

INDIAN PICTURES

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Though fiction, *Indian Pictures* was inspired by historical events and real individuals.

Second Lieutenant Seth Eastman, America's renowned "soldier-artist," arrived at the northernmost post on the frontier in eighteen-hundred thirty, Fort Snelling, located at the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers, currently St. Paul, Minnesota. He sketched and painted Mdewakantunwan Dakota obsessively, believing he was documenting a dying race. He married a Dakota woman and sired a daughter, Mary Nancy Eastman, and was transferred from the post before the girl turned one.

Seth depicted the Dakota in precise ethnographic detail—a medicine man shaking a gourd rattle above a patient in a buffalo-skin lodge, squaws cutting themselves in grief at a burial scaffold, warriors dancing ceremoniously, eating raw livers of dogs etc. He returned to Fort Snelling in eighteen-hundred forty-one with a white wife and children and commanded the post intermittently during the next seven years. In eighteen-hundred forty-eight he oversaw the removal of Indians from Wapahasha's Prairie, three miles from my current home in Winona, Minnesota. The artist Henry Lewis witnessed Seth's stand-off with Indians and championed it in *Das Illustrirte Mississippithal*, published in Germany, eighteen-hundred fifty-four. But such removals disenfranchised the people Eastman painted most enthusiastically.

While Congress authorized Henry Schoolcraft's *Indian Tribes of the United States*, Seth rendered two-hundred seventy-five pages of mostly pristine illustrations for five of six volumes. Meanwhile Mdewakantunwan moved to an unprepared reservation site in western Minnesota and suffered starvation, dysentery, smallpox, delays of annuities, housing and food shortages, crop failures, and deferments of treaty payments to white traders and corrupt agents. These conditions led to the Dakota-White conflict of eighteen-hundred sixty-two, once called the Great Sioux Uprising.

A cycle of murder and retribution commenced with the killing of white settlers. The infant state of Minnesota pursued a policy of extermination, and the family of Seth's Indian grandson, Charles Eastman (Mary Nancy's son), fled to Canada, where Charles remained until his father, thought to be hanged with thirty-eight other Dakota, brought him back to the United States.

Meanwhile Minnesota evicted Dakota entirely from the state, steam-boating Mdewakantunwan to the newly-formed Crow Creek Reservation, eastern South Dakota. The only arable land there lay in the unpredictable floodplain of the Missouri River. It produced no crops. The Mdewakantunwan were prohibited from hunting, and their population diminished to three-hundred.

The Indian Superintendent ordered them to move to yet another reservation site, land already owned by whites in Nebraska, lacking timber for houses. Dakota chiefs, including Wapahasha from Wapahasha's Prairie, traveled to Washington D.C. to plea for a permanent home, better land, provisions for crops, livestock and clothing, and education money owed by previous treaties. During the same month, Congress authorized Seth Eastman to paint oils of Indian life for the room of the House Committee of Insular Affairs in the Capitol Building.

Eastman reproduced images from *Indian Tribes of the United States*—vivacious and beautifully-clad Indians free of Euro-Americans, the only exception being *Death Whoop*, a brave brandishing a white scalp.

During the Dakota's Washington trip the government refused requests, and one chief hung himself. Eventually the Mdewakantunwan were allowed land allotments around Santee and Flandreau, South Dakota, where Charles Eastman first attended a white school, reluctantly dismissing his grandmother's objections.

Charles became, with the skillful assistance of Elaine Goodale Eastman, the most celebrated Indian writer of his time. He excelled at Dartmouth and the Boston University School of Medicine and arrived at Pine Ridge Indian Reservation as the agency physician in eighty-hundred ninety, the month before the Wounded Knee tragedy.

He and Goodale first met while Indians ghost-danced nearby, believing a new wave of earth would bury whites, and dancers would be suspended in air until spring, when their dead ancestors and plentiful game would return to their lands. Elaine had previously convinced the Indian Department to try educating Indian children at home, rather than removing them to boarding schools. She rode about un-armed and sometimes un-escorted in a wagon, supervising teachers on the Great Sioux Reservation and camping at Ghost Dances while three-thousand United States troops massed to enforce orders from President Harrison and the Indian Department to separate ill-disposed from well-disposed Indians and arrest those fomenting disturbance.

