

Novitiate Falls

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THE CARETAKER'S DOG should have warned them. That old Lab should've sensed us coming through the night, the forty of us, our feet punching through the snow. He should've been barking at the front door, scratching the sill, but he had himself a nice sleepy spot by the woodstove, and his stomach was stretched tight with table scraps.

The caretaker and his family and friends were singing Auld Lang Syne, loud enough that we could hear it outside as we lined up alongside the cottage. They had been drinking champagne, and they had party horns, and at midnight they all took turns kissing, the children too. It was 1975. The dads shook hands, seized each other softly by the neck. The moms hugged. I watched all this through a split between the drapes—Anna, my granddaughter, clutched to my chest, both of us wrapped up in my winter coat.

At five past twelve, Floyd Littledeer knocked on the front door. He apologized to the caretaker, gave the story of how his car had gotten stuck. The caretaker was pudgy, his turtleneck snug. He had feathered, blonde hair and wore it parted down the middle. By his smile, I could tell his mind was still in the living room, that he was still celebrating and still happy while he stood there, that he had no idea what was coming.

"If I could use your phone," Floyd said, "or just come in to warm up." The line about the car was going to be the story even before the snowstorm, before the wind chill dropped so dangerously low.

Laughter broke from the house, and the caretaker stopped smiling. A New Year's Indian, braids and all. Floyd shifted foot to foot, his hands stuffed deep into his jacket pockets. He wore a blue bandana as a headband and had on his old army coat, the collar upturned. His face was pockmarked, just like his father's had been, and it had an unavoidable hardness to it. He should have turned his collar back down.

I tucked my nose against Anna's head and closed my eyes. What were we doing? My cheeks felt stiff, and I couldn't stop shivering, no matter how hard I tried to control it. The cold moved up through my shoes, ached into my knees, into my blood. Fran—Anna's mother, my only daughter—stood near the front of the group, a rifle in her frostbitten hands. Even if we turned back, how could we have survived the walk home?

Floyd had done something.

"Stop it," the caretaker yelled. I could hear the strain as he tried to hold Floyd back. He called for his wife. He told her to get his gun.

WHEN THE OTHERS ran, I followed. Floyd and the caretaker wrestled in the front hallway, and then Wilbur Wayka and Arnold Kineway charged in and knocked them to the floor. Arnold weighed more than three hundred pounds and he held the caretaker down while the rest of us pushed through into the living room. We had guns and knives and hatchets. The newspapers would report bows and arrows, though that wasn't true.

The dog barked and snapped, raising its hackles. We had toddlers like Anna with us, and older kids, and teenagers. Raymond Two Shoes, who was eighty-seven, had come. We were brothers and sisters and cousins. We were there to take back our land from the church, turn their unused novitiate into a hospital. We called ourselves the Menominee Warrior Society. Fran had scrawled our name in black marker across the back of her jean jacket.

"Wait a minute," the caretaker's friend said as we filled the room. "Wait a minute," he said, spreading his arms, stepping back. "Wait a minute now."

The dog was too fat and too old and too poor-sighted to do much, but it was loud and scary and Anna started crying. Anna was crying, and Marla Creapeau's kids were crying, and the white kids were crying. One of the wives was screaming for the animal to stop. End tables and coat racks and picture frames crashed to the floor. A foot kicked through a wall. The caretaker's friend kept telling us to wait. I remember thinking we'd been waiting long enough.

"Shut up." Sammy Fish finally yelled, and shot the dog.

THE CARETAKER CLAIMED he didn't know how to phone the Alexian Brothers, the Catholic order that owned the property. "I don't even have a direct number," he said. He sat squashed at one end of the couch, his friends and family jammed next to him. The dog had been dragged outside.

"My boss is a realtor in Shawano," the caretaker said. A few dots of red had seeped into the yarn of his turtleneck, and his nostrils were ringed with dried blood. "He deals with the Alexians."

"Boss is a good place to start," Floyd said, jabbing the phone at the caretaker. "Tell him what we told you." We wanted the deed.

I had moved close to the woodstove and was standing on the dog's dirty blanket, my toes and fingers burning back alive. Anna had quieted down, and I swayed with her in my arms, humming softly as she stared toward the ceiling. Other Warriors trampled through the other rooms, tearing them

apart. Eddie Kinepoway came skipping out of the caretaker's bedroom waving the caretaker's pistol. Arnold found a *Playboy*. The bottle of champagne went around until it was empty and someone smashed it on the edge of the kitchen counter. Fran pulled leftovers from the fridge.

