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Claude D. Kezer

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Song of Little Wolf

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
DONNA K. HILL

*To honor the Muscogee
(Creek) Nation*

*Dedicated to my mother,
Jeanetta Laura (Brook)
Kezer- Hickory Ground
House, Tholophlocco House
and my father, James Daniel
Kezer, both longtime
residents of Okemah,
Oklahoma, and pioneers in
Indian Territory.*

BY CLAUDE D. KEZER

My great-grandmother, as a child, was left to die on the Trail of Tears. Was she abandoned, was she forgotten amidst the terrible confusion and exhaustion of the long march? My mind, my soul want to know my line beyond my great-grandmother, but this trail is cold and lost to me.

She was found by a childless white couple who took her for their own, raised her in their world. She married a white man who gave her children. Their blood was half. Her daughter married a white man and he gave her children. My mother, a child of the half quantum, was born to this union. Her blood was one-quarter.

My mother married a white man, and he gave her children. Though my mother's mother made her children promise to live white in a white man's world and not speak the language, my father had great respect for the Creeks. He learned their language and customs and kept the INDIAN alive in his children.

I thank my mother for my portion of Creek blood and her unspoken influence of the blood. I thank my father for openly nurturing the Indian way in me.

I firmly support the stand that the Muscogee Nation takes on self government of Indians, by Indians, for Indians.

The nation, the heritage, the customs, the history, the pride must be held strongly, because it is good.

The sun had risen from its deepest home seven times in my life, when I met two men whose lives touched mine in ways that make me remember.

One, a great dancer, Lone Eagle was already a legend. His prowess in telling stories through dance was great. He was the snake dancer.

How I watched his movements as he danced. How I left my own consciousness and danced in his body. Like a dream, I was a part of every step, every gesture his powerfully graceful body made.

His white world name was Buck Burgess, and both of his names were strong.

My white name as a child was Sonny. How I wished for a dancer's prowess and a strong name. As this great dancer walked on my father's ground, I would try to walk

like him as I reflected in his greatness.

Marcellus Williams was the other. A young man of nineteen southern suns, he was wise beyond his years.

A dancer of some note, his greatest talent was in herbs and in knowing, and in his strength he saw my desire.

He taught me to dance for war, of the eagle, and for joy. He gave me my Indian name, and his name has grown great among our nations. He is a great shaman.

Only a small part of my blood is Creek, but it is the part of me that sees the world. It is the part of me that dreams.

I AM LITTLE WOLF.

The rhythm of the drums echoes the beat of the Indian heart. Though the songs are old, each time I hear them they sound new.

The heart-drum beats are reflected in the faces of the dancers, and the faces mirror images of what was. And the faces reflect the searching of the heart for answers to the mysteries of man in his quest for understanding the way of his God, his place on Mother Earth, the reasons for his pain, his search for the old way.

The drums, the singers, the dancers all cry for answers. But the answers all say, "You must only remember, and teach your children to remember, for the great change has come. We can only live in the change, and remember the long-past time of greatness, and the beauty of our people and the simplicity of Mother Earth."

The rhythm of the drums echoes the beat of the Indian Heart.

Though the songs are old, each time I hear them they sound new.

Playing in the summer rain, I feel refreshed. Seeking shelter from the winter, I avoid the chill.

Playing in the snow, pleasure is great. Being lost in the snow, fear holds my spirit.

Seeing the great wind pass by is an awesome

thrill. Living through the destruction of the great wind leaves me numb and senseless.

How we see what we see is the balance between fun and fear, comfort and pain, laughter and tears.

The need for rain and too much rain.

The warmth and terror of fire.

The happiness and hurt of love.

The peace among peoples, and war.

In all of life, there is good and evil.

All good may be used for evil.

From all evil, good may come.

And this is the nature of all things.

And this is the beginning of the wisdom of MOTHER EARTH.

I sat at the feet of the old men. I listened to their stories of the old way.

I was a young man of sixteen southern suns, seeking the road to wisdom. My father had said, "If you desire to be wise, you must learn to be still, be silent, and listen."

Old men talk slow and one must learn patience just to listen, and I learned that patience is the pathway to wisdom.

