



CHAPTER ONE

SEPARATION

My grandfather was never known for much. A coal miner by trade, in the sticks of the Appalachian mountain range, he found little glory in life. Viewed as the black sheep among the family of six he helped create, the man received little praise and even less respect. Just the mention of a family function and anchors would attach to the corners of his mouth. Charan Raines escorted my demanding grandmother on the five hour drive to Maryland, but he never said a word to anyone. Sitting alone, staring blindly into the TV, he ignored the trivial chatter of his supposed loved ones, before making an unnoticed escape to the outdoors.

It was during one of these family gatherings, my second to be exact, that I refused to let my grandmother hold me. According to my mom, I never liked being coddled and screamed bloody murder until my grandmother put me down. Then I crawled over to my grandfather and raised my arms high. Mom said it was the only time she could recall seeing him smile. And so it went; for years, he'd sit down, away from everyone, saying nothing, only to have me scramble up and attach myself to a leg or an arm, whatever I could reach at the time.

It wasn't long before I joined my grandfather on his little escapes. He'd hold my hand to keep me from falling over loose rocks and twisted roots while trudging through the woods. I never minded our lack of conversation, I was just happy to be with him. But then I reached that inquisitive age. I started pointing to plants, to animals, asking question after question. My

grandfather happily answered every one, he had all the answers. He knew everything there was to know about everything. When I ran out of things to point to, he told me stories of the Cherokee people, a heritage I didn't know I was a part of until then.

Each story started the same way. We'd sit down under a tree, or by the river, clearing his throat he'd quietly say, "My Little Raven, with sapphire eyes, listen closely to the tales I tell."

The first stories he shared with me were old legends, such as How the Red Bird got his Color and Why the Possum's Tail is Bare. From there he went to myths about The First Fire and The Daughter of the Sun. He taught me the colors associated with each season, and the important celebrations and rituals they practiced in their daily lives. For a man who hardly spoke, storytelling was my grandfather's specialty. It fascinated me, the way his eyes sparkled, and the faraway sound of his voice, how his body came alive in those moments, acting out dances, singing chants. I looked forward to those special days with him. No one but us and the woods we adored.

Late one Sunday morning, after a heavy rain, my grandfather showed up at our door unannounced and alone. Bypassing a typical greeting, my grandfather simply asked if he could take me for a walk. My father regarded us with a raised brow and a shake of his head as I darted across the room. Pushing my father aside I flew into my grandfather's open arms.

"Just make sure she's back by two. She's got homework to do." My father said, before taking a swig from his Sunday observance beer.

"Sure." My grandfather grumbled before taking my hand in his. "I've got a new story for you." The corner of his mouth twitched as his dark eyes fixed on the dirt trail leading into Fischer Woods.

The quiet hadn't bothered me as we walked down the damp trail. It was the menacing shadows around his eyes. "Everything okay Grandpa?"

"Everything's fine. I'm tired Little Raven, and you're growing up so fast."

"I'll be thirteen in February."

"Almost a teenager." He said, looking down with a half grin.

"Almost."

He released my hand as I hopped on a fallen log, and stood back to watch me successfully teeter across it. "Don't let the world change you, Seanna." My grandfather rarely

referred to me by name. His voice sounded strange. Spinning around I caught my toe on the edge of a broken branch, sending me butt first to the wet ground.

Instead of helping me up, my grandfather plopped down next to me in the mud. “This is as good a place as any. Now my Little Raven, with sapphire eyes, listen carefully to the tale I’m going to tell.”

Snapping off the end of a stick, he hummed while sketching the outline of a butterfly in the mud. I watched anxious, waiting for the story to begin.

“I know you have dreams, big dreams. As long as you are true, Little Raven, true to yourself and are willing to protect and care for Mother Earth, as she has protected and cared for you, the Great Spirit will make all your dreams come true.”

“How?”

“Well, in order for a wish to be granted, you must first capture a butterfly and whisper your wish upon its wings. When you release the butterfly, it is so happy to be free again that the butterfly flies to the heavens, carrying your wish to the Great Spirit, who grants your secret desire.”

“Really?” I quickly scanned the grass for any signs of life. “If I had a butterfly now, I’d wish for more days out here with you.”

When I turned back to my grandfather his eyes were closed, his jaw, quivering. I pressed my hand to his shoulder and moved to kneel in front of him, waiting for him to see me. His jaw stilled, but he kept his eyes shut. “No, I’m an old man,” he said with the shake of his head. “Save your wishes for important things. Never waste them.”

“If I want to wish for more time, than I will.” Getting to my feet I marched off in search of anything with wings. “It’s my wish.”

I left my grandfather sitting in the mud, while I wandered around the woods. *He’s mad that I want to spend more time with him. How can he not want to spend more time with me? The only time he laughs is with me, it’s the only time he smiles. Even Mom says so. Why doesn’t he want to smile anymore?*

After an hour or more of searching I finally gave up hope that my grandfather would come looking for me. *He must be furious.*

I made my way back to the fallen log. Only my grandfather wasn’t there.

While waiting for him to return, I picked at a piece of bark with a rust colored smear,
until I heard my father scream my name.