The caretaker hesitated. Next to him sat his wife, and next to her, their son, her hands over his eyes. Earlier, through the window, I'd watched him jump up and down on the couch, his arms flapping like wings.

"I'm sorry," the caretaker said. He'd started dialing, and then stopped. The caretaker's wife nudged her husband and mouthed for him to call. "My address book," the caretaker said. He motioned toward the desk in the corner.

Someone passed Floyd the book, and he flung it at the caretaker, pages fluttering in the air, a business card dropping out. The caretaker thumbed through the numbers, and made a showy frown once he'd reached the end. I could see him looking around for something, some other way to buy time.

Floyd reached out and grabbed the caretaker's wife by the face, squeezing hard.

"Listen to her," he said.

USING THE CARETAKER'S keys, we made our way into the novitiate from the cottage. I stood in the middle of the main hallway, wondering where to go. The ceiling was domed, trimmed in gold, unreachable. Other Warriors moved quickly, turning on the lights, barricading doors, gathering supplies. Anna could only take tiny, wobbling steps, and I held her hand in mine so she wouldn't fall. Our shoes squeaked on the marble floors, echoing off the hard walls. "Isn't it fancy?" I asked Anna, though I knew she wouldn't know.

We assembled in a sitting room upstairs. Sammy Fish and Patrick Sanapaw brought in some firewood, and while Sammy split the pieces into kindling, Patrick built up the fire. Word came from next door that the caretaker had gotten through to the Alexians, and that the police were on their way, and that Floyd had let the caretaker and the others leave. On the way out, one of the cars got caught in a drift, and Floyd and Arnold helped dig it free.

Across from the sitting room was a kitchen, and a few women had begun heating water and sifting through the old teas they'd found. Fran brought a cardboard box from the caretaker's cottage and slid it onto the stainless steel counter. She had hot cocoa, coffee, a half-loaf of bread, cans of tuna, and jars

of homemade preserves. She stepped back and unwrapped her scarf, let the others attack the food. She blew into her hands and rubbed them together. I wondered where her rifle was. Before the water got too hot, Fran took the bottle from her back pocket and mixed some of Anna's formula.

"How is she?" Fran asked. Anna straightened her arms as I handed her off, pushed against Franny with her feet.

"She's been okay," I said. It didn't mean she would stay that way. Sometimes she hated being touched, or couldn't stand the way her clothes felt, and she would pull at them until the stitches ripped. Other times she wouldn't let go of you.

Fran took her daughter and rested her against her hip. She pulled Anna's shirt down over her belly, and tried to straighten her wispy brown hair, though static kept pulling it out of shape. Anna always looked so sweet and doll-like that it was sometimes easy to think she was just a normal child. She had a flat, soft face and dark eyes like her mother's. Her eyes were set wide apart, and they always looked a little droopy.

"She might need to be changed," I said.

Fran checked Anna, but didn't think she smelled. "I only brought the two diapers," she said.

People slid the couch and chairs closer to the fireplace. We rested and waited for the room to warm. A few had fallen asleep. Raymond Two Shoes snored like a cow. Sometimes one of the men would run in and check with Sammy and then dash out.

"I should try and lie down with her," Fran said.

I told her that I could do it, that it'd probably take a while, that I was tired anyway. "You look wide awake," I said.

Fran wanted to be with Anna, wanted to be the one taking care of her, but she still didn't know how. She still felt ashamed and broken, as broken as the rest of us, and I knew that part of the reasoning behind our stunt was that Franny thought it could maybe make up for some of it—that it could somehow take back all those days and nights she'd spent drinking, that it could reach forward into some altered future and pull free the kind of life she had denied her daughter.

"Are you sure?" Fran asked.

After all those years, Franny finally seemed full of the good kind of spirit, her eyes bright and sharp and sober. The elbows of her jacket were worn

through. She'd cut her bangs short just before Christmas, and I liked how it looked—liked that she could no longer hide her face behind that hair. She could be so beautiful. A beaded pendant of Otā'tshia, the Crane, circled her neck. That was our clan. Otā'tshia carried Owa'sse, the Bear, to his people upriver.

"The police will be coming," Fran said, handing Anna to me, even though she didn't need to explain. "The news reporters. They'll have to listen," she said. "I want the people to hear us, to have to hear us, to stop pretending they can't see."

