and singing had stopped. Pom-poms had started. Animal screams and medicine cries came from the Yakama camp, and Sidalia trod swiftly to me, finding me not far from where I had left Lawyer and the governor, just listening, still considering.

“Our Indians might kill us all,” said Sidalia, “the governor first.”

I looked past him, and he gulped distastefully, snickering, knowing who I sought. “The same light that shone upon Him in the desert can shine upon you here, Young Andrew. Come to the Lord’s tent. Let grace forgive your intention.”

“Eaton!” The governor, Lawyer and Dominique hurried through the dark, coming from the governor's tent again. “Have you two been visiting your friends on your own?”

“Governor,” said Sidalia, “the Indians dislike you. They can pray. They can farm. Given time, they will learn to give to this world and the next, but we must we dedicate ourselves to teach them well enough.”

“What did they say?” said the governor.

“Nothing more than they told you today. You know, God does not love those who deceive. He will punish this council just as He will punish the Indians.”

“I await my judgment,” said the governor. “I do not doubt.”

“We love the black gown,” said Lawyer. “We love the governor.” He led us past Sidalia and out of the Nez Perce camp and through the Palus camp, and then a brave untied a boundary rope, the Yakama camp, and we squeezed through chanting braves to a ring of dancers, and a scalp flew high, squaws dove as it plummeted, and Lalooh groveled near-naked in the dirt, and she rose screeching, waving the scalp, and she flung it down, stomped it, trampled it, her breasts shaking before me, her braids unloosed like a hag’s, ghoulish squares painted around her eyes.

She squatted and leaped again, shrieking, pitching the scalp high, and then she danced toward Kamiakin, and he saw me shrinking, and his stare mocked us, mocked Lawyer too, and the governor glared his disgust, and we left.

* * *

The governor pummeled me with questions back at his tent, and I looked at him through a stupor, my mind still reeling from Lalooh’s dancing. “My God, why do I pay you, a boy of sixteen?” he said.

“Did you know the dervish? Her name? Did she call the scalp a name? A white name?”

“They danced a victory, Kamiakin’s boldness,” said Dominique. “She is only a squaw, someone’s third or fourth woman someday. Do you want her tonight?”

“I want Hudson’s Bay posts off American soil and the first transcontinental railroad here in Washington, not in California. I want safe trade from Boston to Puget Sound to Asia.”

The governor dismissed us, pulling out old copies of Indian treaties from the east, Cherokee and Chickasaw. He looked for new words to convince Kamiakin, and we climbed into our wagon, and I opened my bedroll, and Dominique handed me rifles, and I loaded and stacked them, a precaution, and the sky rumbled, and the heat got tighter, refusing to cool, and the willow fragrance sharpened inside the canvas, blossoms sugary-sweet, cutting me deeper, making me worse. *How wretchedly Lalooh had flung the scalp. Yet how softly she had rustled through willows last fall.*

The thunder clapped. It retreated. Lightning flashed brightly, faintly, brightly. The storm seemed to stall—like my favor and fancy, you see—my old hunger for Lalooh, the way she had risen on my skin as I had lain gritty in the cabin last spring, knowing Ma would lament if I became a squaw man.

I was a speck of man compared to McKalb, wasn't I? He might have taken Macis dishonorably, but he had known her only three days, and I had whittled away an entire year, knowing Lalooh, and McKalb had probably had a squaw every chance, visiting tribes during winter and spring, designating chiefs.

Someone's third or fourth woman? Not Lalooh. Dominique hadn't meant it. Dominique mistrusted McKalb, had smiled to himself when the governor had ordered the sulking agent to sit behind us during council, record statements and refrain from visiting chiefs alone anymore.

The wind finally gusted cold. Rain finally slashed down upon the bonnet. I finally slept, and I woke to a crackling-rocky roar, and we scuttled out amid Indians standing everywhere, the creek suddenly high and turbulent, navy-black in the pre-dawn dark, gushing pale-frothing foam across black saplings, the rain finished here, the powdery-gray thunderheads flashing east against the Blue Mountains.

The governor and Lawyer stood eyeing the creek, and Dominique joined them, but Kamiakin was not there, no Yakama was anywhere, and I ducked into willows, heading to their camp, and I came to a little clearing, and Lalooh sat on a bone-white cottonwood log all alone as if in a fairy world, watching the stars as they waned west, seeing the old stories she had told me, the myths of her people.

She smiled warmly, stunning me, her hair freshly clean, her ghoulish squares washed away, and I sat, and she peered down as if modestly or shamefully.

“I have been waiting so long to see you,” I said.

“I have been staying beneath my robe every morning, telling my mother I ate something bad,” she said. “But I could not pretend tonight.”