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Colonel Jules Weston sat on a stool on the Texas deck, sketching his half-breed daughter—shoulders lithe in buckskin, liquid-dark eyes as silently absorbent as his own, cheeks as beautifully supple as those of the Mdewakantunwan wife he had left after his first tour on the upper Mississippi. He worked feverishly from memory, the June sunrise waxing the slow-brown river gold, rushing across Wenonah's profile. Jules finished promptly, went ashore, inspected his troops—infantrymen guarded munitions wagons, gunners primed six-pounders, cavalrymen glassed braves massing a mile across the prairie.

The Mdewakantunwan lingered behind horses as if waking peacefully, but Jules knew better—had sketched his first scalp dance here at Wapahasha's village fifteen years ago—and had painted Wapahasha's wampum last February, just before the chief had departed to Washington to rattle his war beads at Fillmore.

The Mdewakantunwan mounted unhurriedly, stretching from the riverbank to the bluffs. They approached in tight columns, cantering, Wapahasha leading, wearing his war bonnet. Jules signaled to his front: *hold your fire*. He rode forward with two lieutenants and two flag bearers—the territorial banner of Minnesota, a white flag of peace.

Wapahasha reared opposite Jules, a breechloader across his lap, painted braves flanking him, cocking gun-hammers. Jules secretly trembled, but his ancestors had landed at Massachusetts Bay Colony, had founded Concord, had defeated French at Port Royal and British at Chesapeake Bay. He himself had endured swamp fever while removing Seminole and had devised topographical drawing that West Point engineers had used to outmaneuver Santa Anna in Mexico. He would fail neither uniform nor lineage. He raised one treaty signed by Van Buren,

another by Fillmore. He spoke Dakota forcibly, “The White Father paid for Wapahasha’s land east and then west of the Mississippi. He has waited an extra year for Wapahasha to move. He is pleased to give Wapahasha peace and pleased to give him war.”

“Wapahasha’s new land has no houses,” said Wapahasha, “no woods, islands, schools, corn or seeds. Van Buren’s money went to traders and preachers. Fillmore’s is not here.”

Jules unrolled foolscap, his gaze sternly incredulous, jaw-stubble trimmed meticulously, campaign hat tipped cockily. “This mark—is it not Wapahasha’s? This treaty—does it not say Wapahasha’s people must arrive at their new home to receive payments?”

“White words,” said Wapahasha, “skins falling from snakes.”

“Americans will crowd you here, give you smallpox,” said Jules. “You will breathe free on the Cloudy Sky.”

“Leaves falling, floating away.” Wapahasha motioned his braves back across the prairie.

* * *

Jules left the line to Lieutenant Rice, returned to the *Falcon’s* texas deck, and Spirit Woman poured from his pencil, his old Mdewakantunwan wife tying a withe on her bark house, Wenonah toddling on chubby legs, squaws raising summer houses around her. Jules saw the sketch in oil, river-sun lighting the knots of Wenonah’s braids, the red-and-white quills on her toy cradleboard—the first of six oils Congress planned for the Capitol Building.

The Indian Department had not yet given Jules’ the commission, the War Department had denied his furlough, Jules saw his paintings in the Capitol nonetheless. He was unlike Catlin or Bodmer who sought the unsullied savage, the Indian Apollo, by *visiting* villages. He had *lived*

with Dakota when Fort Snelling had been the army's farthest post, had shown Hudson River oils at the National Academy, was commanding the fort as Dakota were disappearing.

He drew Spirit Woman, her nipples warmed his fingertips, his loins roiled, heat sweated his pencil.

Captain Blake stood suddenly on deck: "Wapahasha has come into the council tent, sir. Lieutenant Rice requests orders."

"Arrest Wapahasha," said Jules.

"If the boat is burned, the army must pay."

"Fire the cannons. His braves will cower without him."

The tight-vested captain shrank disagreeably.

"Shove off at thirteen-hundred," said Jules.

* * *

The *Falcon* embarked, Wapahasha shackled to a stanchion, hundreds of braves crammed on the passenger deck with him, their weapons in the hold, soldiers poised, gripping pistols, the squaws plodding along shore with the wagons, troopers hurrying them with bayonets, keeping them from cutting themselves in grief.

Just above Whitewater Creek, islands went dark, but the Mississippi held the twilight, yawning silver upstream, fading pewter, pearly white, indigo-black, the wheelman working his bell-pulls, Captain Blake brooding huffily. Jules stepped out into breezeless air, the deck torches flaming. A medicine man screamed, then braves, and Jules scoffed at his jitters, his ill feeling.

Feet drummed the floor below, hands the walls, and the sky flashed eerily violet, *Wakiâyaâpi* swelling a dark-purple mass, the savages' thunder god unsheathing his reckless bolts.

