

A crucifix is the key to hidden texts defying Christian canon. A man seeks the icon, unaware of its power to change the face of Christendom, or its potential for ultimate sanction from those pledged to keep its secret.

The Crucifix

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**THE  
CRUCIFIX**

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## CHAPTER ONE

### May 1975 Columbia River Gorge Vantage, Washington

**F**rom the western approach to the Columbia River Jack Rikert watched the string of headlights winding up from the bridge toward Vantage, Washington. He didn't care much for night driving, not for the obvious reason of boredom, but that from this point in the clear daylight one might see a distance of as much as twenty miles. The gorge cut by eons of Columbia River flow was breathtaking, and he'd once spent the better part of a day following the sun as it colored first one side then the other of the deep cut's sides. Jack was conscious that Morgan was looking at him through the darkness, and the consciousness of her observation caused him to sit straight and peer intently at the road as the bridge rushed by.

The blackness turned gray. Now the outlines of fences were visible. Behind was still dark save for headlights of following cars. Ahead of them, the faintest hint of pink began to show in the grayness of the sky. Overhead, stars had vanished—the arrow holes left by the trickster raven were plugged. He began to form a mental image of the sky like a great dome when he stopped with an inward chuckle. Perhaps Morgan was right after all, he was feeling his Native American heritage.

She had jumped at the chance to join him. His insistence on continuing the search for his identity puzzled Morgan, for she had, to her satisfaction, provided all the proof he needed to tie him to the mysterious So'qwa. Morgan had come to understand the man she loved and quickly told him, "If you want to know who you are, let's do it together. Let's go to where the answers are." And that led them across Washington to the Idaho border.

Gradually as the landscape began to appear, Jack burst forth, "Well, I'm a standin' on a corner in Winslow, Arizona, and such a fine sight to see, it's a girl, my Lord, in a flat bed Ford, slowin' down to take a look at me. Come on, baby, don't say maybe..."

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Morgan, busy scribbling notes on a pad, stuck her tongue out. “Jack, there’s more to it than those lines. That has to be the tenth time...”

“I’m takin’ you there after we’ve unraveled my lineage and...”

“I thought we’d already done that,” Morgan said with mock indignation.

“Yeah, and the mystery that keeps tugging at my unscientific mind.”

“What mystery?” a bemused Morgan asked.

“The crucifix. If the oral history is true...”

“Let’s deal with one earth-shaking event at a time.” She read the frustration in his face, leaned over, and planted a wet kiss on his ear. “For now we’ll stick with what we can prove. Remember this is about your lineage, not a search for trinkets.” It was just like her to remind him that she was in charge.

It had occurred to Jack that the whole enterprise had been his doing but he kept his tongue. Months earlier, he’d gone to Morgan with the tale of a mysterious Puyallup Indian named So’qwa. At first, she had dismissed the story as myth, but quickly admitted knowledge of the man. “I think all anthropologists are legend chasers, and when it comes to your So’qwa, it’s slightly different. There is a prevailing myth that he was buried with a jeweled sword, and that makes the tale juicy.”

For Morgan the prospects of discovery had been just as juicy, for in a time when most women’s concerns focused on marriage and family, hers was anthropology. She had agreed to join the search for the Indian, Jack believed was his ancestor, but on her terms. She would direct the project. He had agreed and their find became history. Now they were pursuing the whereabouts of a religious icon, in the belief that its discovery would settle the issue for Jack.

Events a world away were conspiring to halt Jack’s quest and to tear two people apart. On May 12, 1975, less than two weeks after the fall of Saigon, a unit of Cambodian Khmer Rouge navy seized

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the American-flagged container ship SS *Mayagüez*, off a tiny island called Koh Tang in the Gulf of Siam, taking the crew hostage.

With memories of the North Korean's seizure of the USS *Pueblo* still fresh, President Gerald Ford determined to act decisively, ordered the US military to recover the vessel and its crew. Against a fourth-rate military establishment, it looked like a walk, but virtually everything that could go wrong did. Air Force special-operations and Marine Corps elements did not receive adequate intelligence and stumbled into a reinforced battalion of elite Cambodian naval infantry.

Perhaps prompted by retaliatory strikes by A-6's from the USS *Coral Sea*, the Khmer Rouge released the *Mayagüez*'s crew. It had been a close thing. The Marines on the island might have been overrun but for a combination of low-level command initiative, hard fighting and superior airmanship and an AC-130 fire mission that proved pivotal.

Lessons learned, long a military practice, prompted more realistic Air Force training scenarios. The Marine Corps conscious of a need for inter-service operational cooperation began selecting officers and NCOs for such duty. It was not long before Jack Rikert's name and combat performance surfaced. He was offered to a Flag study group as a first echelon officer of intelligence and initiative.

As a convalescing officer, he was required to make his whereabouts known to the Marine Corps. Jack learned of his selection at their motel in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. At first, Morgan took the news with understanding, but as the true nature of his assignment became clear, she got angry.

"I thought you were going to retire."

"Never said that, Morgan. Besides I'm cleared for duty."

"I should have known they'd call."

"They? You mean the Marine Corps?"

"They...who kept you away for all those years!" She was working herself up to a good pissed off.

"Morgan, we both have jobs..."

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“I have a career, not a job, and I can tell this research project is dead.” She threw clothing in her suitcase and went out to the car. Later, Morgan felt she must have stared off at the horizon, a mile to the west a hundred times since they started, but saw nothing of the landscape that flashed by.

Theirs had been a campus love, the sweet romance she’d always dreamed of. After four months of barefoot walks on the beach, picnicking at Point Defiance Park, and ferry trips to Vashon Island, they’d secretly moved into a small off-campus apartment and started making plans for a future together. Then, as suddenly as their life together had begun, it ended. She shuddered involuntarily at the recollection of the day in 1968 when Jack had told her that he’d been expelled. A month later, Morgan received a hurriedly written note from a place in San Diego where Marines trained and, a year after that, from a place called Vietnam. He replied to but a few of her numerous letters. Eventually, their communication stopped altogether.

Morgan bit her lip to keep from crying. This time, she decided there would be no tears. Still, she struggled not to be overwhelmed by the old hurt, the years of separation that had left her feeling foolish for waiting.

No more than a dozen words were spoken during the four-hour drive across Washington. Sites they’d both admired passed with little more than grunts. “Palouse country just south, Morgan.”

“Uh huh.”

“We’re at Snoqualmie Pass.”

“Yes I know.”

By the time they turned on her street, Jack was relieved. Duty was his life and assignments were beyond his control. He tried once more to talk about it, but she flared.

“When your job is done let me know. Perhaps we can try again.”

“That’s it, Morgan, ‘Perhaps we can try again?’” he had mimicked.

“Unless you consider another option.” “There are no other options. When, I’m called, I go.” It was then that he realized a

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choice had been made. "I choose to go," Jack said a bit more firmly than he intended. He would serve first.

"Call me before you, what do they call it, ship out? I'll pack what you have here. Come by for it tomorrow. I'm not going to be a camp follower."

Jack stood looking at the closed door, then stepped off with his left foot, back to the Marine Corps.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Tacoma, Washington

**I**t was April 2000 and Jack Rikert was home for the first time in years, retired from the Marine Corps, facing his fiftieth birthday alone. A lifetime of bag drags, living in tents, and serving in countries where the natives didn't want him had left Jack somewhat skeptical of his country's international policies. Spring showers and a recently purchased home at Gig Harbor, not ready for its new occupant, dampened homecoming.

As the day wore on, he repented of his ill humor, it was his birthday after all, and he'd received an advance copy of Morgan's book, *The Circle*, an account of their find on the coast, so many years ago. The novel, thinly disguised as fiction, chronicled a man's quest to discover his past. Writing on a cedar parchment propelled him through dream sequences into the past, where he confronted the enemy of his Indian ancestor. Trapped in the future but beckoned by the past, the man struggled to give life to a legend that sinister elements would prefer remained in history's abyss. Woven into the fabric of fiction were the factual details of discovery.

She had nearly lost faith in the project, doubting it would ever be published. "Finish your work," Jack had urged in a letter. She'd asked him to collaborate and in 1985 joined him in San Diego. It was as if they had never been separated and working together, for a time, seemed to suggest that they were fated to be a team.

Gradually the work took shape, but she stubbornly insisted on a scholarly approach that proved dreadfully dull to read. In the end, she had accepted his solution, simplicity itself, although finishing a draft manuscript took nearly ten years. The first few, they moved the boxes of her research to each new duty station until one day she had called it quits. "I'm not a camp follower. With each move I lose a little bit of me along with a piece of pottery broken or a favorite painting marred."

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So, here it was, complete with photos of artifacts. He had written a good bit of the text and the publisher had said it was a good read, straight forward, no academic ego between the lines. Jack gratefully acknowledged the compliment, but denied the publication was his doing, ensuring Morgan was credited as the author. They had been a good team; their only disagreement was her reluctance to trust oral history.

“What is it you don’t understand?” Jack had pointedly asked when she shook her head at including the material. “Oral history is the only form that can’t be changed by scholars to fit their theories.” He knew it always annoyed her when a man suggested she did not understand. Neither did she care for the editorial concerning shortsighted scholars.

Morgan had chosen not to continue the argument, for she did consider his opinions valuable and a more practical reason. He was, at least on paper, in the form of diplomas, her peer. It was really her doing. At Morgan’s urging, Jack had committed to study Anthropology. Over ten years he was educated at a number of universities, principally, Stanford, University of Washington and Harvard. He’d completed his doctorate in the relatively new science of Forensic Anthropology under the guidance of Dr. Walter Wood, University of Queensland, Australia and Dr. William Bass, University of Tennessee. He applied his knowledge with excavation experience in New Mexico and a half dozen crash sites in Vietnam.

They both knew, to find the proof he needed, to substantiate or quash a long-held legend, was the dream of every researcher and too important an undertaking to engage in bickering. In spite of her reluctance to heed spoken history, he was aware that lurking in her thoughts was the possibility that validation of the connection between him and So’qwa, the mystery man hinged on such data. Neither he nor Morgan talked about it, but it was still there, complicating, yet giving a purer purpose, to the search.

Jack’s instinct to publish a lively work of fiction had paid off. The publication had caused a good deal of interest, much more than the factual account in academic journals. Though they had parted company, it was amicable and Morgan contacted Jack periodically

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to help handle inquiries from professional and amateur archeologists in the United States and from as far away as Europe and the Middle East. He had willingly obliged her as it kept them communicating. Some applauded the discovery in embarrassingly glowing terms, while some challenged every finding with profound skepticism. A most intriguing letter from an organization calling itself the Knights Templar politely questioned the source of the legend concerning a Spanish crucifix and a Quinault child.

Jack wrote an equally polite reply pointing out that the work was fiction only to the degree that depictions of the main character's dreams were impossible to regard as factual. He assured the writer that the account of a Spanish priest and the Quinault boy did occur.

There had been times when academic organizations requested Morgan to speak, she had begged off and asked Jack to talk about how he had discovered the cave. Each time duties permitted, he jumped at the chance, but mostly to see her. And each time, someone would ask about the legendary treasure. It was always the same. Jack would rest his piercing green eyes on the one who'd asked. He knew the scar on his face from a North Vietnamese bayonet gave him a mocking look. He would smile, shrug and answer, "Somewhere on the coast, a child is probably playing with colored stones." The audience would, as always, laugh, and he'd seldom have to discuss the matter further.

When they were together, it was like old times. He still loved her and she freely admitted the same. They'd talk about how to stay a couple, then his leave would end, and her mouth would start to tighten. They finally divorced, neither willing to give up their careers for the other.

Now, he'd go it alone, starting in Idaho where his father was born. There, he hoped to complete the story of Francis, So'qwa's granddaughter, the last known person to possess the crucifix. Going it alone had sounded easy, but Jack, for all of his field experience, did not know where to start. In desperation, he had fished out his copy of *The Circle* and copied down the list of equipment Morgan's

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heroine had assembled, in their search for the tomb of the Indian, So'qwa of the Puyallup tribe. It called for a variety of brushes, two sizes of trowels, a large ball of twine, two 50-foot tape measures, a small clipboard and paper, and a handful of mechanical pencils. He finally decided that he could do without any of it, but was attracted by the new fangled digital camera that didn't require film. Though, just considering the material brought Morgan to mind and the look on her face when he'd challenged her research—solid research connecting him, she'd maintained, to a legendary ancestor.

It brought back more. The frightening moments struggling with spectral figures in dreams—dreams where he felt his life would surely end. Dreams, he'd told his doctor at Madigan Hospital at Fort Lewis that went beyond moments in combat that lived in the minds of every veteran. The illusions were inexplicable memories of people he had never known, places he had never seen and events that had never happened—at least not to him. A military psychiatrist theorized that the psychological trauma of his friend Leonard Geiger's death probably accounted for the people in the ancient Indian writing coming to life in Jack's subconscious.

Though he no longer had dreams, he often relived suffocating terror fighting his way through a water-filled narrow passage in search of a cave that might give clues to his Indian ancestor. The passage had narrowed in spots where shifting sand reacted to the current. Cut off from the outside, he had grabbed handfuls of sand and pulled himself deeper into the passage, but his efforts created clouds of swirling particles blocking his vision. In desperation, Jack had rolled on his side and pressed his feet against the walls to walk the remaining distance into a chamber the size of a small guest room, illuminated by an eerie greenish half-light.

It was there, jostled by the incoming tidal surge, he'd found the lower entrance to So'qwa's refuge and the body of a man who had died under the most mysterious circumstances—circumstances that, for twenty-five years, remained clouded. The image of the mottled corpse still caused him discomfort. He recalled it took steel reserve, born of necessity in combat to remain calm in the fatiguing cold. He

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had reached safety by an act of a capricious ocean. He didn't know who to thank, his God, or the guardian spirits of his ancestors.

Rikert had sensibly prepared for the next journey to the cave. He and Morgan donned wetsuits and masks, the tunnel's size not permitting air tanks. They scaled a sloping tube to a cavern, its walls painted with animals and a man's face. The drawings were primitive, rendered in ochre and soft earth tones, appealing in their simplicity. The eyes of the man were green. Like wounds, bold red strokes marked each cheek. There they had discovered countless artifacts and the mummified remains of So'qwa and his wife Tall Woman, resting against a canoe, as though after a long trip.

It was there also, Jack found a braided leather band hanging from So'qwa's withered hand, the covering of dust sliding away to reveal jewels, bound into a necklace.

They had discovered a window to another time, a snapshot of a people and their culture that could unlock secrets of the past. More than that, they had found Jack's ancestor. They would find another entrance that facilitated their research. Then, armed with charts, exposed film, and a sampling of historically significant relics, they exited the tomb for the last time, careful to conceal the upper entrance. Their findings electrified the academic community, which called the discovery one of the most significant of the century.

He still harbored some guilt concerning the jeweled necklace he had kept hidden from her. When he shared its existence, Morgan had insisted that it belonged to the native people. Jack remembered his exact words. "I am the people, you said so yourself, Morgan, so that's not an issue." He'd challenged her to stop worrying about an overactive sense of propriety for the moment, and visualize the gems funding scholarships for Native Americans in the name of Captain Leonard Geiger, Jack's dearest friend. After that, Morgan had agreed to him find a crucifix, a 17th century religious icon that he hoped would provide the final key to his heritage.

All of that was behind him, and by sunset, he reached Twin Falls, Idaho and got a room overlooking the Snake River. "Lousy thing to be alone two weeks after my birthday," Jack muttered to the slow moving river.

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That evening he had fastened a large blackboard over a framed photo of a mountain scene and studied it. He wrote, “Where would you start, Morgan?” He had completed the educational requirements, but compared to her, his qualifications were only on paper. Throughout his professional life, Jack found little pleasure in achieving things he knew he could do, academic successes, one of them. In a perverse self-deprecating manner he would come to qualify his earning a doctorate, “If nothing else, I’m determined.” Jack surveyed his written query for several moments, then turned to the two unopened boxes he had carted from Tacoma.

What remained in his possession were a thousand pages of information garnered from tribal historians and Morgan’s researchers and a box full of notes—notes from Jack’s best friend, Leonard Geiger. Leonard’s death still troubled Jack after all these years. “Damned Kusiut,” Jack mumbled. The Kusiut secret society had ordered Leonard’s death—perhaps not his death, but he died just the same because the idiot who was sent to get the parchment scroll had given Leonard an overdose of a chemical used by the military to elicit information from prisoners.

First he tackled the one Morgan had labeled in her careful script, *Field Work Notes, Spring/Summer 1975*. On top in a folder, Jack found a brief summary of the parchment—the parchment, which had set in motion the events that culminated in their historic discovery and creation of a chair in the department of anthropology for Morgan. Although she had struggled to translate whirls and squiggles that covered the fragile sheet, Morgan called it legend and refused to give the measure of authority to the words that he thought they merited.

The parchment told the harrowing story of an Indian boy, about ten or eleven captured and brutalized by raiders and how he escaped and lived alone in a cave on the Pacific Coast until rescuing an Arapaho girl enslaved by the Quinault. Throughout his long life, So’qwa of the Puyallup remained a shadowy figure to the white man; but, for a moment in history, he was the conscience of his people, a moment that would shape the lives of the tribes who

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inhabited the Pacific Northwest. He alone bore the responsibility for fomenting the challenge to unfair treaties and, therefore, deservedly earned the fame that nurtures legend.

It had taken all of Morgan's skills, all her imagination and determination, to produce a workable translation from the cedar parchment. There were still many gaps, but she had laid out the skeleton of the tale in such order that they were able to glimpse the shape of the animal it represented. He often tried to fill the gaps with accounts from Leonard's notes, but Morgan had grumbled, "Much of what he has compiled reads like a story, the hallmark of legend." She had been reluctant to place much credence in the passages branding them unreliable, and "...of little value to scientific inquire. The writer," Morgan noted, "tells a convincing tale, but it cannot be verified."

She had argued instead in favor of starting with a prized document, a highly readable account of an Indian possessing a crucifix in the translated diary of the Spanish commander at Nootka Bay, Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra. She had been able to identify Father Juan Fernando Alvarez de la Campo Cos as the Franciscan priest who had given a crucifix to a Quinault child in 1775.

Jack turned the book over. "We should have gone after the crucifix," he said to her photograph on the cover. "I'd have liked that adventure." After the stunning success unearthing an undisturbed Coastal Indian tomb, a site now available for generations of academic communities, finding an old cross that might help track down his ancestral roots had not seemed that important to her.

During the night, he thumbed through the papers and listed on the chalkboard references to an Indian wearing a priest's cross in journals from Spanish explorations on the Pacific Coast, the northwest explorations of Captain Vancouver, the McMillan Hudson's Bay expedition, and the Lewis and Clark Corps of Discovery.

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Next, Jack broke the seal on the box of Leonard's notes and started reading Morgan's translation. It was his perverse sense of optimism that set him to work starting with the first person, Indian writings said, touched the crucifix, the Quinault boy, Klolwalle. Jack studied Morgan's translation. "*Klolwalle's gift to his brother-in-law was made of white man's iron, two pieces, one slightly shorter and joined near the top of the longer one. A tiny man with outstretched arms was attached to one side of the long piece. He appeared dead.*"

In her detailed notes, she had captured tribal peoples' reactions to the spirit they believed lived in the iron sticks possessed by So'qwa of the Puyallup tribe. The Haida, Tsimshian and Makah along the northwest coast considered the crucifix little more than a white man's trinket, but nonetheless were suspicious of its power. The Southern Puget Sound peoples, notably the Puyallup and Nisqually counted So'qwa's many achievements owing in part to the crucifix. The Cowlitz people, on the river that bears their name, and the Chinook and Clatsop on the Columbia River, held So'qwa in high regard, fearful of the power in the white man's iron sticks.

He completed his list of sightings with the details of how the crucifix was passed on to So'qwa's granddaughter who married a white man, one Andrew Rodgers. Despite the obvious technical value of Morgan's research, he had a feeling about the words of the ancients and knowingly gave them equal weight, because he did not have the luxury of discounting them. Jack figured these words challenged mere coincidence and only strengthened the likelihood that the crucifix was once in the hands of his ancestor So'qwa.