I took her hand. “The governor pays me gold, and I save almost all of it. When this is finished, I am going to improve a section of cattle land beside your reservation.”

“Yes, you’re too good a boy to live as a white,” she said. “You make the governor postpone this council. Tell him be true, fair to us. Tell him his treaty is bad, and McKalb is bad. Tell him Macis made wedding clothes, and she rode off, looking for him, and she never came back. Tell the governor your Great Father did not make Macis, he did not make our land, they are not his ribbons to give away. Tell him whites can settle along the emigrant road, nowhere else, and when the willow turns yellow again, you come to my father, and I will put up your lodge and dry your fish and tan your hides.”

The bugle sounded four o’clock mess, the governor’s strict orders, and I got up. “Yes!” I said. “I do! I will!”

* * *

And later that morning and every day afterward Lalooh sat in the nearest semicircle of squaws, and I translated not knowing who knew our pledge, or how I could keep it, but the chiefs railed their long-objecting speeches, and I knew their words with sudden ease--so instantly Dominique secretly winked, encouraging me, and the governor reared his beard, holding bated breath, listening through the tribal histories, heathen Creations, claims to spirits in graveyards, crimes of emigrants, murders, bad promises.

On June seventh—our seventeenth evening at the Walla Walla council grounds—Dominique unrolled a map inside the closed and secret heat of the governor’s tent, and he traced a third reservation-site south of the Columbia--a concession for the Cayuse, Umatilla and Wallawalla.

Lawyer grunted readily. “Where are your five hundred blue-coats?”

“Denied,” said the governor, and he burned a lantern all night, spreading his legs, stretching his old rupture, copying and enlarging the map, correcting lines, detailing springs, drainages, elevations,

grazing sites, places where potatoes grew two-pounds, some years even five.

And the next day at the council arbor he held his hand uplifted like a preacher, his voice clapping excitedly, and I translated, “So long as the Columbia runs to the sea shall these three reservations belong to the Indians! So long as the mountains touch the sky, no white man shall live upon them! Lawyer, chief of all Nez Perce, agrees!”

Peoemoxmox stood with a tomahawk pipe draped around his neck, a British derby shading his gaze, his eyes already dark and resigned. “I would fight Americans until I had no more warriors, but who would take care of my old, my crippled, my children, my women?”

Kahlotus of the Palus rose. Young Chief, Five Crows and Stickus of the Cayuse rose. Each spoke practically like Peoemoxmox, but Kamiakin remained seated in a green tunic upon a grizzly robe, his massive brow raised delicately, his long hair handsomely wavy, his eyes still refusing.

And then horses approached, and four Nez Perce warriors rode beneath the arbor, three pounding war drums, all singing a war song, their white-haired leader raising a Blackfoot scalp on a pole. “I am Old Looking Glass, war chief!” He thrust a rawhide shield at the governor and glowered at him as if he were a roach in a flour barrel. He swung to his people. “I have been away three years, hunting buffalo, and what have you done? While I have been gone, you have sold the Nez Perce country! Go home to your lodges! I will talk to you!”

I translated the governor’s reply, “I have said to every Indian—I say it now—nothing will be done without your consent!”

“You have drawn your own lines, not those of Looking Glass!” said the old war chief.

Peoemoxmox stepped forward again, “Yes, this is the way of you white people, your chiefs! We shall adjourn the council! Set another time to talk! Many Wallawalla are not here!”

Five Crows spoke, hairs and feathers dangling down his forehead, his French blouse showing the wealth of his horse herds. “We do not want to change the earth and sky around us! We will not leave our old ones beneath the earth! We will not break open our mother!”

Peoemoxmox glared at Lawyer, “I think you have given away your people's land.”

Stickus rose again: “I have been friends with Americans since the Reverend Whitman came. I warned the reverend bad Indians would kill him. I did not hide his killers. I helped find them. But I am troubled by the governor. My people came from Earth. She is our mother. You cannot sell or barter her. You will sicken her, sicken your own people. Suppose you were us, and you came from your mother,

and you suckled her, and someone came and took her away?”

Young Chief stepped forward, his lips womanly, his eyes softly almond-shaped. “I wonder if the ground is listening. If it has anything to say? God named the roots that he should feed the Indians. The water speaks the same way. God says feed the Indians upon the Earth. The grass says the same thing. Feed the Indians' horses and cattle. We do not order whites around, and they should not order us around.”

Owhi of the Yakama stood. “God gave us day and night, the night to rest in, the day to see. As long as the earth lasts, he gave us the morning with our breath. He takes care of us on Earth. Shall I steal his land and sell it? Shall I give the lands that are part of my body and leave myself poor and destitute?”

