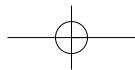
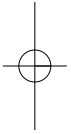




Picture Perfect



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Salem Falls

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My Sister's Keeper

Vanishing Acts

The Tenth Circle

Nineteen Minutes

Change of Heart

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Harvesting the Heart

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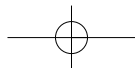
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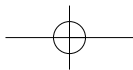
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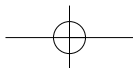
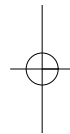
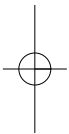
*For my mother – my biggest fan, my first reader,
my sounding board, my friend*





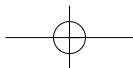
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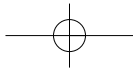
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1993





Long ago on the shores of the Atlantic there lived a great Indian warrior called Strong Wind. He had a magical power – he could make himself invisible – which enabled him to walk around in the camps of his enemies and steal their secrets. His home was a tent that stood beside the sea in a calm, calling breeze, and he lived there with his sister.

His skill as a fighter carried his reputation far, and many maidens wanted to marry him. But Strong Wind would have none of their silly, simpering smiles, their false boasts of being the perfect match. He said that he would marry the first maiden who could see him coming home at night.

It was a test he'd conceived to reveal a maiden's truthfulness. Many came to walk down the beach with his sister as the sun hissed into the sea, wishing to capture his heart. Strong Wind's sister could always see him, even when he was invisible to the rest of the world. So when her brother approached, she would turn to the current girl who peered over the horizon. 'Do you see him?' And every waiting maiden would quickly lie: Yes, yes, there he was. Strong Wind's sister would ask, 'With what does he draw his sled?' The answers were many: With the hide of a caribou. With a long, knotted stick. With a length of strong hemp. His sister would know the lies for what they were, simple guesses, and she knew that Strong Wind would not choose this girl whose footsteps mirrored hers in the wet sand.

In the village lived a mighty chief, a widower with three daughters. One was years younger than the others. Her face was as lovely as the



first rain of summer; her heart could hold gently the pain of the world. Her older sisters, gnarled with their own jealousy, took advantage of her nature. They tried to detract from her beauty by leaving her clothes in rags, cutting off her shining black hair, burning the smooth skin of her cheeks and throat with glowing coals. They told their father the girl had done these things to herself.

Like the other maidens in the village, the two older sisters tried to see Strong Wind coming through the twilight. They stood on the beach with his sister, feeling the water run over their legs, and waited. As always, Strong Wind's sister asked if they saw him, and, lying, they said yes. She asked how he drew his sled, and, lying, they guessed rawhide. When they entered his tent, the flaps shuddered in the wind. They hoped to see Strong Wind bent over his dinner, but they saw nothing at all. Strong Wind, knowing their deception, remained invisible.

The day the chief's youngest daughter went to seek Strong Wind, she rubbed her burned face with earth to cover her scars and patched her skirt with bark from the trees. She passed other maidens on the way to the beach, who laughed to see her go and labeled her a fool.

But Strong Wind's sister was waiting, and when the sun slipped heavy in the sky she took the girl to the beach. As Strong Wind drew his sled closer, his sister asked, 'Do you see him?' The girl replied, 'No,' and Strong Wind's sister shivered at the sound of the truth. 'Do you see him now?' she asked again.

At first the girl did not speak, but her face was turned to the sky and her eyes were as bright as fire. 'Oh yes,' she finally breathed, 'and he is wonderful. He dances on the clouds and he walks with the moon on his shoulder.'

Strong Wind's sister turned toward her. 'With what does he draw his sled?' she asked.

'With the rainbow.'

She too stared at the sky. 'And what is his bowstring made of?'

The girl smiled, and the night washed over her face. 'Of the Milky Way,' she said. 'And his arrows are tipped with the brightest of stars.'



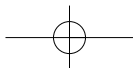
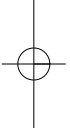
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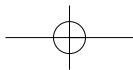
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Strong Wind's sister knew that because the girl had admitted she hadn't seen him at first, her brother had shown himself to her. She took the girl home and bathed her, running her palms over the pitted skin until all the scars disappeared from her body. She sang while the girl's hair grew thick and black down her back. She gave her her own rich clothes to wear and showed her into Strong Wind's tent.

The next day Strong Wind married her, and she walked with him across the sky and looked down on her People. The girl's two sisters were livid and shook their fists at the spirits, demanding to know what had transpired. Strong Wind resolved to punish them for the hurt they had caused his bride. He changed them into aspen trees and dug their roots deep into the earth. Since that day, the leaves of the aspen tremble in fear of the coming of Strong Wind. No matter how quietly he approaches, they shiver, because they cannot put out of their minds his great power, and his rage.