So intent was he engaged in his research, it was the first threat of dawn that alerted him to fatigue. He kicked off his shoes and without bothering to undress pulled a blanket over him. He told himself, he was where he was with what he had and that would have to do. Still he went to sleep wondering if Morgan might be right, but determined he would have to follow each lead.

~1773~

## The Padre

*"At dark, there was a very thick fog so that at a short distance nothing could be seen. While a league from land we heard some people's voices and waited until we heard them no more. We made out the land very well after that and I landed with the Niño Jesus to return him to his people."*

Excerpt from journal of  
Father Juan Fernando Alvarez de Campo Cos  
Aboard His Most Catholic Majesty's Ship Sonora

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Vatican

**H**oly Father, may I help you?" The lean young priest's fingers fluttered at the kneeling man's shoulder, but the courage to touch the Prince of the church, despite the Pope's obvious discomfiture, failed Father Juan Fernando Alvarez de Campo Cos.

"No Juanito," the Pope smiled thinly. "Thank you for your concern. I am in prayer."

"But I saw you fall..."

"You may leave me." The Pope put out his arm to be helped up, studied the sincere young face and changed his mind. "No, stay, there are some letters to write."

The Pope, Vincenzo Antonio Ganganelli, received his education from the Jesuits at Rimini and the Piarists of Urbino, and in 1724, at the age of nineteen, entered the Order of Friars Minor of St. Francis. Pope Clement XIII (1758–69) appointed him a cardinal in 1759, at the insistence of Father Ricci, the General of the Jesuits. Now He was Pope.

The Conclave that selected Ganganelli was heavily influenced by the political maneuvers of the ambassadors of Catholic sovereigns opposed to the Society of Jesus—Jesuits. The fate of the Order hung in the balance; and the Bourbon princes were determined to have a Pope subservient to their hostile designs. During the previous pontificate, the Order had been expelled from Portugal and from all the Bourbon courts: France, Spain, Naples, and Parma; now the general suppression of the order was imminent, and the new Pope was to be the instrument.

The struggle to select a successor to Clement VIII was prolonged three months. At length, on the 19th of May 1769, Ganganelli was chosen, not as a declared enemy of the Jesuits, but as being least objectionable to each of the contending factions. The Pope would go on to engage in the suppression of the Jesuits, the decree to this effect signed in July 1773.

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At the time of his election, Clement inherited from his predecessor the hostility of every state of Catholic Europe. The dispute between the temporal and the spiritual Catholic authorities was perceived as a threat by the Church and Clement XIV worked towards the reconciliation with the European sovereigns; his policies calculated from the outset to smooth the breaches with the Catholic Crowns that had developed during the previous pontificate. The arguing and fighting among the monarchs seemed poised to lead Europe towards heavy international competition—a situation which would have resembled the European situation in the late nineteenth century.

Father Alvarez, skilled in several languages, had been sent from the Papal Secretary's office to prepare the Pope's personal correspondence, mostly that concerning suppression of the Jesuits.

Although there was no evidence that Ganganelli pledged to suppress the order, the charge of simony inspired by Jesuit hatred, deeply bruised him and he said as much to his scribe who had become a confidant

“Tell me what they are saying...in their own tongues.”

“Saying, Holy father?” Alvarez had an ear for the language of diplomacy. A year earlier, Spanish diplomat Azra accompanied by young priest Alvarez, had had an audience with the Pope. Azra presented a suggestion from the young priest and advised the pontiff not to excommunicate European leaders of nonconforming kingdoms for violations of church rules. Pope Clement seized the common-sense approach and was able to negotiate more amicable relations with European kingdoms. A generous Azra gave his young companion the credit and the Pope snatched the clever priest to serve as his personal secretary, a decision, he told his immediate staff, came from God.

“What they really mean. Is it court talk or political? What is the weight of the words? You are skilled with an ear for language as some have an ear for music. But sadly, it is not music that comes from the mouths of Jesuits, the very ones who educated me. That

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they would accuse me of ecclesiastical preferment wounds my body and strickens my soul.”

Father Juan Alvarez was afraid. While he served his Pope out of devotion to the faith and the man with great efficiency, his was a most precarious position. A fledging priest’s proximity to the Holy Father was met with suspicion from his superiors who often questioned him about his talks with the Pope. It was dangerous knowledge, the Pope’s inner thoughts. Alvarez did not speak of it in Confession, and for that, he was proud. Besides being a linguist and a skilled writer, Alvarez was scrupulously circumspect. Never once had he divulged anything spoken by Clement, but his silence only served to incense and distance him from his superior, Cardinal Cantolino the President of the Secretariat, whose questions, of late, had become more pointed, more like interrogation. He was not certain when the veiled threats of punishment might come, but he, with the instinct of a man who knew his time of trial was near, was certain his superior would order censure if he did not break confidence with the Holy Father.

The cardinal’s glasses perched on an oversized nose. Called the “hawk” behind his back, he eyed Father Alvarez like prey. “We are told that Holy Father spends many hours with you.”

“I write letters for him,” Eminence.

“You also talk with him, is that not so?”

“He has very many correspondents, and we talk about them.”

“Tell me Father Alvarez, what sorts of things do you discuss when writing for him?” Juan Alvarez began to speak, but the cardinal silenced him with a wave of a silken cloth, with which he had wiped his prodigious nose before returning it to its place in his sleeve. “Remember the importance of obedience to your superiors.”

“Yes, Eminence.”

“Well then?”

Cardinal Cantolino fiddled with his glasses, watching Alvarez, trying to detect any cracks in the young priest’s resolve to guard his conversations with the Pope. After a long pause, he realized that the man was in no hurry to respond. The first minute passed in silence,

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and the second dragged on. There was a limit, to how long he would sit in a room, staring at another person, especially a lone priest whose disobedience could land him in some hellhole on the fringes of the known world.

It had been a mistake, Cardinal Cantolino told himself afterwards, to meet with the insolent pup, but it was done and he could only go on so long waiting before losing complete control. Surely, he told himself, no man in his right wits would challenge the authority of the church—and he a Cardinal and President of the Papal Secretariat was such authority. Nevertheless, there it was, in the defiant calm of Juan Alvarez, an act of such magnitude against the church that it left the cardinal with no choice but to condemn him as the Jews had condemned the first prince of the faith.

“So,” the cardinal was infuriated he had had to break the silence, “So, you remain disobedient?”

“I am obedient only to God,” your Eminence

“Away with you. Learn the cost of folly.” The meek, he had been told, would inherit the earth, but only when Cardinal Cantolino had weeded out the last of these new independent minded clerics.

His reassignment was soon in coming. Father Alvarez bid a tearful farewell to Clement VIX, rejoicing with the Pope at the opportunity to carry the faith to natives in the some far off land an ocean away.

Neither man spoke of the tragic consequences of the priest’s loyalty, but both knew, and would cherish the bond it had formed.

“Juanito,” Clement’s sad eyes searched his scribe’s face. “You have been loyal beyond compare, and more—the brother I lost in my youth.” He removed his crucifix, placed the chain around the startled priest’s neck, and made the sign of the cross. “Though we’ll be worlds apart, our blessed Lord, will forever connect us...”

“This is too much,” Alvarez stammered. “Your own crucifix...”

“Given in the love of Christ, my son.” The Pope took the priest’s hands in his. “Remember always, it is only silver, but a symbol of the faith, and one which you must pass to another. You will discern the moment when it is to be done.” He hesitated, saw the

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puzzlement in the young man's face and made a decision. Clement traced a gaunt finger along an inscription. "Here, near where our Martyred Lord's side was pierced is a key to the location of the abhorrent gospels."

"Gospels?"

"Patience Brother Alvarez. Hidden near this very chamber are works of false prophets written earlier than the canon of the church."

"Gnostic writings? But, Holy Father, they were excluded..."

The Pope raised his hand to quell questions from the astonished priest. "I choose not to discuss the matter further, except to say, a code is etched on the cross in your possession. I am ill, worn thin by the recent controversies and fear that when I am gone, there are some in the Curia whose calumny will bring find the Gnostic scriptures forward and visit violence on our church." Clement's placid countenance twisted in anger. "Satan's hand guides their action. They would unearth the heretical writing and expose the body of the church to its enemies. It is they, not I, who sells their office." He touched his breast where the crucifix once hung, "But we must find it in ourselves to forgive."

It pained Alvarez who knew the suppression of the Jesuits had removed the Pope's only independent support and put the church into the hands of the princes and the encroaching secularism of the Enlightenment. The estrangement between the secular and the spiritual authority which Clement strove to avert was now irreparable, and his pontificate would remain an exceptional episode in the general history of the Papacy, and a proof how little the logical sequence of events could be modified by the virtues and abilities of an individual.

What fascinated, and alarmed the young priest, was the continued existence of scriptures that had failed to find a place in the Bible—scriptures he was taught, which might have reversed fundamental notions of Christian theology. Alvarez could never admit to the Prince of the Church that before he committed his life to the Order, he had engaged in a vigorous and dangerous questioning, why certain texts were not included in the canon. It was

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a childish pursuit, and one that could have excluded him from the priesthood, and one, which left him with nagging concerns. Why did some texts fail to be included in the Bible? Was it a question of divine inspiration or the result of religious and political rivalry between sects, between factions, between Jew, Christian and Gnostic? He was not sure.

What was certain, the conflict between these two major sects of the early church resulted in a victory for orthodox beliefs, and the disappearance of the Gnostic texts. Alvarez was left to ponder what might have happened had Valentinus, a major Gnostic thinker in the second century, succeeded in his desire to become Pope of Rome. Things might have been drastically different, but that was more dangerous thinking. Indeed, church authorities would brand it heresy.

“He has what?” demanded Cardinal Cantolino.

“Given it away,” his secretary said. “I saw him hang it around the neck of that insolent pup, Alvarez. We should send the guard for him, kill him!”

The cardinal shook his head. He’d already thought that but had instantly dismissed the notion. His secretary said nothing. He was afraid of his cardinal’s mood, of the anger that had come with the realization that the key to the hidden gospels was temporarily lost.

“It is not necessary to take a life. Summon Alvarez and we’ll bring this unfortunate business to a close.” Cardinal Cantolino yawned and waved his secretary away, but the man stood his ground, his face twisted in the most painful expression. “Did you not hear?”

“He is gone, Eminence, gone this long week.”

“Where?”

“God knows, Eminence.” the man searched frantically for some way to escape the piercing eyes.

“Dispatch riders then.” A cloud of anger descended on him. Anger could take a man through most things, sheer passion, but a small notion of what to do might help. He had no such ideas, hopeless even, for it was his own precipitous action that had sent the

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young priest away—“this long week,” his secretary had said. Feeling sour at the situation of his own making, he retired to pray for the early capture of Alvarez and the return of the key to Christendom and the Papacy. The Hawk liked the thought. He would retire to choose a name for his pontificate, perhaps Pius.

Father Alvarez was a world away when Clement XIV, his work s hardly accomplished, fell into a languishing sickness, generally attributed to poison. Those closest to him denied claims that the Pope had been poisoned and no conclusive evidence of poisoning was ever produced. Although his usual constitution was quite vigorous, the Annual Register for 1774 stated, he was over 70 and in ill health for some time.

### *San Blas, Mexico*

Lieutenant Bruno de Hezeta y Dudagoitia took a last pull on his cigar, when he heard the hail from a shore boat. He exhaled a lung full of smoke, his head thrown back, blowing thick greasy wreaths of smoke skyward from his cigar. The mostly Mexican crew on the Spanish ship he commanded had a particular talent for wrapping them just the way he liked.

So relaxed Hezeta was, he had scarcely noticed the lugger on its way out to her, under the control of two sturdy men; it skimmed smoothly on placid water, now and then attracting curious gulls. The boatsmen knew their business and dropped sails the instant they turned the bows to meet the port side of the *Santiago*, and as it approached the main chains the officer of the watch had hailed it.

“Si,” was the answering hail. Now curious, Hezeta peered over the side to a figure in the stern sheets looking like a piece of cargo draped in a black shawl; no doubt a passenger off the recent arrival from Spain. That was as much as Hezeta could see; he was unwilling to leave his comfortable perch and went back to nursing his cigar. Suddenly the passenger appeared over the rail having scaled the tumble down before the lugger turned for shore. A black cloaked figure approached under the escort of a deck officer, who

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after pointing out Hezeta, retired to his place on the quarterdeck. Lieutenant Hezeta, one of a small group of junior naval officers who had arrived in Mexican from Spain in late 1774, joined the navy twenty years earlier. An energetic and promising officer, who would retire years hence, a Lieutenant General, had developed the habit of studying his fellow man.

At that moment, he diverted his mind from the spiraling smoke and looked with attention at the approaching figure. It was that of a young man judging by the agility he demonstrated as he came aboard. Not another priest, Hezeta nearly said aloud. Born a Basque, the strangle hold of the church always rankled him. Now this present visitor was sweeping off his hat in the manner of a Spanish dandy, for which Hezeta had little use. Alert dark eyes met Hezeta as the priest replaced his hat.

“Come aboard, *Senor*?” the young face smiled brightly.

Hezeta’s experience with cloying humble acting priests had not prepared him for this greeting and he found himself smiling in response. Perhaps this young cleric would not be one to burden him or his crew with incessant talk of humanity’s proclivity to evil, paid with hell’s fire, which he’d found an unnecessary distraction to men involved in the realities of voyages to unknown places.

In 1494, the Pope, through the Treaty of Tordesillas, divided the world between Spain and Portugal and the Pacific Ocean; Spain regarded the ocean as their domain. Thus, any ships sailing in the Pacific were intruding and had no rights to claim territory.

The Spanish authorities in New Spain (Mexico) had decided, in the middle of the eighteenth century, to expand their empire northwards. Their attention had been alerted originally to Russian activity much farther north in a region that the Spanish claimed as their own. Later, British ships began to appear and the Spanish felt they needed to assert their authority. A new port was developed at San Blas on the Pacific coast from which a series of ships sailed north over a period of twenty years.

A feature of the Spanish throughout this time was secrecy. They were reluctant to publish the results of their explorations and

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refused, usually, to share information with other countries. The Governments of Russia and Britain did not accept Spanish rights to the Pacific and had begun exploring the ocean with a view to extending their own areas of influence. Because of Spanish secrecy, it was impossible for the Russians or British to know whether they were visiting locations already seen by the Spanish or virgin territory.

The Spanish moved by sea and overland past Baja California into Alta California. A network of Government military posts (Presidios) was established with associated religious missions. Church and State were inseparably linked in carrying out Spain's policy. Religion played a significant role in Spain's relations with and attitudes toward the indigenous populations in their possessions. Responsibility for conversion of the native population to Christianity fell to several religious orders, hence a priest on each expedition. The Spaniards considered conversion through baptism to be a symbol of allegiance to their authority. Commander Hezeta grumbled to himself that he already had one priest, and one was enough, but he was too junior in rank to challenge the church.

"Come aboard, Senor?" the young man repeated.

"Yes, Padre," Hezeta preferred the informal title used by his mostly native crew. After waiting a moment, he said, "You are welcome to the Santiago. Your name?"

"Father Juan Alvarez de la Campo Cos, but I prefer Padre Juan, if that is not too informal."

"Very good," answered Hezeta, warming to the pleasant young man. "You brought dunnage?"

"My sea chest is at the entry port, Sir."

Hezeta contemplated the priest for a long moment. Surely, he was not a seafaring man, but one who had rapidly adapted to its terms and demands. There were no signs of typical pallor from the long voyage to the Mexican Coast. He had often seen deathly ill arrivals hug the earth as they left the vessels. "I'll have it sent below."

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Preparations for a voyage north were already underway and Hezeta could spare little time for the new passenger—a passenger he discovered immediately who made himself useful at any task where additional men were needed. He worked side-by-side with an amused crew who happily called him Padre Juan. No task was too mean for him and Hezeta was horrified to see him reefing sails in a gale a week out from San Blas. When his captain expressed concern about the priest, a smiling Master at Arms said Padre Juan was a born seaman.

The Viceroy of Spain's Mexican possessions had sent two ships under Hezeta's command, he in the frigate *Santiago* and Juan Francisco la Bodega y Quadra as captain of the schooner *Nuestra Sonora de Guadalupe* north to investigate possible Russian incursions on lands considered Spanish by earlier exploration. The much smaller and more nimble two-masted supply ship served as the escort for the *Santiago*. It was needed to conduct coastal mapping and reconnaissance in places where an earlier expedition had been unable to navigate during the previous mission. Most importantly, the *Sonora* was to be used on this expedition for getting close enough to the coast to allow a crew to take formal possession of territory.

To adapt the smaller vessel for the churning waves, unforgiving winds, rocky shoals, and strong currents of the northern Pacific sea, it was thoroughly refitted and careened in San Blas prior to the expedition under the watchful eyes of Bodega y Quadra. Despite the skillful modifications, it was noted that the ship was still much too cramped to comfortably accommodate the sixteen crew members packed on board for the long and arduous sojourn.

Lieutenant Bodega y Quadra, the only non-Spanish commander on the trip, was originally given the lesser position of second officer on the *Sonora* despite the fact that he outranked the others. Bodega y Quadra had all the qualifications and training necessary to be considered for a senior officer position. However, as a non-native Spaniard born in Lima, Peru, he was subject to the class prejudice common to Spain and the colonial Americas during that time. As

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such, he was passed over for promotions usually afforded native Spanish officers of equal training and skills.

The little flotilla departed on March 16, 1775, but owing to storms, delays in California ports, illness and poor sailing capabilities of the *Sonora*, it was not until mid July that the two vessels reached the latitude of present Washington coast. By mid-July, the last of the lemon juice had been served out and Commander Hezeta doubted whether the two vessels or scurvy ridden crews would be able to continue further north. He ordered both ships anchored near today's Point Grenville, Washington. On that day, a select group of men from the *Santiago*—the commander Bruno de Hezeta, Father Benito de la Sierra, Don Cristobal Revilla, the surgeon Don Juan Gonzales, and crewmen, boarded the ship's launch to conduct the formal act of possession. They successfully reached the shore and became the first non-Indians to set foot on what is now Washington State.

It could now be officially considered part of Mexico and part of the Kingdom of Spain. Hezeta named the landing spot Rada de Bucareli in honor of the Viceroy of Spain at that time, claiming Nueva Galicia (the Pacific Northwest) for Spain. As would be the unfortunate trend to erase much of the original nomenclature of this area, it has since been renamed Grenville Bay. Approximately one hour after taking possession, the small launch quickly returned to the safety of the larger ship. The act was a monumental and historic event, but later the joys of that accomplishment vanished with the repercussions of having undertaken it.

In his diary, he writes, "*At four-thirty in the morning, I landed accompanied by the Reverend Father Fray Benito de la Sierra, Don Cristobal Reville, the surgeon Don Juan Gonzales, and some armed men. I took possession at six in the morning, following the instructions strictly in every detail, giving it the name Viceroy Bucareli's roadstead. Only six Indians presented themselves to me ashore... [they] have beautiful faces. Some are fair in color, others dark and all of them plump and well built. Their clothing consists of sea otter skins with which they cover themselves from the waist up.*"

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Two days later, Hezeta ordered a party ashore from the *Sonora* to obtain needed firewood and fresh water. The Indians had been friendly to this point, but Bodega made sure that the seven men of the landing party carried muskets and pistols. Before *Sonora's* boat launched, Padre Juan approached Hezeta with a request that he be included in the shore party. The commander was wary of the Indians and did not want to place the crew's "Juanito" in harm's way, but felt guilty for not having included him in the earlier formal ceremony, and relented.