Lieutenant Rice banged up the steps, Jules shook his head: "More trouble to stop it. Unchain Wapahasha. Let him dance too."

The storm blew east, but the Mdewakantunwan sang, danced, screeched, wailed for one-hundred-fifty miles. The *Falcon* passed the Cloudy Sky, the *Mnisota*, and they saw Rattler's band massed with removal wagons on the muddy plain below Fort Snelling, and they quieted. Chief Rattler—who had taken Spirit Woman as a second wife after Jules had departed his first tour—reclined at the landing, smoking as if scheming. The *Falcon* landed, and Gwen nodded from the fort's portico, clasping Little Jules and Catherine, concealing the fear she had held for Jules, her delirious relief at seeing him alive.

Jules declined a carriage. He paced toward the stone road rising steeply to the fort, and he bustled past children lying on filthy bundles and braves glaring hatefully at the soldier-artist who had always drawn their ceremonies with *wahkun*, *holy power*. Now he had betrayed them, and he swerved from Spirit Woman sitting with women around the steam of a pregnancy potion, a pot of blue cohosh, and he turned toward Wenonah's wagon--she was laying in the bed, swollen with child, her face still girlish, pale, sweaty. Though she breathed visibly, Jules yearned to touch her neck-pulse. He passed her willfully—she could take her mother's potion but would travel by boat, not land. He had never abandoned her—had left her an account during the years of his absence--had returned and traded her husband Iron Hawk his finest stallion.

Some mornings the fort as Jules climbed to it seemed a glorious castle on the Rhine, and other days the towers and limestone walls loomed as a menacing breadth, solid and cold, impenetrable.

He conferred with subordinates all day, presided over roll-calls, an officers' dinner, evening maneuvers. After the cannon boomed at sunset, he and Gwen finally unlocked the vault in her studio—Gwen was plain-faced, her hair in plaited puffs and spiraling lovelocks. She stepped robustly, suppressing bated breaths. She carried Jules' portfolios and sketchbooks to the lard lamp at her writing desk, and he rifled through his Indian pictures, stopping, murmuring at what he envisioned as the Capitol's second oil—a lone brave shouldering a long gun, dangling a turkey beside his leggings, looking across the Mississippi at vernal grass, gaily-colored tepees, Dakota boys fishing, girls bathing, women gossiping in buttery dawn-light.

Gwen stiffened as Jules scanned the third oil—*Dakota Traveling*—a string of mounted braves, an Indian wife, a *tawiçu*, riding in a travois-seat, clutching a new papoose in a fawn-skin, both their gazes center-ground, blotted-black, eager and wondrous as they left the river.

* * *

Jules boarded squaws and braves two mornings later, and the *Falcon* ascended the Cloudy Sky, the little river coiling thirty miles for every ten measured by compass, the new reservation three-hundred miles upriver, the Mdewakantunwan packed like bullets in a case. A bugle sounded every hour--the seated stood, the standing sat. Jules posted marksmen on the texas and hurricane roofs, doubled them at night, and the sinuous black vapor ached for his brush, willows standing airily but densely gray, hag-like, ripples painting whispers.

A cloud-mass swallowed the western stars, zigzagged by a brilliant bolt, and Jules felt the oil in his fingers but descended by boots to the passenger deck. He and a sentry wedged through

braves, holding a lantern, and squaws turned protectively, some kneeling, cackling, Spirit Woman hunching behind them, unwrapping a braided birth belt from Wenonah.

The deck buckled. It lurched. It stopped. Everyone listed. The paddlewheel went silent.

Wenonah cried from the floor, and Spirit Woman moaned bitterly--Jules' lantern was out, its whales' oil stinking nauseously. The paddlewheel spun full-steam astern, clunked dead again--the *Falcon* was aground.

"Spars!" called Captain Blake.

"Make way!" boomed the sentry.

"Everyone off!" yelled a brave. "They'll kill us!"

"Stay aboard!" shouted Jules. "Under penalty of death!"

Jules leapt overboard, landing shin-deep, and he turned to the boat, his boots sucking into sand, Company G filing perfectly along the rails. Indians muttered angrily, watching Jules, riflebolts clanging above them. Jules raised his hands to make talk, and Company A leapt onto the sandbar, flanking him, and derricks lowered long-yellow logs—Norway pines from Ojibwa forests—to Blake's crewmen sloshing along the hull.