– Algonquin Indian legend





Chapter One

The first thing the groundskeeper saw when he went to tend to the small cemetery behind St Sebastian's was the body that someone had forgotten to bury.

She was lying on top of a grave, her head pressed close to the headstone, her arms crossed over her stomach. She was almost as white as the seven faded granite markers that surrounded her. The groundskeeper took a deep breath, dropped his trowel, and crossed himself. He inched toward the body and leaned over, casting a shadow.

Somewhere overhead a gull screamed, and as the woman's eyes flew open, the groundskeeper turned and ran through the iron gate into the dizzying streets of Los Angeles.

The woman looked into the sky. She did not know where she was, but it was quiet; and since her head was pounding, she was grateful. She tried to remember how she had gotten there in the first place.

Sitting up, she touched the gravestone and squinted as the letters dipped and blurred before her eyes. She pulled herself to her feet and balanced against the stone for support. Then she leaned over and retched, clutching her stomach and blinking back tears at the pain shooting through her temples.

'A church,' she said aloud, jumping at the pitch of her own voice. 'This is a church.'

She walked to the gate and stared at the cars and buses going by. She had taken three steps away from the church before she

realized she did not know where she was supposed to go. 'Think,' she commanded herself. She put a hand to her forehead and felt the slip of her own blood.

'Jesus,' she said. Her hand was trembling. She felt for a tissue in the pocket of her jacket, a worn bomber jacket she couldn't remember buying, and came up instead with a tube of Blistex and \$2.24 in change. She stepped back toward the graveyard and looked behind the headstones for a pocketbook, a knapsack, a clue.

'I was mugged,' she said, wiping her brow with her sleeve. 'I must have been mugged.' She ran to the door of the rectory and banged, but it was locked. She moved to the gate again, planning to go to the closest police station and tell them what had happened. She would give her address and she would call . . .

Who *would* she call?

She stared at a bus sighing at the corner stop. She didn't know where she was. She didn't know the closest police station.

She didn't even know her own name.

Chewing on a fingernail, she stepped back inside the gate, where she felt safer. She knelt beside the grave she'd been lying upon and rested her forehead against the cool headstone. Maybe the priest would be back soon, she thought. Maybe someone would come by and offer to help her. Maybe she'd just stay right there.

Her head began to throb, a drumbeat that threatened to split her in two. She sank to the ground and lay back against the gravestone again, pulling her jacket close to ward off the chill of the earth.

She would wait.

She opened her eyes, hoping for answers, but all she could see were clouds that covered the sky like a bruise.

There wasn't enough land in California.

He could *feel* it, beating like a hammer at the base of his throat,

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this claustrophobia born of the hissing asphalt under his tires and the condos pressed so close they left no room to breathe. So he kept driving west to find the ocean, hopefully before it got dark. He had never seen it. There had only been pictures, and accounts from his mother and his father.

He remembered stories his father had told him, stories he hadn't believed at the time, of Indians jailed in the 1800s who died overnight because they couldn't stand the confinement.

He thought of the statistics from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which said that sixty-six percent of Indians who left the reservations returned, unable to live in the cities. Of course, he was not entirely Sioux. But he was not entirely white, either.

He smelled it before he saw it. The wind carried him the salt from the waves. He parked the rusted secondhand pickup on the shoulder of the road and ran down the sloping dune. He did not stop running until his sneakers were submerged, until water stained the thighs of his jeans like tears.

A gull screamed.

William Flying Horse stood with his arms outstretched, his eyes fixed on the Pacific Ocean but seeing, instead, the brindled plains and rolling Dakota hills that he would not call home.

On the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, Route 18 took you into town, and if you wanted to get anywhere else you navigated by natural landmarks or long-abandoned vehicles, since there weren't many other roads. But it had been three days since he'd moved to Los Angeles and Will had yet to get his bearings.

He was renting a little row house in Reseda, which was close enough to the LAPD to eliminate the need for a long commute, and far enough away for him to feel like he wasn't attached to his job. He didn't have to report to work until tomorrow – the paperwork for the position had been done through the mail – and he had planned to use this time to find his way around LA.

Will slammed his fist onto the steering wheel. Where the hell

was he? He groped along the front seat, looking for the map he'd tossed away minutes before. He squinted at the tiny red roads, but the overhead light in the pickup had been one of the first things to go, so he pulled to the curb underneath a streetlight. He peered at the map in the soft glow. 'Shit,' he said. 'Beverly Hills. I was here an hour ago.'

For the first time in decades, he wished he was more of an Indian.