The *Santiago* moved off shore by about a mile. As the launch reached land, Quinault warriors, who in previous encounters had seemed friendly, emerged from the forest and fell on the eight men, the young Alvarez priest among them. Bodega looked on in horror through his spyglass, but could do nothing. Tribesman then paddled out and attempted to board the ship. Bodega ordered his men to fire. Several of the Quinault were killed, and the *Sonora* escaped. The two ships reconnoitered and the captains decided to continue, without retaliation. However, in commemoration of the unfortunate events that took place on that day, Bodega named the Point that we know as Point Grenville, "Punta de los Martires" (Point of the Martyrs).

Foul weather descended on the two vessels and they remained hove to for several days tugging at their fore and aft anchors. On the eighth day, blue sky and calm seas greeted the crews. Bodega sailed on though grieving for his young friend, promising to search for the cleric on the return trip.

*. . . The Crucifix - Idaho*

A few miles south of Twin Falls, the landscape gives way to cattle country, rolling hills, scrub brush and in the near distance, shimmering in rising heat, Jack watched the two-lane road blend into a cloudless sky. The vast Snake River plain runs into the Rocky Mountains to the southeast, leaving the landscape neither flat nor

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hilly. However, there was enough tilt to it to prevent rain and snow runoff from pooling and turning the land to a quagmire, but the topsoil was not deep enough to raise crops. If a man wanted to make a living farming, he'd have to work hard, half the labor ridding the scant top cover of rocks. But rain, there was enough of to support cattle, and Rikert chuckled at a modern-day cowpuncher mounted on an ATV herd reluctant stock.

Thirty-seven miles farther south, Rodgers Idaho sits like a dent in highway 93 that leads to the first gambling joint nineteen miles farther on in Jackpot, Nevada. Jack could see that sheltering trees bordered low buildings. At the edge of town, a rusty sign leaned toward the road announcing, Rodgers Unincorporated. Rodgers, the name his father left in Idaho so many years ago.

One night, with a beer in one hand and a cigarette in the other, his father had shared the family secret. "There was this neighbor gal," a pull on his beer, "who some gent got in a family way. I guess she figured she'd hooked a good provider because she told her father, 'It was the Rodgers boy.' Her kin threatened to march me to a church, but I hitched a ride to Tacoma with long haul trucker. Name on the side of that truck was Rikert Overland Transport. At the time, it seemed prudent to change my name and I've been George Andrew Rikert ever since." After a thoughtful pause he said, "Don't know what happened to that girl. She was pretty, but a bit of a shrew. Couldn't hold a candle to your mom."

Jack knew the rest of the story. His mother had lost her husband in the Big War and his distant cousin showed up in Tacoma one day. She'd been doing dishes at the house in Port Orchard, and watched through the kitchen window as he approached. She once told Jack there was a flash of light when George walked by the woodpile. That was sixty years ago. His mom was such a romantic. He had to chuckle—so was he.

A quick turn through town revealed several cars up on blocks, half-finished homes, abandoned trailers, and only a few dwellings that looked inhabited. The remaining structures, two log buildings looking more like a frontier town, Jack discovered were the church and bar. Figuring the church would be a good place to start, he went

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there first. The church was locked, but the bar wasn't so Jack stopped for a beer.

"No place to stay 'round here, mister," the barkeep replied to Jack's question about lodging.

"Anybody live here?"

"Yeah, but mostly to the west. There's a couple big cattle spreads out there." He said he lived west, as well, working a smaller cattle outfit. "It ain't big, but makes a livin', enough to pay for the kids' college up in Boise. I operate this little place for my sister. She owns the gas station at the other end of town. You wouldn't see it if you came down from Twin Forks, the road kinda turns and blocks the view. Last gas, groceries 'til you get to Jackpot down in Nevada."

"How far is that?"

"Bout twenty miles is all." He got Jack another beer. "You goin' to Nevada?"

"No, just here."

"What on earth for, mister? Like I said, there's nothing between Twin Falls and Nevada but a gas station and this bar. And I'm only open Wednesday through Saturday evening."

"What about that church?" Jack motioned toward the building that looked like the bar's twin.

"Mass every Sunday, when the priest comes, but this being Thursday you're out of luck..." The bartender screwed up his face, looked at a calendar behind the bar, "unless it's the third Thursday, yessir fella, it is!" he explained happily. Third Thursday, he explained, the women of the church meet. "My wife comes, brings me my supper. Always enough for two."

"Kind of you, but..."

"No, no, I don't have many white visitors."

"White?"

"Yeah, I get mostly Indians and Mexicans working the ranches. Sometimes an odd boss or two will come in with his men if he has some rowdy ones. Mostly ranch hands."

"When's the preacher come?"

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“Sunday like I said. But there’s a fella who thinks he wants to be the preacher who stays sometimes in the trailer behind the church. He comes ’bout dinner time every Thursday, likes my wife’s cookin’. Lives in the Falls, uh, Twin Falls, matter of fact, he’s here.”

A dusty pickup rolled into the church parking lot. Jack watched a man dressed in a plaid shirt and jeans step out and rummage around in the back, then carry a load of papers into the church.

Jack finished his beer, crossed the street to the log structure. A man at the altar, who appeared in the middle of a private mass, hadn’t heard the door open and nearly dropped his chalice when Jack said, “Afternoon, I’m Jack Rikert...”

That’s all he got out before the man greeted Jack as though he’d known him all his life. “Clifford Burns, they call me Deacon of Saint Agatha Church,” vigorously pumping his hand. Mid-forties, Jack reasoned, big—big and well built. He looked every bit a linebacker, but for a slightly sallow face. Burns chuckled, “Don’t worry Mr. Rikert,” stroking his sunken cheeks, “just a bit of bad food, not anything catchy.” He explained that serving his flock meant many invitations to dine. “Sometimes the meat, well, not everyone has refrigeration.” He smiled and gently added, “God provides and I’m feeling much better.”

Burns took stock of his visitor and figured he was a couple of inches over six feet and powerfully built. A nasty scar and penetrating green eyes gave him a sinister look until he smiled, which he did the very moment the deacon said, “God provides.”

“Impolite of me Mr. Rikert, not to welcome you to Saint Agatha Church of the Snake River Valley.”

“Thanks, Father, I...”

“Deacon, my friend. I prefer Cliff.”

“You mind if I look?” With Clifford Burns in tow, Jack walked the perimeter of the square structure taking time to study the interior of the simple chapel. It smelled of furniture polish. Hand-painted Stations of the Cross stood out from the walls in framed shadow boxes. Everywhere color had been used to create a warm welcome place. The little church reminded Jack of a country rectory that

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desperately pretended to a higher quality parishioner than probably attended. There his criticism halted, for he'd been baptized in a small inelegant parish. Here, for some reason, the pews rested against the walls and a circle of chairs occupied the center of the room.

"Ladies Family Support Group meets here tonight," Burns offered.

"Hmm." Jack ran his hand along the rough-hewn altar.

"Mexican fella lived here a couple years ago, he made it out of two logs. Hauled the things two hundred miles in his pickup."

"Man of faith, huh?"

"More than that, Mr. Rikert. He said this little parish was like an oasis, placed here by God to help man."

"Does that oasis idea include me?"

"Indeed it does. How can I help you?"

Rikert was thinking and the effort made him frown. Somehow, the simple statement made up Jack's mind. "I need help, I'm looking for someone." In clipped sentences that seemed to rattle about in the tiny sanctuary, he told the story of his search for a crucifix once worn by Clement VIX, careful not to detail its importance in the search for his identity. "Oral history tells us that a woman may have possessed the cross when she came to Idaho with her husband. I'm looking for anything, old papers, photos..."

"You came to the right man."

"You run a church, how can..." Jack was sorry the instant he uttered the words.

Burns seemed not to notice. "History professor. It was my career before this. You might have read a book or two of mine?"

"No, don't recall."

"I taught at the University of Montana," Burns added wistfully, as though that last detail might stir an appreciation of his late tenured position in Rikert's mind.

Jack made a grunting noise that might have been translated as understanding, but was in fact the inadequate sound of a man whose own concerns rendered him incapable of reacting properly to the revelation that the deacon may be wishing he'd stayed at school.

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There were so many misplaced souls wishing that they were somewhere else and Jack hadn't time for compassion. His hardness faded somewhat when the deacon looked hopeful.

"The husband's name was Rodgers."

"Well, this little town was founded by a banker named Thomas Rodgers, in the early nineteen hundreds. He might be a kin." Rikert did not respond. Burns explained he was intrigued by Jack's search, but not for reasons he said his superior would deem worthy. In truth, he admitted Jack's search was more appealing than writing an agenda for the next Family support Group. "When I heard the call to ministry, I left my position at the University of Montana. I had hoped for an appointment to the Diocesan Offices and perhaps in the future, the Vatican, but that was not to be." He told Jack that the bishop had admonished him when he had asked for a transfer. Any service, his superior intoned, was to be embraced just as Jesus welcomed his path to the cross. "That was seven years ago and I have labored on in faith, but I gratefully welcomed this present diversion. Perhaps if you told me more." The deacon stepped back, momentarily put off by his visitor's scowl.

"Woman was called Francis."

Burns suddenly slapped a fist in his palm, confessing to his inner thought, "I'm an idiot, Rikert! Thinking but of myself. There are photos of a woman, an Indian woman," pointing at double doors behind the altar, "the people, I'm told, rarely called her Francis, more often, simply Teacher."

"What's in there?" Jack demanded, instantly sorry for his manner.

"Just the office and a storage room," the Deacon answered, seemingly unaffected by Jack's intensity, "but I remember seeing pictures. Let's look." He felt around, then fished a key from a hook on the altar, "Always forgetting where the key is." He opened the first door to a tiny, damp warren that smelled of pipe tobacco. Cassock and vestments hung on pegs alongside altar paraments.

"It's a wonder they're not moldy," Jack observed.

"Rained like the very devil last week. I run a fan to fight the dampness. It's a small parish and everybody does a little bit. One of

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the old Indian ladies takes care of the priest's robes and vestments. She hangs them out before every mass."

"How 'bout there?" Jack motioned to another door. "We see the other room?"

"Sure. Full of old church stuff, tho'." The door swung open and a box of paper plates and cups disgorged its contents on the floor. "Up on top," Burns said excitedly. A stack of photogravure prints slid to the floor between them.

"The Teacher," Burns said reverently, his voice barely audible.

"What's that?"

Burns didn't answer, just gathered several yellowed photos and arranged them against the communion rail.

"What is it man, tell me!"

"This is your Francis, Mister Rikert, The Teacher."

Jack stared at the figure. Dressed in a high-collar dress and wearing a broad straw hat, Francis did not look much like an Indian. If one discounted the dark eyes, she could have been one of any number of Nineteenth Century women who traveled to the Oregon Territory to teach the heathen peoples. Round her neck hung a crucifix. One hand crossed her breast to touch the cross. The face was unreadable yet her seeming caress of the icon softened the Curtis photo. Edward S. Curtis whose photographs of Native Americans preserved a glimpse of their culture had brought Francis to life. "My great grandmother," Jack whispered.

"Great grandmother?"

Jack ignored the question to pose one of his own. "What can you tell me about her, Cliff? Don't shake your head, tell me!"

"The Shoshone, they revered her."

"Tell me how to find them."

"I can take you to them."

"It's a personal matter, but thanks."

"What are you after?" Burns asked.

"That," Jack pointed to the cross in the photo.

"The Pope's crucifix?"

"Yes."

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The Deacon stared at the photo, then faced Jack. “Let me join you,” he pleaded. “Rikert, I’m a Jesuit, a simple Deacon, but it’s important to me. You can’t know what it would mean to view the crucifix of the Pope who suppressed the Jesuit Order in 1744.”

“Deacon, this isn’t a religious quest...”

“Mr. Rikert!”

“Alright,” Jack said. “I’ll tell you what I know and let you decide, but only if you can round up something to drink that’s not consecrated.”

“We don’t bless our whiskey in Southern Idaho.”

After rustling about in a cupboard, Burns splashed Jamison’s in two chipped coffee cups. “This do?”

“Yep.” Jack emptied his in two gulps and pushed the cup to Burns, who filled it and looked a question at him.

“Okay, Deacon. About the time the founding fathers were declaring their independence from England, a Spanish priest gave a crucifix to a Quinault Indian Boy. Oral history tells us...you have a problem with oral history?”

“Ever read the Apocrypha, Mr. Rikert?”

For an hour, Jack spoke to a rapt Clifford Burns, the dialogue broken only when the deacon recharged Jack’s drink and once for a question.

“Do we really know that the man you call So’qwa possessed a priest’s cross?”

Jack had warmed to the tale and a few belts of whiskey lowered his guard and set him talking more than he would consider circumspect. He repeated from memory: *“Klolwalle’s gift to his brother-in-law was made of white man’s iron, two pieces, one slightly shorter and joined near the top of the longer one. A tiny man with outstretched arms was attached to one side of the long piece. He appeared dead.”* He added that an anthropologist friend, he couldn’t bring himself to say former wife, was skeptical of the information, but that he believed its source.

“That’s sufficient for me. There are some people I want you to meet, old people who know about The Teacher.”

“The Shoshone?”

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“Yes, but let me join you to tell them you are an honorable man.”

“You deduced that while I drank half your Jamison’s?”

“Call it discernment, Jack.”

• • •

**A**t the first sign of danger, Padre Alvarez had frozen in his place, but when the natives hacked their way toward him, he slipped over the side and swam to deep water. He ducked from under his cassock and miraculously eluded the warriors who stabbed at the floating garment. When he surfaced off shore, he was a dozen boat lengths from the scene. Fearing his calls for help would bring certain death from the angry Indians; the Padre half floated and half swam along the shoreline to a clutch of rocks a quarter mile from the carnage. After hours clinging to the rocks he ventured from his hiding place, retrieved his pierced garment and crept into thick undergrowth boarding the shore, determined to fashion some means to signal the ships.

A boy, too young to participate in the ambush, had watched from a place high above the massacre. The warriors’ lust for killing had blinded them to one man’s escape. From his vantage point, the boy had followed the clever white man’s journey to the rocks and back to the shore. It was at that moment the child committed himself to save the white man. He was certainly an enemy, but the boy repelled by the brutality of the killing, had hoped the man escaped.

The Quinault youth heard the white man thrashing through the underbrush and aimed his own noiseless approach to intercept him. The boy stepped from the trees and faced the man. The instant he saw the boy, the man knelt, pointed a shiny thing toward the sky and uttered words the Indian did not understand. He instinctively backed away fearing he had misjudged the white man, but when their eyes locked, there was no anger in the stranger’s eyes. The man took his

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extended hand and together they wound their way up a bluff to a child's secret place.

So began the story of man and boy which became legendary (thanks to highly colored accounts retold by the crews of both vessels during later voyages) throughout the Spanish Navy. The pair spent a week hidden in a cleft of rocks on the coast. It was necessary for them to keep close to their lair, for fear of Quinault warriors searching for survivors of their ambush, and now a missing child—the village leader's son. It was necessary, as well, for the unlikely comrades to carefully venture out periodically to sight either ship beating about just beyond spires of rock off shore. The one consolation was in the supply of edible roots and berries the child procured each day. Alvarez learned from the boy to lap dew from leaves and chew vegetation to extract precious moisture.

A dwindling supply of water brought the Spanish vessels back. As the *Santiago* coasted close in to occupy the attention of Quinault warriors, the shallower draft *Sonora* clawed toward shore and launched an armed party to fill water casks in a stream.

It was a dangerous enterprise, and this landing revealed the danger to the two observers high above the beach, for while the schooner's launches made for shore, a Quinault canoe came gliding around a point of land a half mile from where the Spanish intended to land. Alvarez broke from cover and slid down the bluff waving his arms at the approaching boats. As he ran toward the water's edge, he heard shouted warnings from the crew. The sight of the little Indian boy running after him excited their worst apprehensions. They were amazed when Alvarez hiked the child on his shoulders, scarcely taking time to consider the incongruity of the scene—a white man carrying the child of an enemy. He waded to the first launch, and alerted the crew to turn about.

“The enemy is heading for this very spot,” he said breathlessly.

The day after his rescue, Juan Alvarez waited for what was a painful hour as Commander Hezeta and Lieutenant Quadra y Bodega discussed the matter of the Quinault child. Up and down, up

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and down they paced the quarterdeck in a space allotted the commander for his usual solitary daily walks. Alvarez absently followed their path, on the one side limited by the slides of the quarterdeck carronades, on the other by the rows of ringbolts in the deck for the attachment of the carronade trains tackles, such that the two captains maneuvered in a space four feet wide and nineteen feet long. He realized he had been counting their steps when they stopped. Quadra faced his commander forcefully making a point by striking the palm of one hand with the fist of the other. Hezeta nodded, looked out to sea and, finally, motioned the nervous Alvarez to approach.

“I must admit, Priest you have made this voyage something of a bother, kidnapping a child...”

“Sir, kidnapping is hardly...”

“I pull your cassock, Juanito,” Hezeta smiled broadly. He liked the priest, enjoyed their evening talks and had come to appreciate the passion of the man’s faith. “We have of necessity decided to keep the child. It is unsafe for us to approach shore and casting him adrift is unthinkable. So, for the time required to continue north and return, you will father the boy.”

The priest opened his mouth to protest, then uttered the only words open to him. “Yes Sir.”

Ecclesiastical training did not provide for instructions on parenting a child, in particular one with whom the surrogate parent Father Alvarez could not communicate, save primitive gestures for, “come to one place or go to another.” Good fortune smiled upon the frustrated priest in the form of a seaman who had mastered the language of coastal traders, the Chinook jargon—a manner of communicating that still exists in the twenty-first century. With a part-time translator, Alvarez and the boy, he had named Niño Jesus, for the latter’s role in saving him, could now learn about each other. The child amazed the priest by readily adapting to his new surroundings and more amazing still, grasping the concept of the Spaniard’s “man above.”

### *The Crucifix*

“Does your Man Above live on the piece of iron you wear?” the child prodded the priest.

They had covered the issue, as many times as the boy ran his chubby fingers over the crucifix, and despite some measure of labor to convince the child the figure was a depiction of the crucified Lord, Niño Jesus remained skeptical. Still, Alvarez was pleased that the child understood the meaning of the figure no matter where his untutored mind thought God Incarnate resided. In their time together the boy had shown himself a good student, Alvarez suspected, was due entirely to the fascination with the crucifix. For the priest, the need for a translator was now less. With signs and a made up language of sorts, Niño Jesus could participate in daily mass with the crew, much to the delight of Alvarez.

When the Spaniards next approached the site of the ambush, two months earlier, the ship’s captain ordered that Niño Jesus must be returned to his people. Padre Alvarez went ashore to send his small friend home. In the moment before the launch returned to the *Santiago*, the child put his arms around the priest’s waist.

*“Yo...yo... quiero, Padre.”*

Alvarez embraced the child. Pope Clement’s words, rushed into his head, “You will discern the moment when it is to be done,” He removed his crucifix, kissed it and hung the chain around the boy’s neck. It was an act of great sacrifice, for the Pope himself had blessed the crucifix. Yet it was an act of love, because he cherished the child. And in that instant, he realized that enemies of the church would never locate the vital code. He had freed the church from the likely stain of heretical doctrine. However, there was little time for self-congratulation. An event of great personal importance was taking place. Niño Jesus looked up with sad, tear-filled eyes, his hand tight on the crucifix, then it was over and the boy ran to the woods.

Alvarez would later write in his journal, *“At dark, on Wednesday the 20<sup>th</sup> (of September 1775), there was a very thick fog so that at a short distance nothing could be seen. While a league from land we heard some people’s voices and waited until we heard them no more. We made out the land very well after that and I landed with*

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*the Niño Jesus to return him to his people. He was my first conversion to Christ among the natives. So moved I am by his devotion to Our Lord and me his teacher I presented him a crucifix, following the instructions strictly in every detail the wishes of His Holiness, Pope Clement XIV.”*

In years of trading with the northwestern coastal villages, Taquam of the Puyallup seldom encountered anyone on the lonely interior trails. This day, however, he met a Quinault child with an incredible tale. The child told Taquam he had met a shaman who spoke a different tongue and wore a long black robe. He had stayed on the stranger’s canoe for many days where he learned to speak to a tiny figure on an iron stick. Taquam found him wandering alone, miles from his home, yet seemingly unafraid for the child insisted, “The white man’s shaman lives on this iron stick, and will protect me.” He proudly held a crucifix for the Puyallup to see.