I remembered thinking the same thing about her when she was younger, that I'd do anything I could to get her to hear me, that I'd yell as much as it took. I kicked her out so many times, dead-bolted that flimsy door, screamed that I never wanted to see her again. Each time I kicked her out, she eventually returned. Once she and a boyfriend robbed me, tied me to a chair in the kitchen when I tried taking back my purse. I remember how dirty her pants were, how bad she was shaking. When yelling didn't work, I tried speaking softly. Nothing seemed to change, and no matter what I said, no matter what volume, Franny's demons only got worse.

Fran kissed Anna's forehead. "I'll find you two later," she said, stroking my shoulder.

I didn't say anything as she left. "GET OUT," I once shrieked. Now I cry, *come home*.



I HEARD THE gunshots in my sleep, a long quiet pause between each one. I saw the sound rolling through the woods, pushing crows to flight.

"Hey," Marla said, shaking me awake. She was kneeling on the floor, and had Anna in her arms. They'd both been on the couch with me, but had slid down once the gunfire had started. Anna was still sleeping.

We transferred almost everyone into the kitchen across the hall, keeping low as we moved. It was an industrial-sized kitchen, with a large grill and two ovens and a gaping hole where the refrigerator would have been. Some of the children crawled along the low, empty shelves. Others sat with their parents, who listened to the back and forth outside. There were no windows, and the only natural light in the room was what seeped through the dusty

wall vent. Sometimes a gust of wind would huff through the opening. Sirens blared up and down the road. No one could tell me where Fran was.

A few hours later, Floyd joined us in the kitchen. Some of the novitiate's windows had been shot out, a few slate roof tiles knocked free, but no one had been hurt. Floyd had just spoken with the sheriff, and the sheriff had once again ordered us to surrender—immediately and without conditions. The first time he'd told us to surrender, we put a bullet hole in one of his cruisers.

I was sitting on the floor trying to get Anna to eat some of the instant mashed potatoes we'd made. Marla's kids were helping themselves right from the cook pot, their spoons clinking on the metal, but Anna was hardly interested. When Anna was a baby, I had to show Fran how to gently rub Anna's gums so that she'd take her nipple. It could still take hours to feed her.

"I'll tell you what he told me," Floyd said. "Tell you what I told him." So much of this is from what I've heard from others—from what Floyd had said *they'd* said, from what the newspapers had printed, from what we shared later, once it was all over.

"The sheriff insists we've broken the law," Floyd said. "Criminal trespass. Kidnapping. I tried to explain how we didn't see it that same way." He'd suggested the sheriff get familiar with a few treaties his government had made with us.

It calmed us to hear what was happening out there, to hear that it was going much like Floyd had said it would. Both sides agreed to a ceasefire. The Alexians said they'd work to get us immunity, but only if we came out. No one could speak to the deed yet.

I don't know who first thought of the occupation, if it was just Floyd or not. I thought Arnold was in on it, and Wilbur, and maybe a couple others later, including Fran. None of them had jobs. Floyd and Arnold received a little something from the VA and got by that way. The others made money by selling firewood or by raising rabbits. I know Franny used to do a lot of things.

But Floyd was always the leader. He'd been to the protest at Alcatraz and to Wounded Knee. He'd been fighting for restoration ever since he'd come back to Keshena, and once we got it, he didn't stop. He helped the others become activists. They helped care for the people on the reservation, brought us venison to put in our freezers. It gave them purpose. Fran would come and visit me with them, and they'd help me clean up the house a little, do chores.

When Franny was pregnant, Floyd or Arnold was always there to give her a ride to wherever she needed to go.

I knew Floyd and Fran and the rest were right about a lot of it, and I listened. Floyd talked about getting back all those things we once had—the social services, the hospital, the Legend Lake property that'd been sold to developers to keep the mill from going bankrupt—all those things the restoration committee was stalling on.

I turned twenty-five in 1958, the year the tribe was terminated, when the U.S. government dissolved Menominee Reservation and incorporated Menominee County. Fran had just turned four. Kenny, my husband, worked at the mill as a sizer. We owned a one-bedroom house near Neopit and had two boys, Travis and Cody. We didn't have much—no running water, no gas furnace—but we always had meat, and jars of sturgeon eggs, and plenty of wild rice. Every man in the tribe who wanted a job at the lumber mill could get one, and I thought the boys would work there someday too. The tribe took care of itself by taking care of the land. We left seed trees when we logged. When blister rot crept into the forest, the tribe paid the women to go out and pull up the infected brush. My fingers would throb from the work.