As I listened I learned that every product of Mother Earth has its own way. I learned that to grow wise, one must discover the nature of all things. When one understands the ways of the animals, of the rooted plants, of the parasites, and of men, one begins to know. When one begins to understand the ways of the winds, the waters, the lights of the sky both large and small, and of fire, one grows in wisdom.

I broke my stillness with my ignorance and asked, "How does one begin to understand all these things, for I wish to become wise."

And the old men paused, and the eldest slowly asked, "Have you ever walked in your dream-mind in another man's steps?" And thinking back to Lone Eagle and how I had danced in his body in my imagination as a child, I answered, "Yes."

"Then you must," said he, "walk in the ways

of all Mother Earth's creatures. Only then can you grow in wisdom. Then you will grow as the great river grows, from all of the small streams that feed it. From the small stream that you are, you will gather the strength of many streams and grow toward the wisdom of the great body of water that knows no boundaries."

As I have grown in years, heeding the path of Wisdom, I have learned the nature of many of Mother Earth's bounty and of the elements from the skies that aid her. But I am not all wise as I desired to be, for in my growth toward wisdom I have learned one important thing. Mother Earth and all that is in her is always changing, and I will never be as wise as she.

A cold wind comes from the constant star, and the mist of water chills my naked body back to morning life, as I stand to greet it two hours before the sun.

The trees begin to tell their season story by coloring their leaves and dropping them to the ground. And beauty is in the chill air and on the trees and on the ground, as the grass goes from green to brown.

The fur on the animals begins to grow long, and soon the dead trees will share their spirit with me as he dances yellow and red and blue and white to keep me warm.

In the passage of three moons, the white blanket will cover the ground, and the children will track the rabbit, and the men will track the deer, and many days will be spent inside playing games and telling stories with our families and our friends.

This is the season of the North Wind. To him it belongs, and we belong to him. It is a time to be happy and close, to rest and stay warm, to guide and be guided.

It is a time for sickness, and death. A time that takes the old and weak and young and weak. It is a time when the strong must grow stronger. It is a time of great peace and happiness or of great turmoil and grief. It is a time to look forward to

renewal. For we who have passed many seasons know that the world will reawaken and the new will replace the old, and the time of the South Wind will bring the birds to sing us awake to a new world, and we will share the joy of the new season with our Mother Earth.

Through the lashes of nearly closed eyes, I have seen the wonder that the mind brings to an early morning forest. I have felt the frozen mist on the brows of my eyes as I sat unmoving, watching a doe watch me in wonder.

I have gazed from a high place at the world below, seeing the smallness of what before I had perceived as great.

And I grew.

I have studied the red ant and the black bear and respect their power.

I have stood unblinking, waiting for many wasps to leave my face, and upon their leaving gave thanks for my life to the Great Spirit.

I have raced grandfather turtle and the quick rabbit, and know what it is to win and lose when there is no true competition.

I have witnessed the silent stealth of the coyote and heard his mournful song.

I have thanked the tree for shade, for lodging, and for warmth it gives at the winter fire.

And I grew.

I have danced for the corn, for the rain, and of the eagle.

I have sung songs of joy and mourning. I have spent time in play and in prayer.

And I grew.

As a child and youth and young man, I wondered of the old ones, how did they gain their wisdom?

As an old one, I wonder at the child, the youth, and the young men. Will they ever grow wise?

And the answer is yes if they survive, and yes if they do not survive, because we all go to a better place, a happy place, a learning and reunion place when our spirits leave us. And our bodies feed the

worm, and then they all return to our Mother Earth, and in spirit, we grow.

The clouds came to sleep in the lowlands of Mother Earth. They spent the night hours of their final rest on her bosom.

As the great light of day pushed through the new clouds of his northern rising place, he rested on the uppermost before he began his long climb.

As this great day light grew in its strength, the clouds of earth began their movement into the spirit world. Fading, as a great Chief does in his old age, they moved slowly into the skies of the spirit world to give beauty to the eyes of our departed.

The clouds, like men, grow tired and come to rest on the bosom of Mother Earth, before they go to the greater land beyond of beauty, peace, and foreverness.

I speak these words to the Master of Mother Earth, the One who lives as Chief of the great beyond.