To the man who returned his son to safety, the village leader pledged the found child to the first-born daughter of the Puyallup trader. To Taquam, it meant that return of this precious treasure guaranteed a far more precious bond between the two peoples and a most fortunate marriage into a rich and powerful family for his daughter Graceful Fawn.

The Quinault hearing the boy’s story knew immediately that the child spoke of Klolwalle, the spirit that roamed the forest and allowed only those in impending danger to glimpse him. His family deemed it appropriate, therefore to give the fortunate child the name of his guardian spirit—Klolwalle, but his parents named him before the elders of the village agreed with the boy’s vision.

Klolwalle’s proud father had the boy tell his story to the old men of the village. They seemed skeptical and demanded the tale be spoken a second time. Their intent was obvious. Give the child time to admit he had been lost and saw no one but the Puyallup man. Now, as the apparent opinions of the elders circulated, the boy suffered ridicule for making up stories of white men and large boats to hide the fact he had simply gotten lost.

### *The Crucifix*

Worse still, the boy insisted on repeating what the white shaman had told him. His was a child's vocabulary, but it was clear what he recited. Villagers blanched when they heard the boy tell his listeners that the people studied the good things around them but failed to recognize the one who made them. "Instead," he spoke earnestly, "they suppose that the spirits who rule the earth are wind, or fire, or rushing water, or the circling stars, or the bodies in the sky." Foolish, he said, for they should have realized that these things have a master who is greater than all of them for he created them. Some admired the childlike fervor, but as many quailed in fear of their own Man Above when Klolwalle continued saying such dangerous things. Most foolish of all, he contended, were the carvers of wood objects or persons who made things of clay, smeared them with different colors and prayed to them.

"They are not ashamed," the boy, contended, "to ask the lifeless things for assistance with their marriage, or their children, or their possessions. It is weak, but they pray to it for health. It is dead, but they pray to it for life. It cannot walk, but they pray to it for a safe journey." Soon, it seemed that the only person in the village who cared to hear him speak was the trader, and he was preparing to return to his own people.

The Puyallup man found Klolwalle and took him to a place away from knowing smiles of adults and taunts of children. Taquam did not try to grasp the substance of the white's Man Above, but of the matter he advised, "What you have been shown is beyond human power to understand. If the white man's God is powerful then you should be humble so that you please him." He recalled such a discussion with his own son, So'qwa, when the boy sought his guiding spirit. "Above all," Taquam told the unhappy child, "many people have been misled by their own opinions over things they did not understand." Such wrong ideas could warp judgments and render a person stubborn. "Stubbornness will get you into trouble at the end and you will be burdened down with those troubles."

Of Klolwalle's meeting with the white man, he told the child, "Those who did not believe you are but stones in your path, to be turned one by one. Do not try to move the mountain, but turn each

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stone that makes the mountain.” Then he put his hand on Klolwalle’s shoulder. “Say always the truth of your ordeal. Be patient, for it may take many tellings before listeners believe.” With that, he departed.

Klolwalle watched him leave and followed along at a distance until Taquam stopped. Bushing back tears, he pleaded, “I will be your son.” His own father had scoffed at the details of his adventure.

Taquam’s voice was gentle, but no less a command. “The way of your life is with the people of the Quinault. Remember what I have told you about stubbornness. Learn to bend with the cold winds of others’ doubts. One day, you will need not bend.” The Puyallup adjusted his pack, turned and took up an easy lope, his stride lengthening the distance between them until he disappeared from Klolwalle’s view.

Taquam’s words did not lessen the sting of taunting village children, but satisfied Klolwalle that perhaps one day all doubts would be erased from his peoples’ minds. The child tried, with little success, to share what he had learned about the powerful white spirit, but the shaman warned that talking to the iron sticks would surely kill anyone who listened. He retreated alone to the deep forest where he repeated the strange rituals learned on the white man’s canoe.

In this way, Klolwalle lived each day as it came, accepting what the spirits of trees, sky, and water meted out to him. Having no village of people with whom to interact, he spent considerable time in contemplation. Thus, for the present, the lonely boy amused himself walking in the woods and over the mountain trails. He examined trees, plants, and flowers. This kind of physical effort in the outdoors prepared him for a night of sound sleep. His observations of the day filled his mind with pleasant ideas and dreams. More and more he desired to know how the trees, plants, flowers, and berries grew. Seemingly, they grew wild without much help from the Indians. He wondered why some species were good to eat, while others contained poisonous juices.

### *The Crucifix*

These thoughts came back to him many times, as he retreated to his lodge at night. One thought returned nightly. He puzzled over the strange hold the little man on the iron had on the white warriors and he secretly wished for a dream that would reveal to the minds of others, the truth in his words.

As quickly as he made the wish, he quit thinking of the future, and looked out at the narrow islands just off shore. As he did most days since returning home, Klolwalle had ascended a mound of earth near the edge of a prominent bluff to watch the sun dip into the great water. He squinted at the nearest island—the one he often climbed, when the ocean was calm. Village boys loaded up in large, sturdy canoes and raced for the island. The bravest, he among them, would leap from the moving canoe and compete to reach the highest point.

Now in his ninth year, Klolwalle was just over five feet tall, but lean and agile, monthly adding muscle to his one hundred ten pound frame. His black hair hung straight to his shoulders. Most of the time, he dressed in little more than a cedar cape or went naked. On a spring afternoon, as was his habit, he sat alone, idly fingering the crucifix and said to a small deer warily grazing nearby, "The white men have a powerful spirit who guides them. I will ask this spirit to make my father hear the truth of my words." For the boy Klolwalle to seek redress from an alien spirit was of great significance, for the religion of the Northwest Native Americans resided with nature. For them, animals were intelligent, willful beings inextricably intertwined with humans. The boy studied the priest's cross. He always wore it now, fearful someone would steal the only proof he had of meeting with the white men. It hung around his neck and Klolwalle treasured the gift, and increasingly came to consider the iron sticks his talisman.

~1790~

## **A Matter of Honor**

*“Our fathers gave us many laws . . . that it was a disgrace to tell a lie: that we should speak only the truth.”*

Chief Joseph, Nez Perce

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Quinault Village

War canoes sailed off shore. And the Quinault seethed. In late summer of 1790, the Quinault Indians met in council and decided it was humiliating to exist any longer under the threat of raids from the northern tribes. It was a situation that required a remedy, for it impeded the Quinault in many ways. Not only was it a serious disadvantage for the peoples' safety, the Quinault went hungry when they were not permitted to supplement their food from the ocean. Even moving to their summer camps distressed them, for the Tsimshian, Haida and in particular, the Makah, appeared far too often in their huge war canoes. However, a thrill went through the village, when a dishonored warrior, called Walks With Bears announced, "I have made many mistakes and have little reason to live. We must raid the tribes to the north to show them we are brave. And when we do, I will stake myself on the sand and die fighting any warrior who would step on our shore."

The Quinault respected Walks With Bear's right to sacrifice himself for his people, and all agreed that he merited the privilege. Therefore, when the raiding party assembled, Walks with Bears assumed a place of honor and took a public oath. "Four days from now, the Quinault will attack the northern tribes and I will stake myself out until they return."

Meanwhile war canoes sailed off shore.

Not all listeners agreed. In council, there was a man for whom the people had the highest regard, earned under extraordinary circumstances—defeat of raiders on a Quinault summer camp. He was not Quinault. Indeed, he was the son of a Puyallup chief, kidnapped by Haida raiders, from his river home, one hundred miles to the southeast. Tortured and scarred by a youthful Haida warrior, he had managed to elude his captors by leaping from a cliff into the ocean. Careful to thank "mother of the waters" for sparing him, So'qwa had returned to stand in the surf and unwittingly created a legend. For at that precise moment, a party of Quinault hunters

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broke through dense undergrowth to witness a spirit emerge from the ocean.

Indeed, it was Walk With Bears, who had investigated the hunters' claims and concocted the spirit myth, a spirit with whom he often communicated. His revelations had gained the wily man much respect and prominence among the people, regard that he treasured above honesty.

"The Spirit" had avoided the Quinault for the six years he lived alone on the rugged Pacific coast until revealing himself in a rescue of his sister who had married into the Quinault village.

On the eve of their meeting, the brother-in-law So'qwa had never seen, gave him a gift of great personal value. "It is proper," Klolwalle said, "that Quinault men should marry in an orderly way and always give presents to the brothers of our brides. This is a suitable gift for such an occasion."

So'qwa had marveled at the gift made of white man's iron. There were two pieces, one slightly shorter and joined near the top of the longer one. The whole thing attached to a long iron necklace of beads. He stroked its surface and asked about the tiny figure of a man attached to one side, his arms outstretched. He appeared like a warrior staked out in front of an enemy.

"Is this a man?" So'qwa touched the figure.

"Yes," Klolwalle answered. "The whites' shaman said he was their Man Above."

"White men have shaman?"

"He is named Francis Priest and he used the crossed iron to talk to his Man Above."

"You saw him do this?" the thought filled So'qwa with wonder.

"Yes, many times, and he taught me how to talk to the little man on the iron sticks."

"You talked to their Man Above?" the thought was incredulous.

"Yes, I joined the whites. That is why Francis Priest gave me the iron sticks. And that little man," pointing to the crucified Jesus, "is surely a powerful spirit because all the whites got on their knees to honor him, even the warriors."

*The Crucifix*

“Honor him for what?” So’qwa asked skeptically.

“It is said that he offered himself to take away all the white man’s bad deeds.” Klolwalle spoke of the people’s foolish belief in carved idols and steadfast fear of gods who controlled the stars, and storm and sea and animals of the forest. So’qwa asked no more, because he found the story unsettling, for he knew that each man had to reconcile his own faults. Those words spoken at their first meeting, continued to haunt him.

So’qwa had another opinion of the Quinault plan that he shared with his brother-in-law. “I’m inspired by Walks With Bear’s bravery, but the raiders can come from the sea, while we prepare to fight on land.” He saw in the increased sightings of northern war canoes, an omen, that the raiders planned revenge for the defeat that they had recently suffered when they attacked the Quinault summer camp. Klolwalle argued for a raid to the north and So’qwa reluctantly agreed to join his friend.

That night, they set forth and crossing into Quileute territory, began to recruit men from friendly villages. It was a remarkable accomplishment, since neither tribe could speak the other’s language. In fact, each of the Quileute villages with whom the Quinault first came into contact, could speak only its own dialect, so spread out they were. Not only could the Quinault not speak the language of their enemies, they could not fully understand their allies.

So’qwa’s fine ear for dialect and sign language, which depended on generalized ideas, enabled the allies to communicate. Indeed, two men from tribes separated by the coastal mountain range could meet on a prairie and talk intelligently in signs. There was only one reply to their request for assistance.

“We will send our warriors with you.”

It was in this way that Klolwalle and So’qwa recruited men to their little army as it wound its way one hundred miles north to battle.

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Now sixty strong, they entered the territory of the Makah. The Makah, hearing rumors of the enemy's approach, sent out young men as scouts. Word reached the Quinault and their allies that the Makah were aware of their coming and might seek help from the Tsimshian and Haida. This was dreaded news indeed, for the Haida and Tsimshian themselves were formidable adversaries.

The battle never happened, the feared northern warriors did not materialize, nor did the attacking force ever see the fortified houses of the Makah. There had been no talk of retreat, but the Makah chief said, "If we allow them to invade our land, they might ransack our villages and take our women. It is said, a powerful spirit resides among them."

A deputation from the Makah met them at the banks of a huge lake and parlayed. The two sides agreed to share hunting and fishing territory as a resolution to their differences.

So it was that a victorious, but strangely quiet body of men turned south. They had gained concessions, but it was a long three-week trek with nothing to show for the effort. For So'qwa, however, victory without blood was the greatest victory.

Happily, the mood improved at each Quileute village as families met their returning warriors with gifts and food. The victors would return home with nearly as much plunder had they engaged and defeated the Makah in open battle.

At nearly the same time, as the parlay between the allies and Makah was taking place, a prominent chief of the Haida had sent a messenger to the Makah, their allies, and he said in sign language, "Quinault are killing our warriors. We will make war on them and the Puyallup devil who shares their region. We seek your help."

There could be but one reply to this request since the Quinault were at that moment humiliating them, and the Makah said, "We will give you safe places for your war canoes." That fell short of offering men to fight because they believed the Quinault and their allies possessed a great band of warriors strengthened by a powerful spirit who at any moment might decide to destroy their villages.

*The Crucifix*

The Haida frustrated by a reluctant ally, decided to attack the Quinault alone, from the sea, which might have succeeded but for an old man staked out on the beach at the very point they landed. The alert sounded, a storm of well-aimed arrows broke the attack driving the raiders and their few captives back to sea. On one thing the disappointed warriors agreed, many bows launched arrows against them.

Unaware of the depredations visited upon their village, spirits were high among the returning men. Boys waiting along the trail for fathers and brothers shared a tale that sobered the jubilant warriors. In their absence, the Haida had struck. Women and children had been taken, among them Graceful Fawn. More would have been lost, but for the efforts of Tall Woman, his wife, who led frightened survivors into the forest, and loosed a barrage of accurately placed arrows that discouraged any pursuit.

Here was Tall Woman, sold into slavery by enemies of her people. The Arapaho he had rescued in the sixth year of his solitary existence. "They came in big canoes," she told him. "Fawn is gone, but her child is safe."

So'qwa studied his wife, who was near tears, sensing she blamed herself. "You were very brave..."

"But Fawn..." She wormed into his arms.

"You chased the raiders away." So'qwa held the sobbing Tall Woman. "You saved the village."

She moaned, "It was not me, it was Walks with Bears."

So'qwa was skeptical. He was convinced of her bravery, for she had joined him in thwarting an attack on a Quinault summer encampment the day he had reunited with his sister. Women and children trapped on the open beach ran toward the shelter of rocks, Fawn among them. Three warriors concentrated on Fawn and threatened to cut her off.

So'qwa had leaped screaming from the water, smashing the startled face of the first warrior and clubbing the second senseless. An arrow from Tall Woman's bow felled the third warrior. In a flash of recognition, Fawn had looked into the eyes of her brother

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and he into hers. "I live, little sister!" He embraced her, not believing his own eyes and good fortune at reuniting with her.

What followed was unbelievable to those who watched, and it broke the attack. Tall Woman dashed forward and touched a startled warrior. She had counted coup by touching an enemy in battle. Horrified onlookers saw her jerk his helmet aside and deftly slice off a patch of hair and scalp.

So'qwa had mumbled to Fawn, "That is my mate."

As the story of the Haida attack tumbled from Tall Woman's mouth, it became clear that Walks with Bears, staked out on the beach, had given the first warning. When the raiders splashed ashore, escaping women described hearing the tethered man curse the Haida and saw him thrust a spear toward the approaching men. Fawn had remained with the old man.

Walks With Bears, inexperienced at battle, in this moment of triumph, forgot to brace his knees and feet, and even more important he let go of the spear. The Haida swarmed over him and cast his headless body into the sea. It was in these tragic moments, as disgraced a figure Walks With Bears had been in life, the Quinault changed their minds and called him a hero.

In a hundred ways, the man had deluded himself. He made up the story that gave him his treasured name, Walks With Bears. His final act gave him the regard he had always coveted, fame. Here was a shaman, shaking the stick he claimed held magic powers, whispering to various important men that, because the brave man's headless body was in the sea, Walks With Bears would wander ever after in pain, for he could not enter the Quinault land of the dead. Only the head of a Haida warrior, he declared, would suffice to ease the fallen hero's pain.

Klolwalle did not dispute the old man's bravery, but had other more important concerns. His wife was a captive of the Haida. It was a difficult time for the young husband. He promised he would lead men to rescue the captives, but his father said that was unwise.

"The Haida live far to the north on islands protected on all sides by the sea and mountains. No force could approach their villages

*The Crucifix*

unseen.” It was by force of personality that the village leader convinced the unhappy people that a rescue had little hope of success.

Klolwalle grieved for his wife was lost. No one had ever returned from the islands of the Haida. The distraught young husband began his mourning with memories of their first meeting.

Klolwalle and Fawn made great fun playfully teasing each other about their first meeting. “I peeked out and saw you. I thought you were a slave,” Fawn recalled.

“I wasn’t a slave until I married,” he retorted.

“And I thought your master was very important because you were arrogant, like my brother.”

“Arrogant?”

“Yes, I asked simple questions...”

Klolwalle recalled her words.

“Who is the visitor to our village? Where does he come from? And what does he want?”

Startled Klolwalle had stammered, “I think that they. . .”

“Speak up!” she’d demanded. Then, softening her tone. “Please do not think me angry with you, I only want to know what all the excitement is about.”

“The visitor is Quinault chief,” he had responded.

“Why is the Quinault man here?”

“He brought his son to make a proposal of marriage to the leader of this village.”

“Marriage?”

“Yes, marriage, to the eldest daughter of this house. Would that be your sister?” The pretty girl had disappeared leaving a bewildered Klolwalle.

When the moment to meet his bride came, Klolwalle remembered being as much concerned with his empty stomach. The wait was maddening and the aroma of a meal being prepared had given way to daydreaming about platters of greasy salmon when an alarming growl from his stomach brought a reproving look from his father. At that moment, Fawn appeared. Startled, Klolwalle spoke

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without giving thought to his words. "You!" he blurted. "All the time, it was you!"

"Do you know this girl?" his father demanded. Klolwalle, so pleased with his good fortune, did not at first reply to his father's query.

When Fawn's father spoke, "Graceful Fawn, this boy, do you know him?" Klolwalle came to his senses for he knew liaisons between couples were never tolerated, especially among upper classes. He was ready for his father's repeated query.

"Do you know this girl?" This was serious because any hint of impropriety could break the agreement. No matter how bound an honorable man was to his pledge, Klolwalle knew his father would cancel the marriage.

"Yes, father," he had lied, but it proved not a falsehood for which he felt any need for guilt. "In a dream, I saw her or one so much like her that she is familiar."

But that was behind him and his young wife was gone.

With remarkable instinct, So'qwa devised a plan that did not require attack, "I will use the cunning of the hero Walks With Bears." He did not favor the ways of the man, but used his name to gain support from the Quinault. He had as great a reason as Klolwalle for rescuing Fawn. She was the family he had lost when the Haida captured him.

Speaking privately to his brother-in-law he promised, "I will return my sister to you."

So'qwa's plan was simple; he would pose as a trader from the south offering arrows with stout shafts and flintheads keen enough to pierce any armor. Once there, he hoped to buy the Quinault captives. He was certain the Haida would consider superior arms more advantageous than a few Quinault women and children. The Council met briefly before agreeing to the plan.

When Tall Woman learned of the plan, she threw a perfect fit because So'qwa refused to let her go, saying he would not put his wife in danger.

*The Crucifix*

“I am more than just a wife, but you are blind!” She angrily fled to the forest, her words hanging in the air. So’qwa was left to ponder the reasons for her odd behavior. True, she had joined him in thwarting a raid on the Quinault summer encampment, but this would be different, more dangerous, he decided.

A week later, in the long darkness before dawn, So’qwa pushed off from shore assuring his brother-in-law that he wore the white man’s charm to ward off unknown spirits he might encounter. Klolwalle believed the iron sticks held great power, and noted with irony, the moment So’qwa possessed them; the Quinault changed their minds and attributed all manner of mystic strength to the iron.

So’qwa had expected Tall Woman to see him off, but she did not. Two nights before, she had asked again, “Am I coming with you?” When So’qwa told her no, she had stomped out of the house. She would miss him, he thought.

Not long after dawn, on that first day, the Quinault accompanying him several miles up the coast waved their encouragement and turned back to shore. It would take him two days to reach a point on the large island (Vancouver Island) where he would camp, before following a map Klolwalle’s father had drawn of the Haida Gwaii Islands. So’qwa settled into a steady rhythm heading north, unaware he was a day and a half behind his wife’s well-provisioned canoe heading in the same direction.