Beneath the hull went blocks of tackle and iron points of spars. Lines were tightened to the forecastle, and a muscular Irishman fed the capstan, bare-chested like a gladiator. He flashed the blue of artillery-blasts, the red of furnace-heat. A peal of thunder clapped. Wenonah yelped, Jules shouted in Dakota, "We'll walk the boat off the bar! We'll anchor!"

Wind howled like a gigantic Cyclops, roaring between the *Falcon's* stacks. Rain hammered against her like steel shot. The *Falcon* tilted toward the bar. The air shook again with lightning, thunder—crewmen lit, dark, lit again—slipping beneath spars, scrambling.

Company A splashed toward shore, a perimeter, and Jules waded toward the *Falcon*, both boat and crewmen invisible behind a pelting downpour. Lightning ripped down. Jules flew backward, heat glowing down a black pipe, the smokestack bending. Jules awaited death, electrocution, and he landed, hearing the stack crash, and he sloshed into the lee of the *Falcon*, her hull shaking, the stack smoking in the river, the whim of the Almighty rolling toward his legs, stopping before his feet.

* * *

The *Prairie Belle* arrived the next day, and Jules boarded the Mdewakantunwan again, and he lay in his stateroom at night, the *Belle* churning roughly upriver, Jules grieving in darkness, raging at squaws keening below, Wenonah's hemorrhage, Spirit Moon's superstitious medicine.

A week later he shuddered at his callousness, sitting behind a prairie oak, sketching the blankets around Wenonah's body, braves lifting her onto a burial scaffold, squaws in torment cutting their hair, tossing it upon the corpse.

Jules stared incongruously at his unstoppable scrawling. If He who saw a Better Life deemed it so, He might also immortalize Wenonah in the fourth oil in for the Capitol—yes, Jules would paint her scaffold and *wótakuye*, her relatives grieving pitifully—Jules' joke on Congress, no scallywag knowing the corpse's identity, how thoroughly Wenonah haunted their hall.

He drew his tiny grandson in Spirit Woman's hands, then her wrapping his placenta in Wenonah's bloody dress, then stretching strenuously from her toes, placing the placenta bundle in an upright oak, her eyes pinching tearfully, her chin-angle resolute—*Lightning would grow straight-limbed and strong*.

He drew Spirit Woman young, his pencil racing on petite lips, little-tender nose-tip, brow lovely like a French girl's. He hardened her eyes. She shrieked and drove a flint in her arm, standing fiercely in the doorway of Fort Snelling's schoolroom, blocking soldiers while Wenonah climbed into the room's window, the girl hell-bent on jumping and sprinting to their tepee.

Spirit Woman cried out dismally, wandering now down the prairie, her steps lost amid her animal cries, her dress tattered hide, hair hacked, shins bleeding grief-blood. Jules heightened Wenonah's gleam in the window, the sketchbook flew from his lap.

"The colonel draws Dakota, he curses them!" Spirit Woman tore and quartered the sketchbook. "He draws Lightning, he steals his second self!"

Second self? Jules was sure he misheard the Dakota words.

"The drawing makes the colonel false!" she said. "The house, corn, seed and money he promised—they're only pictures on paper!"

"The payments are coming," said Jules. "The traders and whiskey sellers will grow tired of waiting and leave. The money will be better for your people that way."

* * *

Lightning hung in his cradleboard in a coulee, the wind blowing brittle leaves, and Spirit Woman wiped his eye-gunk and spooned him gruel from a cottonwood kettle, the liquid smelling like dead-decaying hogs, tasting thinly of flour and bark. They slept in a hole in the bank, robes cocooning them, and at daybreak Spirit Woman gave him hot venison broth and strapped him to her back, and she bent for prairie-stems, handing him bulbs and roots to suck.

Lightning grew with cousins, toddling beside garden corn, and whenever Rattler and Iron Hawk left for rations, the agency, Spirit Woman lisped disgustedly. She insisted Lightning woke with the first birds, that he found scars in stalks where Bobolink tore strips for a nest, fluff in seedpods where Kingbird gathered silk. She whirled seriously one morning, listening as Meadowlark slid his whistle loose in the wind-howl, the song already fluting and gurgling inside Lightning, the mother-bird flushing from grasses.

“I dreamt Meadowlark today,” she said. “He spoke Dakota. He cried out, and soldier-boots stepped upon her eggs.”