Kamiakin lumbered up slowly, rising like a bear who knew no danger. “Now we know perfectly the heart of the Americans. It has not changed. They have hanged Indians for years without knowing whether we were right or wrong. When the governor speaks, I think of nothing but the weather. Many Yakama are not here. They are away. I do not tell them where to sleep.”

* * *

The Indians crowded around their chiefs, dispersing, and Looking Glass cantered away, the Blackfoot scalp bouncing on its pole beside him, Lawyer following sullenly on foot.

Dominique and I ate supper beneath the governor's private arbor, letting the Nez Perce vote among themselves, and the governor opened McKalb's little metal box and went through the forms inside, McKalb watching discernibly.

“Five Crows,” said the governor. “Young Chief. Stickus. Camaspello. Umhowlish. Who really rules the Cayuse?”

“It depends upon where they steal their horses and what kind of whoring they approve,” said Agent McKalb.

“Whoring?” I said.

“There's three main bands,” said McKalb.

“The Yakama think it's us who do the whoring,” I said.

“What Yakama?” McKalb fingered a suspender testily. “Who? You got someone special telling

you things? A squaw?"

The governor and Dominique stared my way, waiting, and I saw how clumsy I had been. "Yes, the Cayuse have three main bands," I said. "One up the Umatilla, another--"

McKalb guffawed, and the governor clanged the box closed, shutting it tightly. "No matter the chiefs or squaws, the Cayuse will go with the Wallawalla and the Umatilla," said the governor. "Away from Kamiakin and his hostiles." He quickly drew a map, sketching the third reservation-site, moving Kamiakin's boundaries north, adding a fishery on the Columbia. "The third reservation-site will prevent hot-headed Cayuse from cavorting with hostile Yakama every salmon season."

"The fish there belong to the Sinkiuse tribe, Chief Quilteneck," said Dominique. "They speak Salish, not Sahaptin. They'll treaty with the Spokane."

"A Sinkiuse chief is nothing," said the governor.

"His band is nothing," said McKalb.

"The Sinkiuse belong to Kamiakin, and you forget, Dominique, this is America now," said the governor. "The Indians are conquered. They are no longer savages hunting beasts for Old World traders. Now they will farm in the New World."

Dominique rose heavily from his camp stool, his jowls drooping, his breasts suddenly looking aged, sagging against a sweat-stained blouse. The governor called for horses. We armed ourselves. We rode to the Yakama camp, where squaws worked busily, sewing bags for pack animals, carving stirrups, preparing to leave--Lalooch was sitting upon a blanket, stuffing horsehair into the pad of an Indian saddle, and she looked at me, then at McKalb, and her hands fumbled. She got mean-faced. She looked down, and suddenly braves grabbed our bridles, turning our horses, and Dominique shoved a shotgun against a brave's throat, and the warrior raised a hawk-nose, smiling snidely, the size of his grin nearly hiding his reach for his pistol.

Dominique shoved his shotgun deeper against him, and Hawk Nose tightened his grip on the bridle. Dominique rode on, staring only at Kamiakin's lodge, and the brave jerked and dropped the reins, Lalooch eyeing—almost ogling--him.

We rode on silently to Kamiakin's lodge and found the chief smoking inside, consulting with Chiefs Skloom and Owhi, and we sat upon robes opposite them, and Dominique spoke gravely, icily, launching into the treaty, pouring dire looks at the chiefs. "The aforesaid confederated tribes and bands of Indians hereby cede, relinquish, and convey to the United States all their right, title and interest...It

is distinctly understood and agreed Kamiakin is the duly elected and authorized head chief of the Yakama nation.”

“Many chiefs must agree,” said Kamiakin.

“Even so, all the bands will stay strong from Kamiakin’s wisdom,” said McKalb. “Kamiakin already has gardens and ranches. He has already lived with Father Sidalia. He is the one to save all the Indians.”

Kamiakin's eyes widened. “How does Young Andrew say it?”

The governor spoke curtly, and I translated, “The army sends five thousand troops presently. It will send troops until your people are no more. Can you stop the whites from coming? Can you stop the rivers from running? The wind from blowing? Cannons will come here—and here—and here—and here. And if Kamiakin does not sign, every tribe will be destroyed, will look like the river-villages after small pox and fever. The Yakama will walk knee-deep in blood, and death will come like flies on a corpse.”

Kamiakin sat searching our faces, and then he stared up through the lodge-hole at the dusky sky, swallows flitting, nighthawks ripping the air, booming like banners flapping. “The Indians shall stay on all their lands until the President says yes to the treaty and the reservations.”

“Yes,” I translated.

“No Indian shall be forced upon a reservation until the President says yes to the treaty.”

“No, they shall not.”