Although he was entirely lost in his thoughts, his instincts were quite alert. His mind took in the shadowy forms of the jagged offshore islands, the first hint of color in an Eastern sky and the feel of breeze on his cheek. It was a following wind, which would lend help going north.

He had paddled hard all morning and into early evening before making camp at the last point of land on the edge of an expanse of water (named for Greek captain Juan de Fuca), the dark form of the large northern island land just visible in the distance. In one corner of his consciousness, he recalled nearly swamping on that broad stretch of water and the desperate ride on towering waves that had

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taken him and his Haida captors out to sea and down the coast so many years ago.

The next morning, So'qwa started out over calm waters and held his course steadily towards the mound of land in the distance. In the near distance, the dark shape of a whale broke the surface, blew a plume of white as it emptied its lungs. So'qwa respected the whale and thanked Man Above for sending the great fish to protect him on his quest. After a few hours, he eased himself out of his cramped position and stared at the shore. He could see white water stretching out along what he guessed would be a rocky shoreline. As time went on, he saw more breakers at a place where each incoming wave broke straight up a vertical wall of rock. His belief that he had found the exact place described by Klolwalle's father buoyed his spirits. On either side of the shower of white foam was a stretch of blue. An offshore island and smooth beach beyond told him he had made a perfect landfall. So'qwa turned slightly north, avoided the roiling water around the island, and sent his canoe to a soft landing in coarse gray sand on the isolated shore. He manhandled his canoe to rest in storm debris and covered it with boughs he stripped from an uprooted cedar. Next So'qwa erased any sign of his having been on the beach and settled into a makeshift camp to rest.

It was then it occurred to him that he had made no plan. He chided himself for the rash act of departing with little thought how he was going to accomplish what he had promised Klolwalle and himself—rescue Fawn. Furthermore, there was the niggling hurt that had plagued him since before he departed. Tall Woman had not spoken to him after he told her she could not accompany him and worse, she had not joined the others in wishing him safe journey.

By now, he was used to her behavior when she did not get her way. She would pout and stamp her feet or disappear for days until So'qwa relented or she sensed her defiance was useless. He saw little mystery in her being traded so often as a slave and wondered how her family had coped with such behavior. Despite all of that, he thought she would have seen him off.

It was not as though he needed her approval, but felt somehow detached and strangely alone when she was not around. These were

### *The Crucifix*

not altogether understood feelings for him and he shrugged off such concerns and attempted to devise a scheme to bring his sister away from the Haida.

On his third day as he ate a cold meal, several men suddenly appeared. They did not seem hostile, but took his weapons and bound his hands and feet. After some nervous signs and trade language, the strangers released So'qwa and shared their larder with him. He ruefully noted, the men kept his weapons and made a point of not leaving him alone. Bound again that night, he spent sleepless hours pondering his fate. That issue resolved itself the following morning when So'qwa faced the leader of the band of strangers. Recognition was unmistakable—the warrior who had taken him captive at Puyallup village nearly seven years before. Memory of his capture and torture at the hands of Haida swept over him. He experienced a feeling of dread and involuntarily ran his fingers over the dimpled scars on his cheeks.

Satisfied that So'qwa was the green-eyed Puyallup, the Haida warrior took him aside and asked how he had survived the fall from the bluff, then nodded understanding when So'qwa gave credit to Man Above and the spirit of the sea. This time, So'qwa was securely tied and watched day and night until they reached Haida Gwaii.

### *Haida Gwaii*

So'qwa's journey had started well enough. However, all that had now changed. He was lying face down in a canoe, his arms tied behind him. He did not know how long he had been in that position, but when he felt a hand jerking his hair, and a voice calling to him, he was annoyed that his rest was disturbed. So'qwa opened his eyes and watched his breath rise. He smelled the sea and peered in that direction, but could see little more than rocky shapes sticking out the water, their upper parts shrouded in mist. So'qwa was midway up the dagger shaped archipelago of Haida Gwaii comprised of some one hundred-fifty islands of glaciers, snow-topped mountains, valleys, deep riverbeds, stone-littered beaches, and fjords that

*George Rogerson*

plunge into the sea. The whole of it teeters on the fringe of Canada's continental shelf, about sixty miles west of Canada's British Columbia Coast.

"Get up, Scannah-gan-nuncus wants you," a small voice squeaked.

With a huge effort, So'qwa raised himself to sit back to the canoe thwart and glowered at the child grasping his hair. People passed him in the half-light, but for some reason, did not look at him. "What do you want?"

"Scannah-gan-nuncus sends for you." The boy untied him and stamped impatiently in the water.

"Tell him to come and get me." While sitting in the canoe, So'qwa checked his body, taking an inventory of his injuries. Aside from a number of scrapes and bruises, he could detect no broken bones. He sensed a tender spot on his head, which explained the throbbing between his eyes.

"He has," the boy said, wide-eyed at the response. "I am here to get you."

"Help me up little one," So'qwa ordered. The startled boy climbed in the canoe and put his shoulder under So'qwa's armpit and hoisted him to his feet, then fastened a strap around So'qwa's neck, and jerked him toward the village like a dog.

They walked at his stiff-legged pace toward the largest house in the center of the village, its totem framed against gray-green hills. So'qwa's attempt to rescue Fawn had so quickly unraveled that he barely had time to revisit his folly.

The smell of cooking rode the smoke from the nearby village. He did not have time to think of his empty stomach before the boy dragged him toward a large house. So'qwa's keeper boasted that he belonged to the village leader's moiety. "Scannah-gan-nuncus leads the Raven clan. You are going to his house, the one in front of you called, "Rain-Sounds-Against-It-As-It-Passes-Over." A warrior appeared and tugged So'qwa past an intricately carved totem pole, through the door, and pushed him down. Lying on the floor So'qwa studied the hearth. It occupied the center of the room, directly under

*The Crucifix*

a smoke hole, which had a plank flap that moved with ropes to control the draft for the fire.

Tlahit, The Teacher, once told him that the smoke hole had mythical significance among the Haida, as it was the opening through which souls entered and left the house at birth and death, following the pathway of smoke uniting this world to the upper world and the Milky Way, which was the pathway of souls in the sky. The smoke hole was the opening through which the trickster-hero Raven escaped to carry his gifts of the sun, the moon and the stars to humans. It was while flying through the opening that the White Raven, the primal form, turned black in the smoke.

Someone praising Scannah-gan-nuncus, in the language of trade, interrupted So'qwa's observations. His gift for language permitted him to understand the conversation.

"There is a story told of the long, long ago amongst our people, of a boy whose name was Scannah-gan-nuncus." Using elaborate gestures, the speaker acted out the tale of bravery. One day, he told his audience, the Haida youth sailed up a mountain stream that emptied its waters into the channel, four or five miles west from the place where he lived—the river in those days was three times larger than it was in the present. After pulling up stream, the boy became tired and went ashore to rest.

At the place where he landed, the storyteller continued, large boulders lay in the bed of the stream, and on both sides of the river many trees. While resting by the river, the boy heard a dreadful noise upstream. Looking to see what it was, he was surprised to behold all the stones in the river coming toward him. The movement of the stones frightened him so much that he jumped to his feet and ran into the timber. There he found he had made a mistake, because all the trees were cracking and groaning; all seemed to say to him to go back, go back at once to the river, and run as fast as you can. This he lost no time doing.

When again at the river, led by his curiosity, he went to see what was crushing the stones and breaking the trees. Upon reaching them, he found that a large body of ice was coming down, pushing everything before it. Seeing this, he got into his canoe and fled

*George Rogerson*

toward home to warn the people. "Had he not warned the people, no one would be alive today." Satisfied, the story spoke of bravery; the trader ended the tale and sat.

The warrior who dragged So'qwa forward, announced, "Scannah-gan-nuncus has captured one of those who killed his oldest brother." No one was certain who had killed his brother, but it was a matter of honor to speak of such things. So'qwa raised his head to see this man and looked into the angry eyes of Broken Nose, his enemy. He saw recognition in the man's eyes, just as he had with the older warrior, but this passed in an instant.

Other warriors recognized the green-eyed captive as the man who years earlier had humiliated a young Scannah-gan-nuncus twice in hand-to-hand combat, and then escaped. They shared knowing glances, but it was unwise to speak of the incident, so great the shame that still haunted their chief. Scannah-gan-nuncus longed to erase the only blight on his name, the Puyallup who had destroyed his face..

Slowly Scannah-gan-nuncus arose from his seat, and just as slowly reached under So'qwa's tattered cedar cape to grasp the crucifix. "White man's trinkets," he sneered. The Haida had seen such things worn by the black-robed shaman who came on the large boats and half suspected the Puyallup man carried it to frighten enemies. In truth, the Haida leader was skittish of the power the necklace might contain, but touched it to show that he feared nothing, and certainly not a tiny man staked out on sticks. Still, to be safe, he ordered So'qwa closely watched.

So'qwa read caution in the other man's eyes and surprised himself by remembering nearly every word Klolwalle had spoken concerning the little man on the crossed iron. "This white Man Above is more powerful than all the images of persons or some worthless animal carved on pieces of wood. The carver colors the image and is not ashamed to speak to the thing about his children, his marriage and his possessions. It is weak, but he speaks to it about his health. It is dead, but his speaks to it of life. Its hands have no power, but he asks it for help." Perhaps, he thought, the Haida

### *The Crucifix*

chief understood the power much more than he who possessed the iron sticks. So'qwa tried to drive such thoughts from his mind, lest he anger the numberless entities that controlled his world—entities in the presence of which, he was helpless and constantly compelled to propitiate or appease.

That night and every night after for a month, So'qwa was bound and thrust into a tiny shed adjacent to a larger structure, which held female slaves. During the day, he joined other captives doing tasks the Haida deemed beneath the status of the Raven moiety. Nightly conversations drifted to him from the nearby slave quarters, faint whispered words. Each night he strained to hear the conversations.

Once, he was astounded to pick out a familiar voice, but not that of Fawn. It was his wife, of that he was certain. How could Tall Woman be here? Had the Haida attacked again? With these and other thoughts racing through his mind, he spent an unsettling night questioning whether his mind was making him hear the voice that he might never hear again, until meeting with her on the island of the dead.

The conversations ceased when the Haida moved their female slaves to a larger building. So'qwa robbed of his nightly company, turned to a study of his captors. The mysterious Puyallup man had become something of a celebrity to the young warrior who guarded him each day, and proudly gave information—information So'qwa needed if he were to know his enemy.

As So'qwa came to know the Haida, he learned that Scannahgan-nuncus was the head of the largest and wealthiest family in the village and thus the most powerful chief in the region—a man for whom the potlatch was not an economic challenge. With such power and the treasure of a handsome family, it puzzled So'qwa that the man would so concern himself with an insignificant captive.

*. . . The Crucifix-Idaho*

*George Rogerson*

Jack fell in behind Burns as he headed north to Twin Falls then east on the interstate toward the Shoshone Reservation at Fort Hall, near Pocatello. Ahead, the Deacon appeared to be wedged into his little pick-up and Jack laughed as the huge man surreptitiously cross himself apparently asking for traveling mercies. He guessed they would drive the 150 miles slowly to meet with the Indians. He was right. It was almost dusk before they parked at a simple structure, Burns said was a meetinghouse. A set of stairs that led to a broad porch, was blocked by a group of young men who seemed intent on talking rather than making room for the visitors. The Deacon waded through the youth, who respectfully parted for him after he patted the group's leader on the shoulder and whispered something Jack could not hear.

Jack considered the Deacon a decent man, but like most clergy gentle and soft. "That was interesting," he muttered under his breath. But the giant of a man, who topped Jack Rikert by two inches, pretended not to hear the remark.

Finally, when they were at the door he joked, "I gave him the choice of parting like the Red Sea or landing on his arse. We Catholic clerics are clever devils with words. Helps keep the flock on the straight and narrow."

The door of the building swung open and Jack stepped into the room. Scenes of mounted Indians depicting an earlier time that covered the walls had faded to an even ochre blurring the images of horse and rider. The floor creaked and had a visible slope as though the building had not been constructed with any permanence in mind. At the far end of the slope, a small gathering of men lounged in folding chairs. They were to a man dressed like college students in jeans and jackets and Jack had the insane urge to ask the name of their fraternity, but kept it to himself.

A youngish man asked, "So you want to know about the Teacher?"

The directness momentarily startled Jack, but he managed, "Yes, the lady named Francis," and fell into a chair. As he did, Burns pulled one to a place by the door.

*The Crucifix*

“You pulled in here like somebody important,” a voice sounded scornfully from the shadows. Come to show us dumb Indians how rich you are?”

“Who’s asking?” Jack challenged. It occurred to Jack that his sleek Mercedes was out of place and wished he’d rented something less conspicuous.

Rikert was a wealthy man, but he wore his riches loosely, his only vice—the car he drove—a year old CL Coupe that had cost him a whopping \$120,000. The one excess in an otherwise modest lifestyle brought Morgan’s reproof and continuing questions from fellow Marine Corps officers. The curious Marines he’d brushed off with, “I saved my combat pay, how ‘bout you?”

He had reminded Morgan, “The jewels I discovered were mine to do with as I pleased. I am the only surviving relative after all.” Of that, he was not certain, but what he had done with a good share of the dollars eased any guilt. Jack had established a Native American education fund and selected a fraternity brother, a scrupulously honest CFO of an Olympic Peninsula Hospital as administrator. Under the eye of the man Jack called the most trustworthy person on the planet, it had grown rapidly and was now providing opportunity to several thousand coastal Native American youth.

It was this man’s questions that most concerned Jack. Besides refusing compensation for his work, he constantly warned against any appearance of impropriety. Jack argued that no one knew his name and besides the money was his by inheritance. Wouldn’t that suffice, he’d asked. “Nope,” was the response, his friend’s usual. While Jack’s expenditures were not as tidy as the CFO desired, he continued to donate time and talent to the project.

“Her great grandson, Philip Rodgers,” the speaker answered.

“Another great grandson comes with questions, legitimate questions,” Jack shot back. *Easy. No need ruffling the feathers in his war bonnet.* Jack could not believe he’d entertained the thought and had nearly said it aloud.

“How do we know your claim is true?” another man asked, quick to intervene.

George Rogerson

“Well now, that’s something you’ll have to determine for yourselves.” Jack had peremptorily decided they didn’t have any information that would interest him. Besides, he thought, they do not look any more Indian than I do. *Just what the hell are you boys pulling here.* He raised his hand to quell any response, got up and turned toward the door. Jack realized, absently, that this was the first time his pulse quickened in anger since his last tour in combat. He saw the men glance at the speaker. His mind registered, this was a test? For what reason was not clear.

Rogers spoke, his voice now invested with gentleness. “Try and understand Mr. Rikert, we have only Deacon Burn’s word about you. Trusted as he is, we must be sure.”

“What wouldn’t I understand?” Jack relaxed and sat back down.

Rodgers casually brushed an unseen speck from his sleeve. “How some people behave, who covet the crucifix you seek. You are not used to such people.”

Jack said nothing. He suspected that Rodgers was purposely speaking in riddles and betrayed his feelings. “What’s there to understand? I’m looking for the Indian woman Francis, not a cross.”

“Do you seek the crucifix?”

“Yes, but...”

“Then you are like the others!”

“I don’t know about any others, but if locating the crucifix helps me find my ancestors...”

“Mister Rikert,” the man named Rodgers interrupted, “there are others looking for the crucifix. I’m inclined to accept your words at face value that your search is a personal issue, but it is clear you don’t know the risk you run.”

Jack shrugged, “You’re serious? Look, I know all about risk. I spent thirty years...”

“We know of and respect your extraordinary military record, but, no, you are not ready for what confronts you,” Rodgers countered and raised his hand to stop Jack from responding. “Every day that you continue places you and anyone around you in danger. For your safety please hear me out.”

Jack sighed and sat down.

### *The Crucifix*

“Francis and her husband came to Idaho in 1860.” Rodgers told a tale of the struggles of an Indian woman separated from her husband by the white man’s Civil War.” He spoke of death and honor in the stories Francis shared with the people about her past, of So’qwa and the crucifix. He said the crucifix was more than a white man’s religious icon, much more. Coldly serious now, “It is a relic of our past...no, no...a symbol of our freedom, for the Christ said we were equal to the people who mistreated our ancestors.”

Jack shook his head. “All that is beyond my pay grade. My purpose doesn’t have anything to do with possessing the cross.”

Rodgers looked at him seriously. “You think not? I thought it was we Indians who were in denial. Well, maybe in the beginning when it was a personal quest. Now it’s too late. You want to touch it.” He turned and looked at the silent seated group. “There are those who will not warn you as I have. Two groups, for reasons of their own, follow your movements, the Kusiut from the Bella Coola region and white zealots who call themselves Templars. Be guarded.”

It was dark when Jack turned west on I-86 happy to feel the Mercedes V-12 power, happier still that behind him was the grim faced Rodgers with his stories of Templars, a crucifix with mysterious iconic properties, and the unsettling warning of an old nemesis, the Kusiut. He didn’t know anything about Templars, guardians of the faith Rodgers called them, and less about the gospels. The Kusiut was a different matter. Just the name brought back painful memories of a friend poisoned by a Kusiut zealot and his gut tightened at the danger his search had brought to Morgan’s door.

She’d been attacked while running at Point Defiance Park. Escaping in her battered old truck, Morgan drove wildly around Five Mile Drive before crashing into a fence on a cliff overlooking the Narrows Bridge. Caught in the chain link fence, the pickup hung precariously below the lip of the bluff. Morgan had somehow managed to reach safety, as a post pulled from its concrete base and

*George Rogerson*

the truck plummeted into the abyss, bouncing twice against the rock wall before disappearing into the water below.

Morgan. It seemed she was ever on his mind. *How the hell had that gone so wrong?*

Jack punched up a Dave Brubeck CD, to change his mood, set the cruise control for sixty-four and settled back into a more comfortable position. He stared down the empty highway and let the genius of Paul Desmond and his sax seep in. Jack remembered being the only jazz freak who knew Desmond changed his name from Brentenfield because he thought it sounded too Irish. It was a warm elegant tone like a dry martini. Morgan preferred dry martinis, Jack recalled. The CD was working her out of his mind.

Lights in the trees ahead jerked him back. A car had gone off the road. He stopped in the emergency lane, turned off the car and unconsciously locked the doors before going to help. Three men were trying to push the vehicle back on the road.

“What happened?”

“Went to sleep I guess. Lucky I didn’t hit anything.”

“Yeah, lucky.” Something didn’t seem right, but Jack was still thinking about Morgan and dismissed the feeling.

“You know anything ‘bout motors, bloomin’ thing won’t start.” He lifted the hood and stepped back for Jack to look.

Jack peered in, but craned his neck around under the hood and said, “I honestly don’t have a clue. Why don’t you call a...” One of the three was walking toward the Mercedes. *That’s odd.* Odder still, from this vantage point he could see where the car entered the woods. It was as though it had been parked. He started to pull back, but someone pushed him hard. It was a trap. The hood came crashing down as he yelled, “What the hell is...” He pulled back from the car trailing blood and punched the man who slammed the hood. He turned to face the others. It was a street fight, the kind that suited Rikert, but this time there were too many. Blows thumped on Jack from all angles. He kicked, snarled, felt a nose crumble under his fist and knew he could not hold on much longer.

*The Crucifix*

“Hold the bastard,” a big man shouted. He pounded Jack while the other two held him up. Jack sagged and they dumped his unconscious form down a nearby ravine.

“He broke my nose! I’m blood all over...”

“Shut up Jeffery, just get on with it.”