That night she walked Lightning beneath the Glittering Track, the haze of stars endlessly high in endless darkness, the road for Mdewakantunwan who left the earth. Guns popped, a fire glowed back beyond the lodge--the agent’s quarters, the trader’s warehouse. Spirit Woman and Lightning ran down the coulee to the Cloudy Sky, tepees in the bottoms, Iron Hawk hitching his team, everyone packing, an aunt choking a dog, silencing its bark. Lightning lay beneath robes in a wagon, and the team climbed, braves riding on both sides, voices low, deadly, urgent. The wagon stopped, and Lightning sat abruptly, reaching for a bow, any weapon, and he fought a retch, a smell like maggots and fur-on-bones, but more reviling--strange-gray lumps lay across dark-rolling grasses-- bloated Indians, soldiers, horses.

Rattler was lowered into the wagon, rasping, and Spirit Woman tore his shirt, raising a bloody cloth, sprinkling down powder, pressing on bark, and Iron Hawk leaned in, lifting Rattler’s musket, his face vermillion, his hair hung with claws and feathers. Iron Hawk stared at his son, Lightning’s willing grasp for the gun. He pulled it away, turned. He galloped off with Wapahasha and others, the horses boldly painted, headdresses, eagle wings and scalps bobbing magnificently in the night turning blue, birdsong quaking, pitching piercingly high.

“Listen, my son,” said Spirit Woman, her hands tying shreds, “it is great to become a warrior, but greater to become one who heals.”

* * *

Rattler’s band fled to Canada, built lodges beside a lake where trees exploded from cold, and a white man came in a pork-pie hat and sack suit, a paper crackling in his hand. He read the names of Sioux hanged back on the Cloudy Sky. “Iron Hawk.”

The man looked Lightning up and down and raised a bag of coins. “He will eat well, learn English.”

“No, you will not buy him,” said Rattler. “He will not dig your garden.”

“You will die unburied,” said Spirit Woman.

Lightning grew to twelve summers, was walking upon buffalo meat, flattening it before Spirit Woman dried it in the sun. She turned to the sliding-bursting song, Meadowlark. “Hunt west,” she said, and Lightning rode with Rattler, the old chief prone to hacking and spitting, but he stored balls in his mouth, bit his powder horn youthfully, reloaded one-handed and *bang!* A buffalo bull collapsed, gave chase, swayed as if dying, and a man watched from a hilltop—another pork-pie hat, a sack suit. Lightning aimed his rifle.

“No, they did not hang Iron Hawk,” said Rattler.

“They taught Iron Hawk in prison,” said Iron Hawk. “Praying made his mind clear.”

He pled that night to Wenonah. “Whites know everything in their books, and the sooner the boy learns, the more arrows he will have in his quiver.”

He took Lightning in a wagon, traveling south along the Red and Cloudy Sky, and they reached the Roiled Water during the Strawberry Moon. Soldiers escorted them into Fort Abraham Lincoln, and Lightning saw dust like buffalo herds, more men than he ever imagined. They grinned at his father, coveting something. They took apart rifles that rolled and swiveled, hammered gun-barrels in clanging fires, blew horns that bellowed like cows. They marched in time to soldier-chiefs shouting bossily from mounts, everyone in soldier-blue, even a gray-haired white far across the parade grounds, standing at an easel.

Rees and Dakota drilled in soldier-blue in front of their huts.

“My scouts,” said Iron Hawk, “but we will see the general.”

Sentries led them through a white-picket gate and into Long Hair’s house—buffalo-heads, wolf-heads, grizzly-heads mounted on walls. They entered the library, and the general rose in buckskins, cinnamon-blond hair flouncing to his shoulders, a picture hanging between antelope-heads behind him, its colors thicker and brighter than life—a Mdewakantunwan warrior stood tenderly behind his *tawiçu*, fingering her oiled hair, working her braids, her eyes a slow-dark river.

“Gold?” said Long Hair. “In *Pahá Sápa*?”

Iron Hawk nodded. The two men talked English, Lightning not understanding. He eyed his father, then the warrior in the picture. Each looked the same.

“You will go to school,” Iron Hawk said to Lightning. “I will go to the Black Hills with Long Hair and talk with Lakota about stones in streams.”

Iron Hawk talked English with Long Hair again, hearing only himself and the general, still not seeing himself in the picture—the white words and painting gave him a sickness Spirit Woman had warned Lightning about.

Long Hair smiled in the covetous way at Lightning, and father and son went out past the animal-heads again.

“The picture?”

“It’s from one of the White Father’s houses,” said Iron Hawk. “It was there with five others. The soldier-artist is here—not so powerful anymore. He made pictures for a white book of all the tribes, but the White Father owns them. The soldier-artist cannot sell them. He paints forts for the army now.”

“The marks on top? In the corner? They’re names?”

