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Three Parts Rain

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THREE PARTS RAIN

KAYLENE BIG KNIFE

Thunderbirds bring the rain—mother’s milk—to the people. Before a storm, horses race about as if to celebrate and welcome the arrival of rain, thunder and lightning. They dance! Thunderbirds are close friends of the horses. A Chippewa Cree grandmother told of this. There was once a white farmer who lived in Rocky Boy. He was very mean to the Indians. When his horses would have colts, he would take the colts and decapitate them. Soon, the Thunderbirds brought with them heavy storms, and the only place hit by the flashflood was the farmer’s land. The flood took everything from the farmer. It all washed away.

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In the summer of 2010, rain fell heavily upon the reservation lands of Rocky Boy. Flooding swallowed up coulees, roads, and a few houses. Hills broke apart and slid off into the brush, taking pine trees with them. The Rocky Boy Health Clinic slid, too, off of its foundation, rendering it unusable and unsafe. Approximately 280 tribal employees were placed on leave because of the flooding. About 500 housing units sustained water damage, and over 200 families were left without drinking water. At least \$32 million was estimated in damage from the flooding.

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I drove my grandmother, my mother, and my auntie to Canada one summer. We were on our way to see our relatives. Earlier in our trip, and past the Canadian border, we approached a bridge and river. My auntie said, “There used to be a huge snake in that river.” She held her hand up in front of her and curved her fingers down in the shape of a claw. “A Thunderbird came down and picked up the snake and carried it into the sky.” I studied the meandering river as I drove over the bridge, and I imagined a great battle between these two spirits. On my right, both hov-

ered high above me. Pinks, purples, and oranges wrapped the clouds as the sinking sun's rays pierced the sky from my left. An enormous, maned bird, with feathers made of the deep purples and blues found in storm clouds, gripped a thick snake in both talons. The white, glistening snake curved his head up to look at the Thunderbird. In the rich depths of the snake's red eyes, the Thunderbird's wrath was seen clearly. Ripped apart and strewn about, the snake became the stars. Some of his scales fell back to us, and they streaked the galaxy on their way down—*rain*. •