From him who made the lights in the sky, who turns the earth from the dark side to the light side, I ask these honors.

Honor my eyes with beauty in all they see.
Honor my mouth with words of wisdom.
Honor my ears with sounds of joy, my nose with the fragrance of cleanliness, my hands with the embrace of family and friends.

With these honors all the joys of life will be mine. My encounter with death will be most peaceful, knowing I will pass into even a better place in service to the Great Spirit.

Why should I be angry, when I have a home for myself and my family? Yes, it's called low income housing. Yes, it's located at the end of the road on the far side of town. Yes, it's surrounded by business and industry.

Why should I be angry, when we still have forests and plains? Yes, the forests are owned by corporations or the white man who put up signs

saying "KEEP OUT." Yes, the plains are still there, with barbed wire fences and signs that say "NO TRESPASSING."

Why should I be angry, when we still have the rivers to enjoy? Yes, the scenic waterways are full of power boats and beer cans and wrappers from fast food joints. Yes, the rivers are polluted with industrial waste and farm sprays. Yes, many of the fish are not good to eat because of the poisons in the water.

I have no reason to be angry, I am told, because tribes are given autonomy. Yes, but isn't this just another form of segregation, or marking and identifying?

I have no reason to be angry, I am told. So I escape in pow-wows, dancing, memory, by dropping out, not trying, all too often in drink, and I'm not angry. . . . I'm FURIOUS!

They came in the store where I worked. Members of my tribe, men older than their years, and I was ashamed for them.

I feel sorry for them. My heart aches for them. Men who spend their time in town shuffling down the street, disoriented, sitting or prone in the alleys, locked up in the jail, they exist on the edge of life just beyond reality.

Once they were children who played, young men who aspired and loved, men who tried and dreamed. Now they are empty shells with nightmares day and night, vacant lots with weeds of discontent, shuffling into this store where I will deceive them.

I go quickly to the "Hair Care" counter, empty it of all the bottles of Bay Rum Hair Dressing, and lie to them that we are out of that product.

They are blank-faced. They know I am lying, but there is no protest. They know they will find someone in town who will sell it to them, and they leave in their unsteady gait in pursuit of their "tonic."

I knew it was futile, but I would not contribute to their disgrace.



They say, "All Indians are stoic, stern faced."
 Look at the children. Are they stoic? No, they are happy, animated, full of dreams.
 Only when the child becomes an adult does the countenance change, for then they understand the way of the "civilized" world.
 Only then do they learn to wear the mask. The mask of noncommittance.
 The mask that hides their rage.
 Living in the white man's world means living by his measure of time. . . minutes, seconds, hours.
 To the Indian this is an imposing restriction, because his measures of time are the sun, phases of the moon, and the needs of his family.
 In today's world, to the white man, time means money in his pocket.
 To many Indians who still think Indian, money in his pocket means he has more time.

"I'm coming to see you."
 "When will you get here?"

"When I arrive."
 He who sees far is like the eagle.
 He who sees what cannot be seen has great medicine.
 He who looks to the future is wise.
 He who sees into the hearts of men is great council.
 And these are the requirements of a great chief.

And the great Chief uses these gifts to benefit his people.
 And the Chief who lives to benefit his people is like the eagle who soars to the greatest heights. He is held in esteem by those he serves.

This was true in the old days.
 This is true today.

"The Great White Father in Washington makes this treaty with you. It will last forever," said the Agent. But, it did not last forever.

The Indian lived with the capriciousness of nature and was happy to do so. But to live with the whims of a vacillating and invisible Great White Father was unbearable.

To be herded like cattle, uprooted like a tornado rips up trees, denuded by the white man's flood, all this was unbearable for the Indian. So, he became in his mind like the eagle. He learned to soar in his imagination. In his body, he still walks tall. In his heart, he still has dreams. In his mind he still has pride. And this stubborn mindset has prevailed.

Today, the Indian is regaining control over his life. Today he can again have the pride of self-determination, because his Chiefs have learned to work and fight with the white man's tools; Indian lawyers, Indian politicians, EDUCATION.

An hour before the first light of day, I stepped into the cool morning breeze. Looking

up, into the realm of the stars, to offer my morning thanks to the Great Spirit for the opportunities proffered by another day of tasks, I saw the most beautiful sight.