Jack tried not to open his eyes but the blaring car horn jolted him awake. *Turn off the alarm.* He instinctively felt for his keys and was fully alert. He switched on the tiny flashlight attached to the key ring to investigate his surroundings. He was beside a small stream, and the best he could tell, at the bottom of a steep hill. He hurt all over and figured he gave as good as he got, but had to admit he had taken a fierce beating. His head throbbed and there was blood, lots of blood on his jacket. A search revealed a deep cut at his hairline. He doused his head with cold water, removed his jacket and shirt and made a bandage from his undershirt. Satisfied he’d stopped the bleeding for now, he put his shirt and jacket back on, then scanned his surroundings to the length of the flashlight beam and started up the slope.

Voices instantly switched Jack to escape and evasion mode.

“You idiot, we need his keys to turn off the alarm. This isn’t some smash and grab we have to unlock the car.”

Training drilled into his head set Jack on a path laterally along the ravine away from the men. He worked slowly toward the top, careful to match his movement with theirs.

“You sure this is he went? No? Spread out then, he’s down here somewhere. We need those damned keys. How the hell did an idiot like you ever join the Order?”

*Order, what order?*

Jack crouched low and watched the three men descend, their shadows sharply outlined against the ridgeline. “Never walk on a ridgeline,” Jack’s sergeant had intoned so many years ago. His assailants were several yards apart shouting back and forth.

“You see ‘em?”

“No.”

“Idiot, damned idiot!”

*George Rogerson*

When they reached the bottom, the calls started again. “See anything?”

“Not yet.”

“Stupid Jeffery, broke a damn window and set off the alarm. Eugene, go left, find him and get the keys.”

That suited Jack because the person coming left would have come right to him—winded from the long climb. After a few anxious minutes, Jack sensed movement, then heard heavy breathing. The climber walked directly to Jack’s hiding place, but didn’t see the fist that smashed into his temple.

Jack tracked the second man, the one who had beat him, and dispatched him with a hard chop to his throat. The man dropped to his knees and Jack kicked him hard in the groin. Two quick punches sent him crashing down the slope.

“Hey, Marty, that you?” a voice from the right.

Jack muffled his voice, “Damn vines,” and silently made his way toward the top.

“What’s that? Marty, Eugene, dammit answer me!” Silence. “Well, if you’re gonna dick around, I’ll be in the car. My nose is killing me. We gotta get out of here.”

Jack was standing by the car when the third man, his broken nose spewing blood, emerged, sweating from the climb. He blurted, “It’s you!”

“You expected someone else.” Jack rushed the startled man, slammed him against the car and threw him on his stomach. Jack felt around for a wallet and rifled through until he found a driver’s license. “Hmm, Jeffrey Warren of the Ottawa Warrens. Thought you sounded Canadian.” Jack rolled him over and kneeled on the man’s chest, waited for him to gain his senses, then found a soft spot behind an ear and began to apply pressure. “Now, Jeffery, in a few seconds you will be unconscious, so you haven’t much time. If I don’t see your mouth moving, you are a dead man.” Jeffery tried to look defiant, but his face betrayed fear. His eyes darted about and he attempted to talk, slurred at first, then in a torrent of words that stunned Jack, he said he would die for the Order of Knights Templar.

*The Crucifix*

“Templar, you say? What the hell do you want from me?” Jack heard a cry from the ravine. “If you make a sound, Jeffery, I will tear out your throat.” Jeffery rapidly nodded his head.

Jack dragged the terrified Jeffery Warren to the Mercedes, unlocked the door and silenced the alarm. He reached under the seat and pushed a latch that released his .45 automatic. He shoved the gun into the frightened man’s face, “Somebody broke my window so me and my friend, Smith & Wesson, are gonna get even. Come on Jeffery.”

Jeffery lost control of his bladder. “I don’t want to die,” he sobbed.

“Shut up you weasel!” Jack marched the weeping man back to the parked car, lifted the hood and put two rounds through the block. “That about makes things right. My, my Jeffery,” he said disdainfully, “you appear to have wet yourself.”

At the sound of the booming reports, two bedraggled men broke from the forest cover. The big man walked doubled over but still posed a threat. Jack pointed the .45 at him. “What did you do to Jeffery?” he demanded through clenched teeth.

“Nothing yet,” Jack said menacingly. “He pissed himself though.”

“We heard shots.”

“He ruined our motor,” Jeffery moaned.

“You’ve no right,” the big man sneered.

“All the right I need is in my hand.”

“If you plan to kill us, we are prepared to die for the cause.”

“For the Templar cause Jeffery babbled about? How ‘bout one kneecap each? You do that for the cause?” Their shocked looks told Jack all he wanted to know. These were amateurs.

“You have no right!”

“I thought we settled that.”

“What are you gonna do?” the big man spit the words out.

“Well, you boys are going to sit right down here while I call the police. They might be interested in what you’re up to.”

Jack hit 911 and just as the operator answered, another voice from behind said, “You should wait, Doctor Rikert, let us talk first.”

*George Rogerson*

A fourth man. Jack had broken a first rule of combat— locate all unfriendlies.

He turned to see a tall man walk from a concealed place in the trees. His elegant attire would have been well suited for a boardroom. Here amidst torn shirts and bloody faces, he looked every bit like a GQ mannequin. The man was leaning on cane and held his free hand out, palm up. Jack thought he saw another figure in the woods.

“Sorry ma’am,” Jack apologized to the operator, motioning with the weapon for the fourth man to join the others, “my son was playing with the cell. Yes ma’am, I’ll keep better control. Thank you. Good night.”

“Okay, mister, you are? And tell the one in the trees to come out.”

“There is no one, but us,” and added calmly. “You’re bleeding.”

“I’ve bled more.” Jack leveled the .45 at the man and demanded. “Who are you and what the hell are you playing?”

There was danger in the eyes of the lean sandy-haired man who held the weapon. He wore an ugly scar on his right cheek almost as a badge of honor. It was obvious he’d taken a beating. There was the beginnings of a large bruise across the bridge of his nose and his clothing was blood-spattered. Obvious also, it would do well to exercise caution, for this was a man used to personal combat.

“It is you who play Doctor Rikert. I do have the pleasure of addressing Jack Rikert, PhD?” He didn’t wait for an answer. “You have become involved in a situation quite beyond your search for an Indian trinket. I am here to assure you that ending your fruitless journey, will likewise mean the end to any further unfortunate occurrences, such as this.”

“Unfortunate, yes, but I still have the artillery here.”

“This time perhaps, but we can always find you.” The man approached Jack, made motion to offer his hand, then whipped a sword from the cane so quickly that Jack had scarce time to avoid the blade slicing through the air. He stepped back and brought his weapon level with the swordsman’s chest when the big man struck

*The Crucifix*

him from behind. The last sound he heard was the thunder of fists banging on his skull.

• • •

So'qwa had not imagined Tall Woman's voice. She was in the Haida village posing as a slightly deranged but hard-working slave making herself useful to the wife of Scannah-gan-nuncus. No one had questioned her sudden appearance in the village babbling an unintelligible language. There were people living on the fringes of every village, some with no family to care for them, others simply preferring to live as recluses. This woman was one of those. Tall Woman hated "woman's work," but had successfully demonstrated skills that caught the eye of the village leader's wife.

She had departed the Quinault village before So'qwa with ample provisions for the journey, much to the credit of Bright Star. Sensing the girl was determined to follow the man she loved, the chief's wife had ordered slaves to select a canoe Tall Woman could handle and then accompany her to the last landfall before the crossing to the big island where she would camp before attempting to reach Haida Gwaii.

Unlike So'qwa, she had traveled only in hours of dark, carefully scanning the shoreline for any sign of campfires before landing. Prevailing strong current had forced her Northwest around the side of the island exposed to the ocean. Stiff winds buffeted her little canoe, which laden as it was rode low in the water. Just as she became more accustomed to the nature of the water, an occasional wave of unusual proportion would descend without warning to send the small craft skittering down its slope and leave Tall Woman frantically paddling to avoid swamping.

On her second day, the plan was to land near Nootka Sound on Vancouver Island, but the presence of large ships and many canoes forced her on. Within the year, it would be the place of an important conference between Britain and Spain concerning overlapping

*George Rogerson*

claims to portions of the Northwest coast of North America. The delay seriously stretched her night's toil. Fatigued, she slept soundly in her first day camp, only waking when gulls squabbled over a morsel of fish she had not eaten.

On the fifth day of travel, Tall Woman almost lost her life. It was unlucky for her that she had decided to paddle into dawn rather than halt as she had on each previous day. Although moving from place to place at night in open seas frightened her, she was more confident now that she better understood the ocean's changing moods. The faint light that gave a view of high on-shore mountains heartened her and she pressed on past a favorable looking landfall.

The first indication that she had overreached was a stiffening breeze on her cheek and the sight of dark clouds congregated in the West. The ocean had turned a deep charcoal, the water frowning, furious, giving her its most angry look. Looking toward shore, she sensed she missed a place to land, now there was white water as far as she could see. Soon enough, slanting rain hissed toward her blocking the white surf as it rushed toward land. High mountains on the land disappeared as the peaks of the rising swell grew higher and higher. With every second stroke, she had to brace as the waves kicked and bucked beneath the hull, the seas building right before her eyes. She could taste fear in her mouth.

Swirling water rebounding off close-in sheer rock faces threatened to swamp her canoe. Here the sea changed from sweeping swells to jagged foam-capped ridges that tossed her canoe about like the first reluctant horse she had attempted to ride. There the comparison ended, for to lose this mount meant death. Paddling furiously with a final reserve of strength, Tall Woman dug her paddle in harder, hunched over to put more power in each stroke. She was reaching beyond the grey-green bluffs and fast approaching the line of surf, but could not change directions.

She looked toward the land again, now silhouetted in approaching dawn, to measure the diminishing distance, and started as a warning raised out of the sea several canoe lengths away. It was pillar of rock six feet high, which rose from the breast of a wave, then disappeared as quickly. More menacing black forms shredded

*The Crucifix*

the waves into foam. It was going to be a very near-run thing to escape them. An immense following wave snatched the canoe and hurled it toward the white water boiling round the rocky shore.

By some favorable happenstance of nature, the very wave that portended doom swept the tiny vessel over the rocky barrier and into a lagoon beyond. Here Tall Woman gained control and directed her canoe to land. Still pounded by rain, wind, and waves that had turned the canoe into a wild thing, she hauled it up the beach away from the reach of the surf.

She rested for two days, drying clothing and stores, and tending to a score scrapes and bruises. She had managed to clear the danger and land on the northernmost point of the island. From there, the map drawn by a Quinault trader required crossing Hecate Strait to the mainland of present day Canada, working her way a hundred miles up the coast, then a second crossing to Haida Gwaii.

Named for the British ship Hecate. Hecate Strait, lying as it does between landmasses is rather like a swift moving river. The great eastern crescent of coastal mountains holds it like a snow-capped dam—to the west, the islands of Haida Gwaii. Between these barriers, a narrow chute allows the Pacific Ocean to connect with itself, north from the Gulf of Alaska, to Queen Charlotte Sound at the southern end. Hecate, the connecting link is a stretch of water made dangerous by winter storms that lash the Pacific coast.

It was her good fortune to start the nearly one hundred-mile trip to Haida Gwaii at ebb tide. That coupled with unusually mild weather made her passages of the treacherous strait uneventful. Still, she reached the outer barrier islands of Haida Gwaii a weary traveler. For the first time in over a week, she had dared risk moving by day, and on this day, someone spotted her. The boys, at first curious to see a woman traveling alone, were more interested in fishing and simply waved as her canoe slide by a quarter mile away. Tall Woman was intent as well; she would have been glad to know the state of the tide. She preferred an incoming flow. It was not until reaching the entrance channel when she sighted some pieces of driftwood floating into the bay that Tall Woman knew the tide flowed in her favor.

*George Rogerson*

She was fast approaching a village and would have to find a place to hide. Like a part of the flotsam, Tall Woman drifted toward a series of gaps in the shoreline. She guided the canoe into a promising one. The water was shoaling rapidly and she continued until the canoe grounded, deep in a thicket of gnarled pine. There she secured the canoe, and blocked the entrance to her refuge with driftwood and branches before making a bed of loose boughs. She slept as though dead, wrapped in a soft, cedar blanket.

Early the next morning, she climbed a prominent rock formation to determine two things. How far she was from the village and if her hiding place was secure from prying eyes. From the rock she looked down on a sea of green, and long houses wisely situated, facing the south from the sheltered bay. Here and there, puffs of smoke, drifting over the village marked the location of smokehouses. Groups of women and children were hard at work digging on the beach. Such labor was not to her liking, but she could appreciate the quantities of clams and mussels along such a protected shore. Beyond the village, thick, gray, soot-like clouds hovered like a curse over layers of forest growth containing trees of a size she had never seen. At the base of these giants, she could discern rich and luscious thickets of bright green mosses, ferns and berry bushes.

Satisfied her canoe was in a remote location and unlikely to be spotted, she dressed herself in rags, rubbed dirt on her face and limbs and set out to locate Fawn. That she would attempt such a ruse to rescue her adopted sister provided the stuff of storytellers. That she had driven herself in darkened skies for over five hundred miles and reached the land of the Haida was the grist of legend.

At the very moment, So'qwa was straining to identify the hushed voice that sounded like his wife, Tall Woman was asking about the mysterious man the Haida kept tied and guarded in the next hut.

"Who do our masters say he is? Where is his village? Why do they guard him? There is nowhere to go."

"It is not your concern, crazy one," a slight woman answered.

"Where do they hold the Quinault woman?" Tall Woman asked.

"Quinault? Who tells you she is Quinault?"

*The Crucifix*

“Another slave.”

“What other slave? Anyone here speak of the chief’s slave?”

When no one answered, she turned on Tall Woman. “Well, who told you?”

“I must be mistaken,” and uttered a string of Arapaho words.

“Yes, mistaken. It is not your concern. Someone could tell the master.”

Fawn hunkered down in a corner of the shelter. It was not even a proper house, half the living space she shared with her husband and child. How she wished she had not stayed with Walks With Bears on the beach to keep him company. Her mother, not her real mother, but her married mother, scoffed at Fawn’s concern for the old man. “He is not worth your effort,” her mother-in-law had said. Fawn felt sympathy rather than disdain, certain that such behavior was proper, since Man Above saw all things.

It was not really the Quinault Man Above, but the little statue on the iron sticks. Her husband had convinced her that it was the white man’s greatest power. Even white warriors, he had told her, got on their knees before him. Klolwalle said the white’s Man Above sent his own son to carry all the wrongdoings on the earth. She was not sure how that took place, but her husband was so certain. She could not argue when he told her it was good to care for others, especially the old people. So, she sat with Walks With Bears and saw him die. Now she was not going anywhere. Huge tears dropped onto Fawn’s lap and she did not care, she wormed into the corner and wept.

To Fawn, it seemed that she had slowly grown another skin on top of her own. Sometimes she had the impression that she was still moving about, rather uncomfortably, inside her own village. If she could just break through this unwanted cover, she would find herself home. At other times, it seemed as if this new, ever thicker skin was stuck fast. Then, even when the old woman came after her with a sapling, she felt as if she were in the hands of a strange animal, with a very thick hide. Not that, in any way, did such thoughts change her circumstances.

*George Rogerson*

There was only one way to survive in her new skin—only one way. Keep the old woman happy. For a month, she had endured the hag's cruelty.

"Lazy girl," the woman chortled, "hard work will put wrinkles on the pretty face."

There was nothing left for her now. She would die here tormented by a leather-skinned crone. The moment Fawn permitted herself such thoughts she struck her thigh with a clenched fist. She muttered aloud, "Did not So'qwa suffer far more at the hands of the Haida? Did he not escape? I can do the same."

"Yes, and we will bring So'qwa with us." Fawn, startled, looked into the eyes of a tall girl working next to her cleaning the chief's fire pit. This one, the people called crazy because she kept her face covered and spoke a strange language.

"Who are...?"

"Say nothing, only move your head to tell me you understand."

Fawn nodded and continued scraping up burnt woodchips as the stooped girl whispered.

"Go to the place where women bathe."

Fawn turned to nod, but the speaker was carrying her basket of chips outside.

Something about the shape of the sloping roof made Fawn feel at home. From the outside, it appeared as little more than a lean-to, yet inside it had the warmth and intimacy of the first summerhouse she had built on the Quinault River. True, it was made of huge cedar logs rather like a fortress, but it was a place where slaves could be alone to bathe. The woman who watched her would not lower herself to join mere slaves. As she stood drying herself, the crazy girl came near. Now she walked erect, and more than that, she had not covered her face—the face of her sister-in-law. Fawn was overjoyed to see the resourceful woman, but did not speak when Tall Woman signaled to wait until the last women left the hut.

"We must plan for your escape," Tall Woman said, her tone sure and comforting.

"How can you do that?" Fawn asked skeptically

*The Crucifix*

“It is easy to take you, but...” Tall Woman then told her how So’qwa had come to Haida Gwaii for his sister and was again the captive of the crooked-nosed man. “It is said the chief will make So’qwa watch the Haida destroy the Puyallup villages.”

“When?”

“Soon, I have learned. The Haida speak their secrets around the crazy woman. I have a way...”

Fawn interrupted, “What can we do?”

“I have a way...” Tall Woman raised her hand before Fawn could speak again, “to steal So’qwa from under the noses of the Haida.”

“How?”

“When they least expect, on the ocean. But first, we must begin to take food from the Haida, enough for one week, and warm clothes for our journey.” When she outlined her plan, Fawn smiled for the first time in weeks. It was a plan that would have done credit to any of the French Marshals who were engaged in battle, in that late summer of 1790, or to any British Earl so occupied. She touched Fawn and whispered, “We choose our path forward and turn not back.”

The two began to hoard bits of food and discarded clothing that Tall Woman took to her hidden canoe, never raising suspicion, for the villagers were used to her wanderings. The more dangerous part of the plan sent her each night to the chief’s war canoe. There, she carefully worked to bore a hole below the waterline, disguising progress with clay. Within the week, a hole the size of her finger penetrated the vessel’s underside. She sealed the hole with clay and rubbed ash over the place to hide the flaw. She hoped the plug would last in a canoe loaded with men and supplies long enough to clear the protected waters of Haida Gwaii. If the canoe sank near land, the plan would fail.

With their store of food and clothing growing in Tall Woman’s canoe, the pair waited for the moment to escape. They did not have long.

It rained the next morning, as it had for the previous five. To the pair huddled in the house of Scannah-gan-nuncus feigning work, the

*George Rogerson*

air hung heavy and damp. It was colder too. Grey tendrils of squalls swept in from the west, brought from the Pacific by an icy wind that blew from the Bering Sea. Gusts rattled long house planks sending a chill wind whipping through the rooms.

Tall Woman was watching for the old hag who tattled to the Haida. She moved close to Fawn about to speak, but the girl was dozing. It was better to let her sleep. Then she heard a noise and for a fleeting instant thought, the hag had found them. She told herself it was her imagination or just the wind coursing down through the smoke hole. There was a sound. She looked to the leader's fire and saw his wife was stirring embers into flame. The flames burst forth and curled round the new pieces she carefully stacked in a cone.

"Wake up Fawn, the master's woman," Tall Woman shook her.

It was a long moment before Fawn opened her eyes. The wife of Scannah-gan-nuncus viewed the scene with compassion because her younger sister had been kidnapped years before. She still grieved her loss. She ordered the two slaves to some light work in another part of the communal house hoping they would find a place to rest away from the nasty woman whose self-appointed task it was to betray unproductive slaves. Perhaps, when the business of the Puyallup man was over, she could ask her husband to deal with the old hag. For now, she would do her best to show a little kindness to the unfortunate women so far from their homes.

It was a month now since Tall Woman had come to Haida Gwaii. She knew from the way the leader's wife acted that the time was nearing for her husband to go south. So'qwa, she knew, would go with him, and day-by-day she smuggled more food to her canoe.

More and more warriors visited Scannah-gan-nuncus, drawn there by rumors that he intended to seek revenge on the Puyallup. Some reasoned that the whole thing was about the captive—nothing to do with the tribe in the south.