“No whites shall come between the Rockies and Cascades until the President says yes. They shall not build houses or fences.”

“Yes, we will do everything we have said. No new land will be opened for settlement for two or three years. We have nothing more to say.”

Kamiakin dipped a stick into ink, shaking visibly, biting his lip, and he marked the treaty, blood streaming down his chin.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Though *First Territory* occurs in the Pacific Northwest, an Ojibwa man in Minnesota provided its first germ of creation. He called me off the road as I bicycled west across White Earth Reservation thirty-five years ago. He showed me his old-time rice mill, explaining how his people had harvested wild rice for centuries. Gray-haired and bespectacled, he spoke quietly, lamenting how the Dawes Act had allowed whites to buy back most of his reservation. He painted word-pictures of landscapes I would travel to, and he insisted I revisit him. He gave me my first firsthand lesson of Native history and hospitality.

Ten days later a sixty-two-year-old Assiniboine woman called me into the lee of a boarded-up store on the wind-beaten Fort Peck Reservation, eastern Montana. “The whites own most of the land here, that’s the problem,” she said. “But I don’t trust my own people. No one follows the old ways. There’s discrimination against the Indians here.”

Iron bars blocked the windows and door of the town’s café, which was entered only via the post office next door. “Look at this town,” said the white owner. “It took the Indians two years to tear down what it took the whites sixty to build.”

He warned me to avoid Wolf Point, but I camped at a wayside there with two Indian teenagers who worked a concession booth at the Red Bottom Celebration Grounds. The young men disdained tribal rituals. “Taking an hour to drop a feather,” said one. “To pray to have patience with the white man who has always robbed them,” grumbled the other.

On the Fork Belknap Reservation I hesitated at a railroad crossing blocked by heavy construction, and a tall brawny Indian smiled beneath his hard hat and easily lifted my loaded-down bike across barriers. Another Indian two-heads taller than me, a Blackfoot, addressed my anxiety about crossing the Rocky Mountains. “Don’t complain about the heat,” he said. “Don’t complain about the wind. And *don’t* sleep in Browning.” Indeed the hardware store in Browning sold no nut and bolt for my rattling bicycle but displayed numerous cases of pistols, rifles, ammunition.

Weeks later, a Franciscan nun and I watched Indians reef-netting on Puget Sound. “It is not an efficient way to catch fish,” she said. “I think most of them do it only for meditative purposes.”

In British Columbia I stopped to watch dip-netting on the Fraser River, and Indians shouted me away angrily. I gained understanding to their objections when I read *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*

by Dee Brown that winter.

A few years later I visited *Pish-pish-aston* in Yakama and Sinkiuse country, salmon runs near Wenatchee, Washington. “This is beyond question the greatest fishery I have ever seen,” said Colonel George Wright in 1856. “I have consented for those Indians to remain here and fish, and later move on to Yakima.”

A.J. Splawn described Wright’s efforts to contain Indians in *Ka-mi-akin: the last hero of the Yakimas*. Splawn’s memoir instigated the writing of *First Territory*, but not until I had bicycled across reservations during twenty-five more years.

Other sources of *First Territory* include Teresa “Ana-hoo-ey” Kurtzhall, Virginia Beavert, www.yakamanation-nsn.gov/, Martindale’s Language and Translation Center, Tamástslikt Cultural Center, Darby C. Stapp, L.V. McWhorter, Kent D. Richards, Hazard Stevens, Richard Scheuerman, Michael O. Finley, Donald M.Hines, Eugene S. Hunn, Cyrus Townsend Brady, Jeremy Agnew, Carl P. Schlicke, Robert H. Ruby, John A. Brown, Corporal E.A. Bode, Richard H. Post, Andrew Dominique Pambrun, Phillip H. Sheridan, Theodore Stern, Robert C. Carriker, Cornelius M. Buckley S.J., Edward J. Kowrach, Robert Ignatius Burns S.J., Stephen Dow Beckham, Terrence O’Donnell, Joel Palmer, Herman Francis Reinhart, William G. Robbins, Melville Jacobs, Elizabeth Jacobs, William Seaburg, Roberta Hall, Don Allen Hall, Israel S.P. Lord, Nathan Douthit, Cecil P. Dryden, Katharine P. Judson, Clifford Merrill Drury, Matilda J. Sager Delaney, Lieutenant Lawrence Kip, Reverend A.M.A Blanchet, Robert H. Utley, Major-General O.O. Howard, Helen Addison Howard, Major G.O. Haller, David Fridtjof Halaas and Andrew E. Masich.

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Robert Olen Butler tutored me in the art of fiction outside academia, enabling me to smell sage and juniper in desert air while I searched for stories.

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