The Rabbit-on-the-moon appeared as a deep vortex to the brilliant half-orb of the night sky. Portent of change in the weather. Hopes for a change in the world. Thanks for the change in my life. Nature's symbol for the coming washing of her earth.

There are streams and rivers that flow underground. Some flow freely, while others seep slowly. But, there is a current to be found.

The blood in the veins of the Indian flows like the water under the ground. Some flows fast and impatiently, while others flow slow and mark time.

Sadly, because the sun of the white man's world burns so hot, in some Indians their river is turned into vapor and they are Indian no more.

Sadly, because for most Indians the stream is strong, the river runs into the great water of Heritage and collectively the strength is increased and the tribes will live on forever.

You see me at some of your functions and you think, "Who is this light-skinned old bald-headed man? Why is he here? Has he come to see us wild Indians like a carnival sideshow?"

If you would take the moment to hold my hand in yours, you would feel the pulse, the river that flows in me.

You would sense my reverence for the wolf, my awe of the eagle, my insights into nature, my love of the old ways, my understanding of the betrayals, my hopes for the future.



I know that I must earn your respect. But, I also know that you must earn mine. I have no respect for any man who sets a bad example, no matter what his heritage.

Individually, I give you respect unless you prove me foolish. Collectively, I give you respect, because I believe in quantum control of the tribe.

I give you respect, because I do not condemn or condone until I have walked in your steps.

All I ask is a chance for you to see that my blood flows the same direction as yours.

Fred Beaver, my mother's second cousin, was a man who captured his ancestry in great simplicity through the masterful strokes with his tools of graphic art. Many paint. Few are recognized as great.

What is the secret of greatness? Experts in all fields have various criteria they feel must be met before the title "great" is added to any name.

In all art forms, the answer is CAPTURE THE ESSENCE, the spirit, the soul of the effort,

and greatness may then occur.

Many strive. Few achieve. All long for it.
Fred Beaver. Artist. GREAT.

The animals grow nervous before the ground shakes.

The birds fly south before the snow falls.

The flies become buzzing pests before they die.

All creatures have their normal senses and, usually, one dominates as most important for their survival. But, all creatures have senses beyond "normal" and many listen to these as well.

The modern world says that the only senses which can be trusted are the five "normal" ones. And, here is a major difference between the modern world and the Indian world.

The Indian still listens to his beyond-normal senses, for he knows them as "real." They are a part of his nature. They set him apart from and above the modern world, because he has his modern knowledge increased by his Indian natural sense.

In his youth his breath was warm and friendly.

In his age of passion, he breathes whirlwinds of aggression. When his time for conquest comes he builds his strength for the path of war. He blusters with hot breath. Raging with destruction, he lays to waste all that are in his path.

When he matures, he rests, gently breathing, caressing those he loves.

He is the wind, and we learn from him. We grow to be like him, and as we grow, we age. And, as we age, our breath cools. And when we're old and death is near, our breath goes cold. It can no longer warm our bodies, and our bodies fall under the spell of the north wind. And, our bodies lie under the blanket of snow, as our spirits seek the warmth of the Great Spirit.

Much of the time she is silent, predictable, loving.

At times she is fragile, sometimes soft, sometimes hard and unyielding.

Sometimes she trembles. Other times she violently shakes and screams horrors to the skies.

Her cycles come and go with near regularity.

Most times she is patient, but sometimes she brings forth before her season.

Most of the time she seems happy, but she is not above scorn and rebuke.

Much of the time she's crying, but her tears flow in all her moods whether joyous or angry.

Her offspring bring joy and pain to our lives.

She suckles us from birth to death.

In every way she is like a woman, and that's why we call her MOTHER EARTH.

Where he is, Mother Earth brings forth.

Where he is not, Mother Earth is barren.

He gives life.

He gives death.

He is our friend.

He is our enemy.

He is in the sky.

He is on the ground.

He is under the ground.

He is the first thought for where we build our camps.

He is water, and without him we are nothing.