“Lightning sees why he must learn English.”

“Spirit Woman says no white man can paint Dakota! None can enter *Pahá Sápa!*”

“Lightning sees why he must read treaties someday.”

* * *

Dawn spread through the valley even more alluringly than Brigadier General Weston hoped, nighthawks booming, sage-hens thumping, the river misting wispily below, curving broadly, the pale-coming light sweeping the white-clay banks below the blockhouses, the pinnacle-hills and vast-flowering slopes beyond the fort dwarfing the post with immense yellows, greens, mauves.

Jules blew on his paint tins, warming them, his fingers aching irritably, his breath sharp from climbing the ridge. He fought a chill, a shoulder cramp. He grasped a brush, and willows shook down near the ferry. A brown body leapt, an Indian, a lad. He dove into the muddied

current, the Missouri thundering a muffled roar, rushing with the Rockies' snowmelt. The head bobbed, the ferrymen looked elsewhere.

The lad pulled himself onto a log, was carried mercilessly. He vanished behind a slope, probably a young Sioux wanting to deliver intelligence to Sitting Bull.

The lad floated in view again, Jules called his two sentries.

“What Indian, sir?”

Jules handed off his pallet, alarmed, perturbed. He hurried downhill, his face suffering a cold sweat, boots clumsy. Though the day might reach one-hundred degrees, clover-bushes sopped him icily, roping his ankles. He paused panting—the Indian nowhere, the Missouri suddenly a maze of sun-glints spraying past the mouth of the Heart.

Jules gazed along a bend, and a whistle pierced his ear, leapt behind him, fluted insistently. Jules scanned slowly back upriver, and the whistle rolled violently through his head, garbling—the yellow-breasted lark who sang the nation's wind from the Rockies to the Mississippi. The notes broke dizzily, and Jules sat weakly, his eyes defeated.

“I am Lightning, son of Wenonah and Iron Hawk.”

The Mdewakantunwan stood before Jules, breechclout dripping, eyes as liquid as his long-streaming hair. He blurred as Jules stood, a claw wrenching inside Jules' chest, and Jules slumped down--the sentries swiftly there, turning him on his back.

“Ain't beating!”

“Ain't breathing!”

“His whistling done it!”

Lightning knelt beside Jules, reaching down, and the sentries snatched his wrists, and he wriggled, stared at his grandfather's pallid sweat, wanted to lower his ear, listen.

* * *

Iron Hawk boarded Lightning onto a steamboat, his hastily-chopped hair angling up like unformed feathers, his skin chafing against a coarse-brown uniform destined for a preacher's school downriver.

The teacher wore hair-shears on his belt and gabbled incoherent cackles, English. He counted out twelve hoes to twelve Indian boys. He added and subtracted chickens and eggs that existed only invisibly!

Locomotives carried Lightning inexorably east—Illinois Preparatory School, Knox College, Dartmouth, Boston University of Medicine.

The Chicago and Northwestern returned Doctor Lawrence Weston, bachelor-physician, west to Rushville, Nebraska in eighteen-hundred ninety, and Agent Boyer drove him north in a buggy, Boyer's blue gaze darting nervously around bleak November plains, his talk hedging coolly.

Boyer stopped atop a draw sloping distantly down to Lakota dancing around a single pine tree. The wind blew alkali clouds across them, carrying chant-sounds to Lawrence. Dancers circled together, swaying like old-time Sioux, Boyer barking questions, Lawrence feeling him edgy, regretting their escorts—twenty Oglála Agency policemen, Winchesters loaded.

Lawrence looked through Boyer's spyglass--dancers pawed the wind, stepping high. They stood rock-like, facing northwest, arms open. The robes and shirts blew bluish, leggings looked red. Dancers flew backward, rolled twitching, lay dead-like.

“Washington should a’ sent you to Santee Agency, your own Mdewakantunwan,” said Boyer. “They’re obeying the law, not ghost-dancing.”

“I want to help all Sioux,” said Lawrence.

They reached Pine Ridge before dark, the agency a long barracks-like building, the wind blasting through warped-cottonwood walls, dusting Lawrence’s instruments as he unpacked. He walked resolutely to Boyer’s office, hoping for prime blue shack lining, and Boyer beckoned as if amiably, his gaze flitting down to a crate on his desk, his grin bemused.

“*Sioux Ball-playing on Ice*,” he said, “it came today—army conveyance.”