He blamed his faulty sense of direction on his *wasicun* blood. All his life he'd heard stories of his grandfather's father, who tracked the goddamned buffalo by the slightest rising of the wind. And when the woman his father loved had left without a word, hadn't he ridden for miles using only his intuition to find her? Compared to that, how difficult could it be to find the San Diego Freeway?

Once, when Will was little, he'd followed his grandmother into the woods to collect roots and leaves for her medicines. He'd picked the ones she pointed to, cedar and sweet flag and wild licorice. He'd turned his back only for a moment, and his grandmother had disappeared. For a while Will had wandered in circles, trying to remember his father's lessons about footprints left on broken leaves, snapped branches, the sense of movement in the heavy air. It was hours before his grandmother found him again, cold and curled beneath the burl of an oak. Wordlessly she pulled him by the hand in the direction of home. When the small log house came into view, she turned and cupped Will's chin in her hand. 'You,' she sighed. 'So white.'

He had only been ten, but that was the moment he knew he would never be like his grandparents. To them, to everyone who lived around him, he would always be *iyeska*, a mixed-blood. He had spent the next twenty-five years acting as white as he could, figuring if he could not be like his father's people, he would be like his mother's. He threw himself into his schoolwork so that he'd be able to go to college. He spoke only English, even at his

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grandparents' home where Lakota was the primary language. He nodded when his white bosses described the Sioux as lazy alcoholics and when the words ran cold through his blood; he wrapped his indifference around him like a cloak.

Well, he was white now. He was off the reservation and he was planning to stay, and as for finding his way out of Beverly Hills, he'd do what every other white man would do: he'd find a gas station and get directions.

Shifting gears, Will eased the truck away from the curb and started down the street again. The opulence of Beverly Hills amazed him – the wrought-iron gates and the pink marble fountains, the lights that winked from great Palladian windows. There was a party going on at one of the houses. Will slowed down to glimpse the silent ballet of waiters and guests and it took a moment for him to notice the flashing lights of the police cruiser pulling up behind him.

Co-workers, he thought, as he stepped out of the pickup to ask directions. There were two officers. One was blond, and that was all Will had time to notice before the man slammed his head against the cab of his truck, pinning his arm behind him.

'Look what we got here, Joe,' he said. 'Another fucking spic.'

'Listen,' Will heard himself rasp, and the cop brought his free hand down between Will's shoulder blades.

'Don't talk back to me, Pedro,' he said. 'We've been following you for ten minutes. What the hell business do you have in a neighborhood like this?'

'I'm a cop.' Will's words fell heavy to the pavement.

The man released his wrist, and Will pushed away from the truck and faced him. 'Let's see your badge.'

Will swallowed and looked him in the eye. 'I don't have it yet. I don't have my piece, either. I just got here; I start work tomorrow.'

The officer's eyes narrowed. 'Yeah, well, if I don't see no badge, I don't see no cop.' He nodded to his partner, who started to walk back to the cruiser. 'Get the fuck out of here.'

Will clenched and unclenched his fists as he watched the cop's retreating back. 'I'm one of you,' he shouted, and behind the thick plate glass of the police cruiser's windshield, he saw the officer laugh. Walking back to his truck, he stared at the people at the party on the hill, laughing and drinking like nothing at all had happened.

The moon slid behind a cloud as if it were embarrassed, and at that moment two truths struck Will: He did not like LA. And he was not white.

When she awakened the sun had set. She sat up and leaned against the familiar gravestone. Somewhere to the east, a searchlight was cutting across the sky, and she wondered if some awards show was scheduled for that night – they were a dime a dozen in LA.

She pulled herself to her feet and began to walk toward the gate. With each footstep, she spoke aloud a different female name, hoping that one might jar her memory. 'Alice,' she said. 'Barbara. Cicely.' She had gotten to Marta by the time she reached the street – Sunset Boulevard, she knew it right away and she realized she was making progress, since she hadn't remembered that earlier. She sat at the curb, in front of the sign that listed the name of St Sebastian's priest and the hours of confession and masses.

She knew she wasn't a member of the congregation – that she wasn't even Catholic – but she felt she'd been there before. She felt she'd *hidden* there, really, or taken refuge. What would she possibly have been running from?

Shrugging, she dismissed the thought and peered into the distance. Across the street and down the block was a billboard for a movie. '*Taboo*,' she read aloud, wondering if she'd seen it, since the title seemed so familiar. The poster showed a man half in silhouette, but even with the shaded features it was easy to tell that the actor was Alex Rivers, America's sweetheart. He'd successfully starred in everything from action thrillers to Shakespeare,

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and she remembered reading somewhere that his Q-rating for recognition ranked above the President's. He was smiling at her. 'At theaters everywhere,' she read, hearing the catch in her own voice.