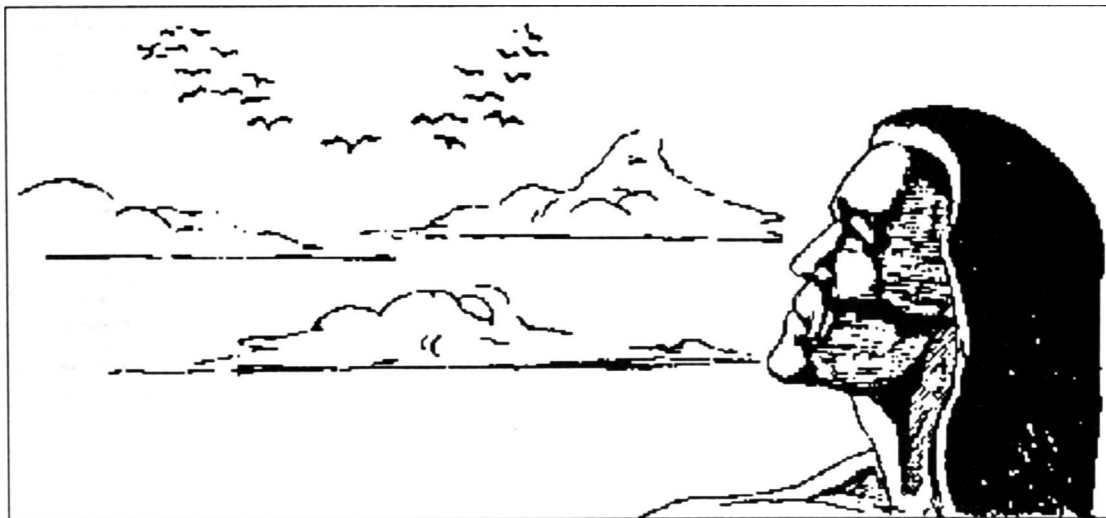
The rod of brilliant light that comes before the thunder is like unto that rod of the Great Spirit which strikes through my heart. It causes these words to flow.

These words that uphold the beauty of creation, that see as the spirit sees, feel as it feels, love as it loves, hear as it hears, these allow me to touch all that is. And, being a part of all that is, when I experience it, I experience myself.

The Great Spirit Father and Mother Earth, these are the parents of all mankind and must be honored.

Honor your Father and Mother, and they will in turn honor you.

The robin sings, before the barnyard cock,



to greet the morn. Its song a sweet reminder,
another chance of life is born. It gentles all who
hear it, it urges them along, but you've got to get
up early to hear the robin's song.

Why do all the old ones rise before dawn,
and go out of their homes to stand barefoot on
the lawn, and breathe the clean air deeply that
wafts gently from the south, and hum quiet
lovely tunes that flow easy from the mouth?

It must be that they find a special force that
time of day, for it's evident they spend this time
in thought. They hope. They pray.

The quiet and sense of peace is something
we employ. We think of all the ones we love,
our sorrow and our joy.

We thank our source of love for standing by
us for so long. Besides, you've got to get up
early to hear the robin's song.

When my time on earth is over, and it's time
to go to sleep, I hope to do it early just before
the first light's peep, surrounded by the ones I
love to help me move along, and once more I
hear the glory of the robin's morning song.

I am Little Wolf. From the direction of
creativity I come. Toward the direction of

fulfillment, I go. My destiny is to create and to
lead others to learning. My life is an opening-
up, a growing thing, that shares itself in all
manner of the arts.

Look to me. I will not tell you answers, I
will only create questions. For each of us must
find our own answers to the mysteries of Mother
Earth and the Great Spirit.

There are many who are in touch with
Mother Earth, the Great Spirit, and their own
spirit place in the oneness of all creation. Look
to these.

It is time for a return to the way of
comprehension. Look to the way-pointers who
ask nothing but understanding.

Only when we find a balance between our two
opposing forces, only when we couple them, may
we find true peace and total positive growth.

Look to those who cause you to ask questions.
Seek answers. Begin by understanding that for
every thing got, something must be given. Don't fail
to offer thanks to the spirit of what is got, and the
Great Spirit for making all possible.

I am Little Wolf. From the South I come, to the
North I go, as I learn to balance the East and West.

I am Little Wolf. . . .and this is my song. ■