The ice and trees were clearly the Cloudy Sky, and Mdewakantunwan men swung sticks, racing toward a horizon that yawned boundlessly upriver, densely and endlessly white, promising virgin worlds beyond the ball-playing and the woman who turned singularly from it, staring rapt and engrossed outside the oil, eyebrows fluid, stare black-blotted, incandescent, Wenonah’s.

“You bought this?”

“It hung in the Capitol once.”

“Bought it where?”

“Ha! When President Harrison replaced the Republican agents, Simmons left it like a bad penny at the Minneçonhou Agency.”

* * *

Troops arrived the same morning as the white woman who smelled palpably of blowing snow, her skin as ruddy and brown as an Indian’s, cheeks beautifully full, hair corn-silk and eyes

as richly brown as winter mink—they searched Lawrence pensively as she helped him slide an unconscious dancer from her wagon-bed. Miss Featherstone grabbed the litter, and they hoisted One Bear toward the agency, soldiers pitching Sibley tents amid flurries, turning to help, obeying her head-shake.

The two laid One Bear upon the table in Lawrence's office, and Lawrence settled his cedar stethoscope against a blue-muslin shirt fringed with old-time sinew, thawing crustily. The *thub-dup* beat strongly, and her stare drank Lawrence silently, warming his face as he palmed One Bear's forehead, sacred red paint dreadfully cold.

"I've been inspecting schools since October—was ordered here with everyone else," she said. "I found him beside the road near the new dance camp. Three Minnečonhou were escorting me, visiting *wótakuye*. They saw soldier-dust, they left."

Lawrence grasped One Bear's wrist, timing his pulse. "You speak Sioux?"

"*TasákA?*" Her stare ran heat through his hand to the pulse. *Frozen?*

Breath swelled against One Bear's ghost shirt, raising half-moons and spirit crows. His eyes bolted open. "I have visited our dead! They're coming! We will dance!" He sat up, flinging away Lawrence's hand. "The soldiers will shoot! Our shirts will turn away bullets! The messiah will wave his arms! The whites will blow down!"

Miss Featherstone pulled out a sketchbook, sat, jotted his words, some English, others Sioux. Lawrence braced him, afraid he would drop dead. One Bear shouted on, Miss Featherstone's sketchbook dangling its loose leaf, and Lawrence craned to glimpse a watercolor upside-down--a slender-prairie bird, black vest, yellow breast--Meadowlark clutched a bush thrashing in a gale, his whistles hurtled visibly by his unflinching posture.

Boyer and Rustle Snake bustled in, the Oglála police captain drawing a pistol. “He is under arrest.”

One Bear shouted in trance, “When the grass turns green, the earth will swallow all whites!”

Boyer glared at Miss Featherstone’s sketchbook and moccasins. “Teachers do not use Sioux here, only English. Ladies wear only shoes.”

* * *

Dust clouds brought troops and compliant bands into Pine Ridge every day, hundreds Sioux frost-bitten, rheumatic, eviscerated. Telegram wires clicked incessantly. Sitting Bull had been killed at Húnkpapá Reservation. The Rosebud’s Brulé had stopped dancing. Big Foot’s Minnečonhou had also ceased, had come in, had slept last night with troops seventeen miles east at Wounded Knee Creek.

Lawrence lacked camphor, black drop, Dover’s powder, tartar. He closed his dispensary mid-morning and found Miss Featherstone sitting in a pew, drawing as stranded schoolmistresses strung Christmas popcorn on the cedar tree inside the little-frame chapel.

Lawrence slid beside her. She shuffled her rump, he thought. She rumped her cheek prettily, smiling, sketching—Meadowlark again, speaking now with wings fluttering, nearly clapping them as he descended toward a lass testily brandishing her bill, visibly scolding, *chucking*.

“The first year I taught at Cheyenne Agency, children came until meadowlarks sang outside the schoolhouse,” she said. “Then they all went home to parents, plowing fields like good

whites, and I was left alone with the larks romancing, one leading another on convoluted chases.”

Laughter seized Lawrence. His eyes watered mirthfully. He shook from weeks of exhausting weariness.

She resumed sketching. She stopped. Schoolmistresses froze, looking up from bagging candy. Hotchkiss guns distantly boomed, double explosions. Lawrence sank inside, rose to his feet. He hurried out, his boots unbearably loud on floor-planks. A storm of double explosions turned him around, his mind on bandages, sutures, morphine vials, Miss Featherstone’s wagon and team.

Boyer came in. “Everyone, remain at the agency—under penalty of death! Six-thousand friendlies surround us and can turn hostile at once!”