Later on, when Will thought back to the moment, he realized it was the owl's fault. If he hadn't braked at the sound of that screech owl, he never would have stopped; and if he had never stopped, he wouldn't have made all the wrong decisions.

By some stroke of luck he'd found Sunset Boulevard, and although he knew Sunset Boulevard ran into the freeway, he wasn't sure if he was going in the right direction. The two gas stations he'd passed had been closed, and by now his right eye had nearly swollen shut and all he wanted to do was crawl into his bed and try to forget what had made him move to California in the first place.

He had just passed a McDonald's when he heard the call, sharp and piercing, like the cry of a child. Will had certainly heard owls before, but not since he'd left South Dakota. His grandparents, like many people on the reservation, believed strongly in the omens of birds. Since birds took flight, they were closer to the spirit world than man was, so ignoring a message from a bird might mean missing some warning or promise from powers greater than oneself. Will, in keeping with his rejection of the Sioux culture, had shrugged off the significance of hawks and eagles and ravens, although he couldn't bring himself to completely disregard owls, which his grandmother said were signs of death.

'Maybe it's the car,' he said aloud, and almost simultaneously he heard it again, a shrill scream that pulled at his insides.

He braked. Behind him, a van swerved, its driver cursing through the open window. Will pulled over in front of a Catholic church and parked in a towaway zone.

He got out of the truck and stepped onto the sidewalk, lifting his face to the sky. 'Okay,' he said sarcastically. 'Now what?'

The woman who came through the gate at the side of the church was faintly outlined in white, like a ghost. She saw Will and started to walk a little faster, a smile breaking across her face. Stunned, Will stared at her. She reached just as high as his shoulder and she had dried blood at the edge of her scalp. She came closer, until she stood just inches away, looking at the bruise above his eye. She reached out, this woman Will did not know, and brushed her fingers over the skin. He had never felt anything like it: a touch more quiet than a breath. 'Not you too,' she whispered, and then her eyes rolled back and she started to fall to the ground.

Will caught her and settled her in the passenger seat of his truck. When she started to stir, he sat as far back against the driver's-side door as he could, certain she'd scream when she found herself in a stranger's car. But her eyes blinked open and she smiled so easily that Will found himself smiling back.

'Are you okay?' he asked.

She swallowed and ran her hand over her hair, smoothing it away from her face. 'I think so,' she said. 'Have you been waiting long?'

She spoke as if she had known him all her life, which made Will grin. 'No,' he said. 'I just happened to be passing by.' He stared at her for a moment. 'Listen,' he said, 'if you're waiting for someone, I can wait with you until they get here.'

The woman froze. 'You don't know me?' Will shook his head. 'Oh God.' She rubbed her eyes. 'God.' She looked up at him through tears. 'Well, that makes two of us.'

Will wondered what he had gotten himself into, sitting in his own truck with a woman who was crazy, or so high she couldn't think clearly. He smiled hesitantly, waiting for her to fall back to reality. 'You mean you don't know me either.'

'I mean I don't know *me*,' the woman whispered.

Will looked carefully at her clear eyes, at the clotted cut on her temple. *Amnesia*, he thought. 'You don't know your name?' He switched automatically into the questioning he'd learned as a

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tribal police officer in South Dakota. 'Do you remember what happened to you? What brought you to the church?'

The woman glanced away. 'I don't remember any of that,' she said flatly. 'I suppose I should turn myself in to the police.'

The way she said it, like she'd committed a capital crime, made Will smile. He thought of driving her downtown to the Academy, the headquarters of the LAPD. Even if he wasn't officially on the roster, he surely could pull some strings and check the APBs, see if in fact anyone had been looking for her. He shifted slightly, wincing at the pain that shot over his eye. He remembered the blond cop in Beverly Hills, and he wondered if they all would be like that come Monday.

'I'm the police,' he said quietly, and even as the words were forming Will knew he would not take this woman to the LAPD, not after what had happened to him, not right away.

Her eyes narrowed. 'Do you have a badge?'

Will shook his head slowly. 'I just moved here. I live in Reseda. I start work tomorrow.' He caught her eye. 'I'll take care of you,' he said. 'Do you trust me?'

She looked at the sharp angles of his face, at the light shifting over his black hair. Nobody else had come. Yet when he had appeared, she'd run to him without any hesitation. Surely for someone who was not thinking with reason, but only with gut instinct, that had to count for something. She nodded.

He held out his hand. 'I'm William Flying Horse. Will.'

She smiled. 'Jane Doe.' She placed her fingertips against his palm, and with her touch this strange city fell into place. Will thought about the song of the owl, and this gift that had literally dropped into his arms, and as he glanced at her he knew that in some way she was now his.