In the years when Scannah-gan-nuncus' canoe designs attracted many buyers, he created an exquisite vessel for himself. His favorite, with its distinctive profile, displayed a strong curvature in

*The Crucifix*

the gunwales, rising to high, truncated projections at both ends. In cross-section, the rounded bottom and fashioned sides flared out below the gunwales. He could not help admiring his work, the craft hewn from the gigantic red cedar and the beautiful lines that pleased the most demanding navigator—lines that also suited the canoes for war.

Canoes were to the Haida, what the horse became to the Plains Indians. Hollowed out of single logs of cedar, they were often large enough to carry sixty men. Scannah-gan-nuncus felt his people were surrounded by enemies, when in fact they were quite secure on their remote islands. Although food was plentiful and life comfortable for his people, he had a warrior's view that the way of the Haida was fraught with challenges and the one thing upon which he could depend was the finest canoes made by any people

Sitting in the comfort of his house he thoughtfully considered that the Haida were better at sea than any Indians and always more willing to engage in battle. The Haida, dependent upon the sea, had become, in his mind, masters of the sea. He had a deep sense of identity with his canoe as though it were a living thing—a warrior at his side. This thoughtful Scannah-gan-nuncus had once seethed with deep-seated anger at his disfigurement, but now that he could experience spiritual cleansing in the destruction of the man So'qwa, he found little pleasure in the act. To do what he had intended, would be contrary to the grudging respect he had for the Puyallup man.

Scannah-gan-nuncus shuddered. His wife saw this and frowned. "Do not trouble yourself wife," he insisted without bothering to explain what brewed inside. He prized her company, and loved the intimacy of married life. She was perceptive. It was the Puyallup, he could sense she knew, but he would not admit to her knowledge of him—that a long ago misfortune, had for years troubled him. What he planned, must be done, and in spite of himself he did something out of the ordinary, he smiled.

After pondering the matter for several minutes, he amazed his wife. "This is ended."

"Ended?"

*George Rogerson*

“There is no reason for war between us. He is an honorable warrior. I will ask him to become one of us.”

“If he says no?”

“We will take him to his people.”

“Is there no other way?” she interrupted, wishing to know what he planned, but knowing he would not say. So shocked was she at her uncharacteristic behavior, she leaped into his arms. “Husband, you are a great leader, but never as great as this moment.”

The last day of summer arrived with rain and wind. The grasses were blown flat to make one green blanket facing the mountains. Still Scannah-gan-nuncus did not go and Tall Woman feared he might never. “He has trouble with his woman,” she told Fawn. “She does not want him to leave.”

When she thought her planning was for naught, the village erupted with activity. Canoes loaded with stores sat ready for a long journey. Men busied themselves selecting their finest weapons and armor, which in truth, had been ready for weeks. In fewer than three days, the war party of determined warriors stood at water’s edge awaiting their leader’s commands.

That morning, the departing war canoes were all that mattered and no one took notice of two slight figures that emerged from the leader’s house and disappeared into the bordering stand of trees. The two would endure a rugged circuitous daylong journey to a secluded inlet. There they would rest before the long trip south, a trip made dangerous by a scheme to rescue So’qwa.

Scannah-gan-nuncus had insisted on the most direct 100-mile open ocean southern route to the big island. After the pounding of ocean waves, the clay plug disguising Tall Woman’s sabotage, popped out immediately flooding the canoe. Before the vessel filled with water, So’qwa had discovered the source of the leak under tightly packed supplies. He alertly seized an arrow from a nearby warrior, wrapped the broken shaft with his headband and jammed the thing in the hole.

*The Crucifix*

The Haida decision to strike out across open water surprised Tall Woman and she saw her careful plan start to unravel. She calculated the clay plug would disintegrate just after the canoe cleared the safe harbor. There she and Fawn would assist those in the sinking canoe. They would pluck So'qwa from the water and escape in the confusion. It was a risky plan, but one that might work especially in the chaos of the warriors' concern for their leader.

The two women watched the big canoes turn toward the ocean and fell in behind hoping for some change in their luck. Tall Woman had explained to Fawn for the tenth time how the plug was supposed to fail, but two hours later the Haida canoes were still pulling away.

"We cannot follow them much longer, the waves are too large for our canoe," Tall Woman said, resigned to failure.

They had no other choice but to turn east toward the mainland. The tricky current in the Hecate Strait was blowing them south and Fawn gasped, "The Haida, they have turned also."

Tall Woman's fertile mind was already planning her next move and urged Fawn to paddle hard. "We must go north, out of the Haida's sight. It will take time to repair their canoe, there is still a chance to rescue So'qwa."

"Did you do this?" the chief stormed at So'qwa after examining the carved out place in the hull. They had landed in the dark after fighting strong currents and a slowly sinking canoe, his favorite. He studied the blank face of the captive. No, he decided, this was not the work of the Puyallup. Guarded day and night there had been no chance. The man was an enemy, but a warrior and not one to stoop to such means, and it was he who had saved them from sinking. That left only one answer, one of his own people had betrayed him. Always fearful of disaffected villagers, he had suspected that even his closest family members might covet his position. "Is this the work of your white man's trinket?"

"I do not know the ways of the white's Man Above." So'qwa had a troubling thought. Had someone in the village damaged the canoe? While he inwardly felt pleasure at the Haida's distress, a

*George Rogerson*

kernel of pity for the man surfaced. He had learned something of the Haida during his brief captivity and gained an insight into the enemy he called Broken Nose. He was a man of obvious power, a loving husband and father, and his village had prospered under his leadership. That a member of one's own village might bring harm to their chief challenged So'qwa's animus toward the Haida. Such things, to the fair-minded Puyallup, should never occur.

That evening, Broken Nose sought out So'qwa and pulled him to a place away from the fire. "Are you my enemy?"

"Yes."

"I ask you once more. Did you do this thing?"

"I would not mar such a fine canoe."

"I reasoned you would not." He feared if it came from power in the white man's iron sticks, but could not ask and risk betraying such fear. Then the Haida spoke gravely, "Today I owe a debt and choose to war with you no longer." He cut the bonds and motioned So'qwa to sit, replaced his knife, then reached out his hand.

"Your people call you So'qwa? What does that mean?"

"Small boy," was the reply.

Scannah-gan-nuncus smiled and staring directly into the eyes of So'qwa asked, "What do you call me?"

"Scannah-gan-nuncus, leader of the Haida."

The Haida smiled. It was not a pleasant smile, though he had strong white teeth. So'qwa felt he was in the eyes of a forest cat, cunning, about to kill. He guessed the Haida was twenty-five years old, seven years older than So'qwa himself.

Scannah-gan-nuncus saw a tall young man, powerfully built. So'qwa's clothing was torn and stained. His over garment hung in tatters between leather thongs that threatened to part. A hard young man too, Scannah-gan-nuncus guessed, not just from the scars on his cheeks, but from the man's demeanor, which was awkward and raw-edged as though So'qwa did not know how to behave in the presence of his enemy.

The two men, each respectful of the other, held this gaze, and then ever so slowly the Haida resumed movement of his hand and placed it upon the shoulder of So'qwa.

*The Crucifix*

Then as So'qwa began to withdraw from the touch, the man relaxed and spoke. "The war between us ends." The war had ended that morning when Scannah-gan-nuncus decided to take So'qwa to Vancouver Island

There could be only one reply to such an oath, "So it will be," So'qwa said.

Scannah-gan-nuncus made an offer he supposed would affirm his promise of peace between the two. "I fought against you twice. You are a warrior of much spirit power. No longer will my village war against the Puyallup. You are free."

There was but a moment of hesitation, which So'qwa broke by placing his hand on the Haida's shoulder, "I will not betray your trust. Our grandfathers have taught us always to remember that a life without honor is not life."

In the land at the foot of coastal mountains, the temperatures in that time of year often went down below freezing. Not a burden to native people secure in their long plank houses. But this man, the Haida leader knew would suffer greatly as winter advanced. Therefore, Scannah-gan-nuncus, made a most extraordinary statement.

"You are welcome in my house until you can travel to your people next spring."

As So'qwa looked deep into the eyes of the man who had once enslaved him, there was a long moment of silence, as each acknowledged that either could have slain the other, but had refrained. Though neither uttered a word, peace existed between two warriors.

So'qwa's father once told him to be wary of an enemy making promises, but this man was no longer an enemy. The confusion on So'qwa's face amused the Haida, but he sternly advised a decision before winter came. "My people trade with tribes near this spot. Return to my village with them, but do not wait too long." The big man turned and headed to the shore where his repaired canoe was waiting.

~1791~

## **The Sweat Lodge**

*“Placement of the fire pit in the sweat lodge symbolizes the center of the universe, the dwelling place of Man Above and his power.”*

Tall Woman, Arapaho

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Eastern Shore of Hecate Strait**

**T**he time for regrets would come later, the time to puzzle on his stupidity, to reflect on being alive, at least for the moment, the time to feel remorse that he could not have had more faith in Tall Woman. So'qwa shifted his position on the log, took in his surroundings, while he chewed a remnant of salmon cooked by the Haida.

It had been a worrisome month since he had joined Quinault men and northern allies to extract concessions from the Makah. Their triumphant homecoming was marred by news the Haida had struck and taken his beloved sister. So'qwa, confident he would rescue Fawn, had failed miserably and placed himself in the hands of hated enemy Scannah-gan-nuncus. He had resigned himself to a grim fate when a miracle brought about his release. So'qwa had little time to consider his good fortune when a sound made him instinctively reach for a weapon he did not have. He smiled at the anxious faces of his wife and sister.

The two women had approached from the north and beached their canoe out of sight. They watched the Haida depart and expressed apprehension for So'qwa was not on either vessel.

“They have killed him,” Fawn wailed.

“We do not know that,” Tall Woman scolded. Fearing the worst, they crept through the trees and discovered him sitting on a log in the empty campsite placidly chewing a remnant of salmon left by his captors.

“You are not dead,” Tall Woman shouted. “We thought the Haida...”

So'qwa stilled her with his fingers to her lips. As he stood there considering all the doubts she had left unvoiced, and the realization that they were once again a family, So'qwa said simply, “They could have killed me, and they let me go.”

*George Rogerson*

From an early age, he had fantasized facing down an enemy in combat, protecting his people or returning victorious from pitched battle. Suddenly, the prospect of peace with the most feared of raiders, left So'qwa somehow cheated of a heroic destiny, the dream of every Puyallup youth. Was it possible to be in accord with a people who had swept through his village like a winter storm destroying all before it? Were the Haida to be trusted? He touched the iron cross and pondered its spirit strength. This and other thoughts filled his mind, but he had little time to consider each because two young women were beseeching him to speak.

Patiently he described the events that had made him a free man. So'qwa detailed how he had sealed the mysterious crack in the leader's canoe. "Someone in his own village did the terrible thing."

"The Haida's village?" Tall Woman asked. "Does he suspect you?"

"A warrior would not stoop to such means. I face my enemy with honor."

The women stood listening, bewildered, and his wife, the more outspoken of the two, decided to challenge his words. "I would make the Haida canoe sink to rescue you."

"For a woman it is different." So'qwa noted softly, immediately sorry he had uttered the words, for he saw the gathering storm in her narrowed eyes.

"Warrior honor," she spat, "that's what got you captured. So, here you sit eating because of woman's work!" As was her habit, she rushed indignantly away, pulling Fawn along.

So'qwa puzzled at such an outburst, asked himself for the hundredth time, why he had bothered to save her from the Haida. Surely, her tongue was the reason the Pawnee who had captured her had traded her to the Sioux. The Sioux likewise had bartered her to a white man for a rifle. Lastly, the wife of the white man demanded that her husband sell the fractious Arapaho girl to the Quinault. If women could not tolerate her behavior, where did that place a husband?

Disabusing her so troubled him, and he turned his thoughts to his surroundings. He looked east to the majesty of snow-capped

*The Crucifix*

mountains, as though for the first time. He stopped in admiration, aware he was seeing the precious work of the spirits. The day was magnificent, he was free. His mind now clear of conflicting emotion gave So'qwa space to see Tall Woman beyond her sharp words.

First, she possessed an independent spirit he much preferred to the cloying and often mindless obedience of most Puyallup girls. Tall Woman was thus dependable in situations where men might be required to accomplish important things.

Second, it had not been too long ago that she fought the Haida, doubtless saving his life and that of his sister, Fawn. However, the image of her taking the hair of an enemy still troubled him.

Third, she was brave and resourceful. Had she not managed to find her way to Haida Gwaii and rescue Fawn, a task at which he had failed? He might better have told her it was a notable feat. As it was, he had permitted his own failure to cloud her achievement.

Tall Woman had succeeded where he had failed. She arrived in Haida Gwaii undetected, posed as a crazy person and snatched Fawn to safety. A thought blanked all else out in So'qwa's mind—that how much this situation was like his refuge on the shore of the great water—saved from loneliness by this woman.

"I would not have thought of such a clever way to defeat the Haida," So'qwa said loud enough to reach the departing women.

Fawn turned, a look of relief on her face. "It is fortunate my wife had such a plan. She had to become a crazy woman to save me. And now, you are safe."

At that, So'qwa knew shame. He looked into his sister's eyes hoping for some understanding, but saw only a stern countenance. She moved her eyes toward Tall Woman, who was busy making a fire. Sensing her meaning, So'qwa approached his wife.

"We need some poles to make a shelter," he said half aloud so Fawn would hear.

Tall Woman stopped doing her work and said, "We could build one just there," pointing to a stand of tall cedars, "for more protection from the wind." She returned to the fire then added, "Seven poles will make a good frame, and cedar boughs for a cover."

*George Rogerson*

Then the three were discussing the best way to construct a good house. Where to face the opening, what to use for covering the bare ground, and that the gathering clouds signaled they must act quickly.

Here Fawn proved to be the most experienced. First, from the poles So'qwa cut and stripped of limbs, she carefully selected four forked poles and wedged them in the ground to form the corners of the structure. On these, she rested horizontal poles. Then she lashed the framework together with tightly woven cedar rope that So'qwa and his wife hurriedly fashioned. When she had a solid frame to support the gabled roof, she showed the others how to overlap cedar branches and lash them in place so that they covered the roof and three sides of the house. The front was open, but a strong square of woven branches hung down from the roof, serving as a door.

The shelter was complete save for one important feature, which made it habitable. Taking several long saplings, Fawn skillfully tied them to short forked sticks to form low wooden frames. She then criss-crossed cedar rope to strengthen the platforms and finished her work with strong branches covered with moss. Over these, she draped some of the blankets taken from the Haida. She allowed the blankets to hang evenly over the cots, and then lashed them in place to form a comfortable sleeping pallet.

As if to note their diligence in building a sturdy house, a north wind began to buffet their shelter. They finished by placing heavy rocks and branches about the edges of the house so that wind and snow would not infiltrate. So'qwa forced a crack in the roof to vent a very small fire. It consumed few sticks and its heat made the hut snug.

Tucked in a place well shielded from the chilly wind, the three having made the decision they were safe, fell asleep and did not awaken until midnight when So'qwa's thrashing about in a dream caused Tall Woman to go to her husband's side.

In his sleep, a chorus of sound had reached him, men chanting, plucking him from reality to a scene of swift moving canoes. He peered into the lead canoe and saw himself, hands bound in front, pressed into a small place against supplies and spare weapons.

*The Crucifix*

A hushed, excited cry broke the morning air. “There, there is the island.”

So’qwa knew the Haida had reached the island from which they could attack his village. Everyone was anxious at the sight of the island, the first daylight landing on the voyage. So’qwa was excited as well, but for reasons of dread, for Scannah-gan-nuncus words stunned him.

“When we reach this dog’s village, all will die.”

So’qwa was conscious of a rapid, beating heart in his breast. He wanted to step out of the dream, but something else was tearing at his subconscious. He wanted to appear stoic in front of his captors.

“I will not show the way to my village,” he said.

The flabbergasted warrior stared at him for a moment, and then turned to whisper the message to the Scannah-gan-nuncus. So’qwa was pleased with himself. He clenched his fists in self-congratulation. He dropped the remains of the half-eaten fish into the water and washed his fingers in the billowing wake of the canoe.

“You will die here,” Scannah-gan-nuncus said. He jerked So’qwa’s head back exposing his neck and drew a bone knife. The Watchman’s call interrupted him.

“There is the place where we will land.”

Scannah-gan-nuncus released his hold and So’qwa rolled over the side of the canoe and into the water.

So’qwa awoke gasping for air, a roaring in his ears. Tall Woman was leaning over him, a question on her face, but he could give no more than a moment for her concern. Wind was howling outside. He leaped up and peered past the door at snow piled against their house. Inside it was warm and he relaxed. They had food for several days and enough tinder to keep the small fire going.

“I dreamed of the Haida,” said So’qwa, answering her unspoken question. The Haida had agreed to no warfare between them—freed him as one warrior would at respect for a deed. When he had spoken thus, So’qwa trusted the Haida leader to honor his words. He discovered respect for the man he had so derisively named. After quickly considering this imponderable, he made a decision.

*George Rogerson*

“We are safe here. This is too early for deep snow. When it is gone we will take Fawn to the Quinault.”

Tall Woman stared at him in disbelief, then said a strange thing. “We cannot stay, the Haida will return for us.”

Ever reluctant to quiet the voice of his outspoken wife, So’qwa nevertheless answered sharply, “The Haida released me as a matter of honor between warriors, and he will not make war as a matter of honor.”

Tall Woman seemingly ready to respond in her usual unfettered fashion, heard authority in his voice, and wisely held her tongue. She did not remind him that her plan to rescue Fawn was successful where his was not, because there were limits to a woman’s freedom to express herself. It seemed distressing still, that she may hence be forced to silence, thus her newfound conventional behavior was short lived.

“The leader’s canoe, if I had damaged it...”

So’qwa, sorry for his forceful words, gently interrupted her, “The Haida promised no war between us, and I promised not to betray our pact.” Then he added, “But, we will stay alert.”

The “we” made her embrace him. Their closeness disturbed him as it had the first time. He broke away so embarrassed his face burned. He left her arms and busied himself looking occupied rekindling the little fire.

“So’qwa?” her voice trembled.

“What is it?”

“I betrayed your pact with the Haida,” she whispered dejectedly. There were tears in her eyes.

A dejected Fawn said, “We did it together and there is more.”

Bewildered, So’qwa ordered, “Tell me of what you speak.”

Tall Woman told of her journey to Haida Gwaii, the hidden canoe, pretending to be addled to avoid suspicion. “We took food and clothing from the village and each night I slipped away and packed it in my canoe. When the canoe was ready I started to make a hole in the leader’s favorite canoe, and it worked.”

As the story tumbled from her mouth, So’qwa realized she had saved them both, but that the Haida leader would suspect him of

*The Crucifix*

treachery, for their handclasp of peace was a manner of honor. He could appreciate the danger that had faced them, and marveled at their daring and ingenuity.

“You are warriors sisters.”

Tall Woman hung her head, “But I was not as clever as you think,” she said. The old woman who watched Fawn followed us when we escaped...”

“Did you kill her?”

“I could not. She was so old, I could not. We left her under a tree with food and warm clothing. I fear when they find her the Haida will know we are together and think you dishonored your pact.”

“You say an old woman? Who would believe her?”

“She is the grandmother of Scannah-gan-nuncus. I fear he will come.”

Frustration filled Scannah-gan-nuncus and fueled his anger. He blamed himself for letting the man escape. Escape? No, he had let the man go as a matter of honor. He should have insisted So’qwa return to Haida Gwaii, the man could not be trusted, and now the matter of an old woman. In truth, she had not been abused, her only complaint was the thin blanket the kidnappers left for her. That mattered little for the Haida’s blood lust was up. He presumed the old woman spoke the truth that the kidnappers had joined the Puyallup man in a monstrous plot to sink a favorite canoe and rescue a Quinault woman.

Yet the worst insult of all was the Puyallup man’s betrayal. So’qwa the wild, clever and resourceful warrior whom Scannah-gan-nuncus had imagined could one day be a brother. He held few men in such close regard, and self-pity welled up in him. He pounded his fists together, startling his wife. Scannah-gan-nuncus shook the crippling thoughts from his head and walked toward the door.