Miss Featherstone swiped her corn-silk brazenly, tipped her chin cockily. “We’ll talk Sioux with friendlies. We’ll find out.”

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They dragged pews against walls. Wagons came at dusk. They laid Sioux on hay and blankets inside, wall-lanterns throwing shadows.

Lawrence picked muslin-bits, bone-bits, shrapnel from Blue Horse’s jaw, and Blue Horse heaved, rattling, gasping, and Lawrence lifted his tongue with forceps, freeing his windpipe, and he turned to Mary Weasel, bullet-hole in her head, jellied flesh, and Charles Thunder sat up, raised a pipe, wobbled, and Miss Featherstone lit his last smoke, and then she knelt with Lawrence above Two Elk, held smelling salts, and Lawrence cut leggings, mopped bullet-blood,

tied veins, and she plugged leaks, fingering them, and they turned to Day Child's chest--gaping pulp, eyes dismally blank.

Big Foot's surrender had failed. He lay killed, his daughter shot atop him. Blue-coats had demanded guns, warriors had fought, cannons had shelled the camp.

"Two-hundred Minneçonhou dead!" cried Cindy Crow. "Fifty soldiers!"

Lawrence tacked together Cindy Crow's stomach, and Teddy Crow writhed, lesions in his side, ribs exposed, splintered. Miss Featherstone stuffed cedar boughs into feed bags, they cushioned the boy. All night they propped, mopped and drained the dying--directed the able to carry those in their final silences out from panging moans and death songs through the back door into howling-lashing snow.

Old Tall Moon came in, the ancient Minneçonhou caked with snow, eyes burning trustfully at Miss Featherstone. He pulled a calico bundle from his blanket-coat and handed Popping Moon to Miss Featherstone, canvas-bits charred against the baby's blistering skin.

They laid her on torn-bloody wadding. Lawrence swabbed her, she sobbed and kicked, Miss Featherstone held her. Lawrence pinched canvas-shreds with forceps, pulled. Popping Moon screamed, squirmed. She slackened, her pulse slowed. "Laudanum will kill her," said Lawrence. "We have no salve, no lard."

Miss Featherstone wheeled. The back door shut behind her. Lawrence pressed cold-water poultices on Popping Moon, her pulse strengthened. He needled open blisters, she shuddered as if to seize. He immersed her in a basin. She buckled, stiffened, blacked out.

Miss Featherstone shuffled beside Lawrence again, kneeling away from him, lantern-light flashing silver on her thumb, forefinger. She had his bone-nipper, *Ball-playing* lay by her knees. She scraped and scraped, Popping Moon flailing now on Tall Moon's lap, Lawrence pinching

canvas-bits from her cheeks. Lawrence smelled linseed oil, white-lead paint. A pestle knocked. Miss Featherstone raised a mortar of white cream, the bone-nipper lying on *Ball-playing*, paint-flakes on the dense-white horizon.

Lawrence pinched canvas from Popping Moon's nose, Miss Featherstone followed his forceps. She creamed each wound, her lotion smooth, finger-circles slow, soft. Popping Moon gawked at her knuckles, gurgled quietly. She chewed them, sucking readily.

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Lawrence sat exhausted in a pew two mornings later, sinking heavily beside Miss Featherstone, *Ball-playing* on her lap, his grandfather's painting washed entirely white, a squaw sketched sprawling amid tepees smoldering, collapsed, shredded--her hair singed, face lifeless. Popping Moon suckled the corpse. Tall Moon reached down for her.

Boyer filed past a chapel window, then agency police and Captain Rustle Snake in blue-wool overcoats.

Lawrence raced on tiptoes to the Franklin stove, creaked open its door, waved for Miss Featherstone to toss in the painting. She flared her eyes, dismissing him. Boots clapped through the vestibule. She sketched Mary Crow, Lame Crow, Day Child fleeing up a ravine, shells exploding, children and flesh bursting.

Boyer and Captain Rustle Snake stood before the rows of wounded on the floor. Lawrence rose and glared them out, his professional prerogative for patients. Boyer planted his feet. Miss Featherstone sketched Sioux corpses in snowy trenches, blue-coats with shovels overseeing them.

“Miss?” said Captain Rustle Snake.

She sketched blue-coats chasing squaws, positioning guns.

“Agent Boyer claims you have his painting, miss.”

She erased meticulously. She blew fastidiously. She sketched bullets ripping a white flag, piercing a ghost shirt, and Lawrence could not take his eyes from her, nor resist the buckskin dress, wedding beads, and the white silk gown flashing, bolting before him.