He came out of his house with a huge anger and went looking for his most able warriors. When he had gathered them, he described the Puyallup man’s perfidy. “The Puyallup has broken his word and is fleeing to the south with two slave women.”

*George Rogerson*

“He cannot go south,” an older warrior said. “It is winter.”

“He will not survive,” another offered. “We will find bones when the snow melts.”

“We will find him now,” Scannah-gan-nuncus insisted.

The storm spent itself in two days. Fortunate for the three people in their tiny camp, travel was possible close in to the mainland shore where the winds did not buffet their canoe. They made excellent time the first day and by the third had moved nearly 100 miles down the coast, putting them just east of Vancouver Island. They endured hardship, paddling hard each day with little food, sleeping huddled together wrapped in blankets beside their canoe at night, fearful to light even the smallest blaze.

The morning of the fourth day, So’qwa announced he would catch some small game and cook them over a small fire before they attempted the crossing to the big island. While he was gone, the two women gathered edible roots and berries.

That night and a long day after So’qwa should have returned, Tall Woman set out after him following the trail of bent branches he had left to find his way back. She lost his trail and searched frantically, finally softly sounding the call of a bird she knew he would recognize. As he always did when they hunted, So’qwa whistled the lark’s answer.

Worming her way through thick bushes, she found him propped against a tree. A woman in ragged clothing was tending a small fire. At his feet sat a small boy speaking a strange tongue, pleading with his eyes for understanding.

“The boy thought the deer was alive,” So’qwa mumbled pointing at the animal draped over a low limb. “His aim was bad.”

Tall Woman said, “I know you,” to the woman. “You are Quinault. How did you...?”

“I did not listen to you when the raiders came. The Haida took us.” The Quinault woman called her son, Lost Child, for he had no real home. She said her Quinault name was Spring Rain after her mother’s vision during pregnancy. We escaped when a storm made them stop here.”

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“That is more than a year ago,” Tall Woman said. “You are brave and resourceful.”

“We are mostly hungry.” They had traveled miles from their camp in search of food.

As the women talked, So’qwa reached forward and patted the child’s head. When he did so, Tall Woman saw an arrow protruding from the thick muscle below his shoulder. She stifled a gasp and quickly rolled So’qwa on his other side to better examine the wound. The arrow had penetrated only the muscle and she traced the contour of the shaft to a bump under his right arm. It would have to come out there, she thought. There was not much blood, but So’qwa was in great pain for he was pale and cold to her touch. She pulled the shaft and So’qwa grimaced.

The Quinault woman stopped her. “The arrow is barbed, it will not come out that way.”

Tall Woman faced her angrily, “Barbed or not, the thing would not be there if you had controlled your child!” She heard in the woman’s voice the arrogant girl who had ignored her warning when the raiders came. In an instant, she was reliving that day. The attack, So’qwa her rescuer—So’qwa, wounded needing help. “Then we will take the arrow out here.” She tested the blade of her knife.

The Quinault woman offered an Obsidian fragment, one used for scrapping hides. She had burned away remnants of animal debris and wiped it clean. Tall Woman first cut the shaft off at the entry point. She gave it to So’qwa who clenched in his teeth. She had never cut human flesh and hesitated.

The boy whispered to his mother. The woman appealed to Tall Woman, “Please, we must take it out, there is poison...”

“What kind of poison?” Tall Woman demanded.

“I do not know, only that it will cause sickness.”

So’qwa sighed as she made a cut the length of the arrowhead. She gently pried it away from exposed bone and tried to pull the projectile free. The barbs held fast in tissue.

No measure of pulling would free the arrowhead. At each attempt, So’qwa quivered the length of his body, but made no

*George Rogerson*

sound. The pain would grow many more times before he would react.

With the back laid open, blood gushed from the wound, and onto his side and her hands. Sight of the blood and awful wound made her light headed, she struggled to hold down the contents of her stomach. Tall Woman pried the arrowhead loose with the point of her knife. She held it for So'qwa to see, and seeing the mess on her hands nearly fainted. Here was the woman with a mass of pounded fiber she called "bear food." The grizzly and black bears, she explained, dug for the root and Indians learned it was not only good to eat, but also powerful medicine for cuts and bleeding. The two women arranged the crushed root on both wound sites and tied the poultice in place with strips of sapling bark, which contained strong medicinal power.

Tall Woman had sent the boy for Fawn. Now she looked for a place nearby to build a house. The weather had improved, but she was aware of its changing nature. Four strong when fawn arrived; they erected a sturdy house on a rise near fresh water. They carefully moved So'qwa to a cedar bough pallet and began to forage for food and firewood. The temperature continued mild, and as if in response, So'qwa got better. He sat up and took his first meal. A diet of tea concocted from late blossoms of the "bear food" plant had left him ravenous.

On the third day following his injury, the sun shown bright, presaging a hopeful day. When called, So'qwa could not raise himself. He was pale and the wound hot to the touch. Tall Woman applied a fresh poultice and forced more tea into the languid patient. Still, that afternoon, his condition worsened and he lapsed into moments raving about the broken nose warrior, calling for Tlahit, asking for the white man's cross, and finally subsiding into soft muttering.

Tall Woman announced that purification in a sweat lodge was now their remaining hope. Among her people on the Western Plains, the lodge was a low-domed structure covered with available material that completely shut out the light. Under her direction, they gathered two dozen supple saplings from the waterside, and tied

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them together to form a low hut, seven feet in diameter and four feet high at its apex. They used blankets and moss to cover the exterior of the lodge, saving one blanket to block the door, and spread freshly striped cedar on the earthen floor.

Tall Woman dug a hollow depression in the center of the lodge to receive the red-hot stones she heated outside. The women, of Arapaho, Quinault and Puyallup lineage shared the belief that placement of the fire pit symbolized the center of the universe, the dwelling place of Man Above and his power. Tall Woman would tend the fire. As fire keeper, she would carry hot rocks to the lodge walking a line that represented a path from Creator to Creation.

The women placed So'qwa in the lodge. Tall Woman carefully rolled heated stones to the center using forked branches. She added more stones to the pile and on top of these scattered the shredded stems of "bear food" and sweet grass. An intense smudge quickly filled the lodge, pitch black, save for the glow of heated rock. Throughout the day and night, the women took turns pouring ladles of water over rocks creating intense heat inside the lodge—heat that mimicked fever, the body's natural reaction to toxins.

Once the poison sweated from his body, So'qwa was complaining his stomach had shrunk. Superb physical condition and a rugged constitution did the rest. At the week's end, he was moving about their camp with renewed vigor, although the use of some muscles caused pain. Accompanied by the seven-year-old boy, So'qwa walked to where they had hidden their canoe and affirmed what he already suspected. It was the smallest vessel the Quinault would take on the ocean and not meant for long distance travel that required large amounts of stores. Three people and their supplies could easily skirt the coastline and cross the dangerous strait to the big island, five might not make it.

Tall Woman, who had joined him, read his mind. "With two more people, there is not enough room."

So'qwa privately agreed. There was not, but leaving the woman and her son was out of the question. He was now responsible for their well being. Two more mouths to feed was a concern. More important, however, additional passengers meant more frequent

*George Rogerson*

landings for food and water, and that portended problems he would rather not face.

The prospect of a crossing to Vancouver Island in an overloaded canoe carried with it a nagging sense of discomfort, like a toothache. So'qwa was not certain it could be done. In a time and culture where a man's value was measured by his ability to protect family and property, So'qwa felt trapped in a fortress not of his own construction. From no conscious motive other than disliking the sense of not being in complete control of the situation, he cursed the Haida.

"The Haida do not force us to take the woman and her child," Tall Woman remarked with undisguised rancor.

So'qwa nodded reluctantly, sorry he had permitted his frustration to show.

"And the arrow..."

"From a child's hand," he interrupted.

"They should go back to their master."

"They stay." The boy stepped behind him and peered warily at Tall Woman. So'qwa told him to join his mother.

"You could have died," she admonished.

"Spirit power was with me. The white man's iron..."

Tall Woman interrupted, "Healing plants and the sweat lodge saved you."

Why, he asked himself, was discussing any matter with his wife so difficult. Once she started, he usually felt powerless. It was so when they had shared the cave dwelling two years ago. She had insisted on hunting with him, even pouted in the farthest corner of their cave sitting with her back to him until he relented. He had then fashioned a yew wood bow for her, careful to provide an easy pull and the straightest arrows. That would not do. She had demanded the same weapons he used. He knew of no other girl who hunted with men and with the same weapons, but she had proven herself capable. Then it had been a trial teaching her to swim. Once she saw bubbles coming from her mouth, breathing under water seemed possible to her; a valuable lesson, he had watched her gasping for air with considerable puzzlement. He noted with some relief, that

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each spiteful episode freed him of her prying eyes and dreadfully difficult language. How had he learned such a language, with its grunts and odd sounds that required disfiguring one's mouth?

No, the woman and her child stay, he decided. He reasoned that Tall Woman would understand. It never occurred to him that his wife might be jealous of the woman. For him to think such would suggest he considered her need for him. So'qwa had not yet sensed her depth of devotion to him.

"It is my canoe," Tall Woman hissed.

So'qwa flexed his shoulder. It hurt to move. He felt no need to engage in fruitless talk. "It is no longer yours, wife. Tonight we will pack it for our journey."

His statement was so unjust that she shouted loud enough that the boy stopped and turned around in question. Lowering her voice she insisted, "I will not give up my canoe. I say who will ride and who will not."

"It is proper," said a beleaguered So'qwa, "that a girl must obey and should always consider it an honor to give gifts to the leader. A canoe is a suitable gift for this occasion. Yours must be surrendered to me."

Hearing this, Tall Woman reacted in the manner So'qwa expected, stomped her feet and dashed from the site toward their camp.

"We can find another canoe in the Quinault village," So'qwa called in a gentle voice.

"Not like this one," she answered bitterly, but in the end, she dutifully helped load stores. As she watched the canoe covered for the night, Tall Woman experienced a most painful feeling of loss, and for an hour, she wandered alone. Finally, she returned to camp and Fawn took her aside.

"We must not refuse to obey, So'qwa. He is a man and the leader."

"He called me a girl. I am a woman, his wife."

Fawn half-smiled realizing that fact had apparently eluded So'qwa along with his wife's loyalty to him. Fawn wanted to query her sister on the matter, but hesitated. Instead she said, "He is our

*George Rogerson*

leader and will need your help.” What help an outspoken, self-centered woman might provide, Fawn could only guess. Of one thing, she was certain; a day would come when Tall Woman would have to tell So’qwa she was no longer the girl he had saved from the Haida. For now, she would try to refine the independent Tall Woman’s behavior, as much for So’qwa’s peace of mind as for the success of their escape.

*. . . The Crucifix - Idaho*

There was a light and a face. Jack couldn’t make out the features, but he recognized the voice of Deacon Clifford Burns. He also recognized the antiseptic odor of a hospital. He was slowly piecing together how he could be in a hospital when he heard Burns bullying someone.

“Visiting hours? They don’t restrict clergy.” He raised his voice and boomed, “What is more, this man is an American hero, holder of the Congressional Medal of Honor.”

A nurse pleaded, “Father it’s midnight.”

“Then move him to a private room so he’ll not disturb anyone. He can afford it.”

When Jack woke in the morning, Cliff was snoozing in a chair beside his bed. The Bible he’d been reading was on the floor.

“Cliff,” Jack croaked, “that’s no way to treat the good book.”

“Ah,” Cliff snapped awake, “he lives.”

“Barely. I got thumped damn hard. Where am I and how’d I get here?”

“County Hospital in Twin Falls. Some gal stopped and scared off the guys who waylaid you or you might be downstairs in the morgue. Ironical, too, she was coming here to work for you. I backtracked up the highway when you didn’t show at the restaurant and found her holding your head on her lap.”

Jack looked puzzled. “You advertised, remember.”

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Jack nodded. He also recalled how Morgan had called and burned his ear. “Really, Jack.” she’d said, “you stand to diminish the quality of your findings with such a pedestrian advertisement. You’ll attract nothing but lower tier graduate students not selected for fellowships.” He’d sent out a number of letters to universities offering research opportunity to qualified graduate students. Qualified was a loose concept to Jack. He wasn’t certain if he needed historians, anthropologists or gofers, and hadn’t even planned how to go about interviewing should anyone show up.

He finally said, “I guess I better thank her.”

“She visited a couple of times, when you were doped up. Pretty, too.”

“Father,” a nurse arrived. “We have to take our patient to x-ray.” It was that way for the next three days as Jack recuperated. He was, poked, probed, and watched—watched for any ill effects of his ordeal—and as much for the celebrity Burns had made him.

Two detectives visited several times before they were satisfied that Jack would not alter his account of what he called an attempted carjacking. No mention was made of his .45 and Jack determined not to raise the issue.

An attending physician said a rock hard constitution and superb physical condition saved Jack from all but a cracked rib and a number of cuts and bruises. When released, he still had a low-grade headache, and sported an enormous knot on his head, mute evidence to the collision with the car hood, but no concussion. A grinning Burns wheeled him between lines of applauding hospital staff.

“I can walk dammit!”

“Hospital policy, Jack, my friend. All patients must go by wheel chair to the exit.”

Jack expected to ride in the Deacon’s nasty little truck and laughed at the sight of his washed and waxed Mercedes. “My car, you fixed my car. Cliff you’re a real friend.”

“Wasn’t much, you paid for it. You carry a powerful lot of money, Jack. Ever think of donating some to the church?”

“I’ll make a point of it, Deacon.”

*George Rogerson*

Jack spit out the first of a welter of questions he'd been struggling with since the ambush on the highway. "Cliff, what did they want with me? Surely those guys are not some modern-day medieval crusaders? What happened to my .45? And why didn't those clowns take my money? My car?"

"Well, if you believe in angels like I do, that lady happened along before the evil doers could do anything. Besides, your keys were in your jacket pocket."

"But the police didn't find a weapon?"

"No, I did. It's under your seat. Cute little holster you have there."

"You're beginning to trouble me, Deacon. You may be cut out for something other than the cloth."

Burns chuckled, "Ever since you said, 'Good afternoon,' I've had the devil tugging at my cassock." He yawned. "You know, I've been sitting up with you for a week. What's say you buy dinner as recompense?" He promised to provide his best scholarly answer to Jack's concerns about his assailants who called themselves Templars. The Deacon was, as it turned out, reluctant to let Jack pay. He fussed about the bill. "A vow of poverty doesn't mean I don't have cash," he said, insisting to at least pay the tip.

"Okay, pay the tip," Jack grinned, "but you oughta save your money and buy a better truck."

Jack took a pull on a longneck and considered for a moment some long ago information he'd learned concerning the Knights Templar. He began almost plaintively, "Deacon, about all I know of the Templars comes from a book called *Ivanhoe*, that was required reading in junior high school." Junior High, where the Ninth Grade teacher had labeled Jack a second class student who would be fortunate to complete high school. He half wondered where she was today and if she might reconsider her assessment.

For an hour Deacon Burns told a tale of Christian piety and sacrifice by Templar warriors for the Lord. But what he talked about next was unsettling and it made Jack suddenly skeptical. "I believe

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that the crucifix for which you search may hold the key to the location of writings at odds with the canon—Gnostic gospels.”

Jack raised his eyebrows and glanced at the Deacon. There was a fire in his eyes that was unrecognizable. “You alright, Deacon?”

“Sure probably born a few centuries too late, though.” His expression changed immediately and he said, “Let’s return to your education.”

A document, known as the Chinon Parchment was found in the Vatican Secret Archives, apparently after having been filed in the wrong place in 1628. It is a record of the trial of the Templars, and shows that Clement initially absolved the Templars of all heresies in 1308, before formally disbanding the Order in 1312. “It’s my guess the Roman Catholic Church’s position will be that the medieval persecution of the Knights Templar was unjust. That there was nothing inherently wrong with the Order or its Rule, and that Pope Clement was pressured into his actions by the magnitude of the public scandal and the dominating influence of King Philip IV.”

“Hmm, interesting. And there are Templars to this day?”

“Yes, and also groups who claim to be affiliated with the International Order, but are not. My suspicion is that some of those people assaulted you. Something like a secret Templar organization within the International Order.”

It was the last comment that troubled Jack the most. What did the Deacon know about the Templars he hadn’t shared? And what about the Gnostic gospels? Another concern flooded his consciousness. How did a “simple Deacon” come to possess such knowledge?

The last thought prompted Jack to query, “How does a simple Deacon come to know all these things?”

“Remember, Jack, I’m first a history professor. You’re a PhD, you know our mantra, ‘publish or perish.’ So the university library is full of my papers on the Templars—holy warriors sworn to protect against enemies of the faith and writings abhorrent to the canon—like the Gnostic gospels.”

“And the threat from Gnostics? Come on Deacon, if the secular nasties haven’t overthrown the church yet, they either can’t use

*George Rogerson*

what's written or there is nothing else hidden in some Vatican hole with which they can challenge Christendom." In spite of himself, Jack was pleased with the logic. Clerics went around inventing ways to scare the "hell" out of their congregations and Cliff was clearly no exception. "Sounds like church myth to me."

"That's what I like about you Jack," Burns smiled bleakly. "You're willing to accept aboriginal oral history over a trained professional's opinion and blithely discount the careful research of church historians. The Council of Bishops, no less, who codified the bible in 325 AD."

"How's any of this involve me?"

"Stay with me Jack. Church historians believe that Pope Clement XIV knew the whereabouts of ancient Gnostic gospels. Why he didn't order them destroyed is beyond belief..."

Jack tried to interrupt, but the Deacon raised his hand.

"What troubles me most, though, is their purpose."

"Whose purpose?" Jack asked.

The Deacon was more intense, "There is a story," Burns said, ignoring the question, "that before the last heretic and the blasphemous documents were destroyed, the surviving evil ones made an oath. They knew their war with the church was lost, they knew their movement must fall and that forces of God would show them no mercy, and so they vowed to visit hell on their enemies. They promised one day to bring down the throne of Jesus and the Christian Church, and to do it they would use the power of their holiest books."

"The Gnostic Gospels?" Jack asked.

"Vatican documents attributed to Cardinal Cantolino, President of the Papal Secretariat during Clement's reign, contain an intriguing note concerning a code etched on the Pope's crucifix—a code to the location of the Gnostic gospels." He paused to stare

hard at Jack, turning away at last, from the burning green eyes. "Furthermore," he pressed on, "church historians suggest that a Padre Alvarez departed the Vatican with the crucifix. I believe you have stumbled on to the last person to have touched the cross, your So'qwa of the Puyallup."

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Jack was incredulous, “How long have you suspected this?” The Deacon stared rigidly ahead at a picture on the wall.

“Deacon!”

“Not until you came did I fully grasp the reality that the crucifix might still exist, and that it might come to the attention of latter day holy warriors.”

“To what end?” Jack asked.

“The gospels,” Burns said as he pushed his half-eaten meal away, then hunched toward Jack, both elbows on the table, “the heretical writings were introduced during the birth of Christendom and flourished until quashed by the church. However, the beast lives to this day in the secular world. They remain hidden away and the church seems not to recognize the potential for an assault on the faith, should they be uncovered. Nor will it until the threat is obvious, but by then it will be too late.”

~ Fall 1791 ~

### **Fouled Tongues**

*“A party of five Indians presented themselves to me on board the Santa Saturnina. They are fair in color. Their clothing consists of cedar shifts and skins with which the women barely cover them. All in ill repair. Their leader is well structured, intelligent and commands the obedience of the three women and child only with his eyes. He wears on his neck a crucifix many say was given to him by Padre Alvarez a member of the ship’s company on the Sonora fifteen, years ago.”*

Captain Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra  
Commander at Nootka

A crucifix is the key to hidden texts defying Christian canon. A man seeks the icon, unaware of its power to change the face of Christendom, or its potential for ultimate sanction from those pledged to keep its secret.

The Crucifix

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