As part of the termination bill, every Menominee received a \$1500 remittance. It seemed like so much money. I dreamed of buying an electric stove, and Kenny wanted a TV. But then the government cancelled its contracts with the mill. The tribal rolls were closed, and anyone born afterwards didn't get counted as a Menominee. Federal funding for our hospital and our school went away. Kenny and me and everyone, we spent most of our new money paying back-taxes for the land our houses or farms were on—taxes for land that we had always shared, because we knew it could not be owned.

My parents lost their house to the bank. Floyd's father lost his. The mill dropped a shift. After Kenny was laid off, we got behind on the electric bill. We had to sell the car. Our hunting and fishing rights were stripped, and we had to follow their seasons, had to obey DNR regulations, had to purchase a license, even to harvest rice.

When Franny turned six, Kenny left me with the kids and ran off with a Mohican gal. I heard they lived over in Stockbridge, and that she later miscarried. I can only imagine Kenny being thankful for that. Three years later, Kenny was hit by a car while he hitchhiked home from his job on a tree farm. A family driving north from Illinois found him dead in the road.

Holly Tepiew had poured Floyd a cup of coffee and he blew on it. The blowing seemed to exhaust him. “The Alexian Brothers have more people on their way,” Floyd said. “We’re getting closer. We just have to sit tight until they get here.”

We were already running out of the caretaker’s food. We’d found a Civil Defense food kit in the novitiate’s pantry. Floyd looked at the cans of MPF, Multi-Purpose Food. *Protein-rich granules fortified with vitamins and minerals—precooked, ready to use.*

“And then what?” Raymond Two Shoes asked Floyd. “When they get here?”

Floyd took a drink and shrugged. “I hope they give us the deed.”

I wiped Anna’s face clean, tried wiping up the rest of her mess, and let her crawl free, her little hands slapping the floor as she moved.

It was only on Christmas that Fran told me about the occupation. Franny and I were watching Anna play with her big present, a Molly Moo Cow. I showed Anna the card I’d gotten from Travis. It had no return address, no phone number, no way to contact him. All he’d written was *I hope this year is better than last.* It was a good wish. Franny told me how it’d be true.

Fran had always planned on taking Anna with her. I tried talking her out of it, stayed up nights wondering if I should call the police and stop them. I told Franny the occupation would only draw the wrong kind of attention, but she just kept telling me that it would work, that it had worked in other places, and that after we got the deed everything on the reservation would be different.

The day before New Year’s, I told Fran I was coming along. I thought she would tell me I couldn’t join, that I was doing it for the wrong reasons. I was ready to argue with her. “Irene,” she said, “I’m proud.”

BY THE END of the second day, the ceasefire had already broken. From upstairs, we could see most of local, county, and state police—almost a hundred in all—who thought they had us trapped. Two wooden barricades and a line of police cars sat at the end of the driveway. Lights flashed red and blue all along County T. Roadblocks cut off all outside traffic. A few deputies had snowmobiles and sometimes they zipped along the edge of the woods, until one of the guys on the roof would fire a warning shot and turn them back. All those faithful troopers and they never covered the back of the

building. The sheriff admitted later that he didn't know the novitiate had a back door that he'd mixed up the information the caretaker had given him. The caretaker thought he'd been perfectly clear.

During the night, Patrick Sanapaw, Tony Chapman, and Brenda Corn came through the woods and brought us two more rifles, along with some sandwiches and a near-full bottle of brandy. Floyd made Tony dump the brandy down the sink. More people arrived the next night—a few people even left and went home—all of them following the river. Meanwhile, out front, the cops had their road flares and spotting lights and two-way radios.

The Alexian officials wouldn't meet with us inside the novitiate. Instead, the sheriff had a school bus parked halfway down the driveway, about a hundred yards between the novitiate and the road. We watched from the sitting room upstairs, Fran behind me. Floyd and Arnold went together, the sun glinting hard off their sunglasses. Arnold reached down and strained to scoop up a handful of snow. As he walked, he let the powder pour from his glove, sprinkling it as if it was cornmeal.

Brother Kroner and Brother Eaton weren't wearing boots and they walked inside the bus's wheel ruts. Brother Kroner was the older of the two, white-haired and jowly, a waddler. He wore argyle earmuffs and a dark overcoat identical to the one Brother Eaton wore. Brother Eaton didn't even look to be in his thirties, didn't look any older than the young men who had once studied at the novitiate. He offered his hand, but Floyd and Arnold wouldn't shake it.

Floyd told us that each man sat in his own seat near the front of the bus—Floyd and Arnold on one side, the Alexians on the other. They sat in the same spots each time they met. Arnold had trouble fitting, and he sat with half of himself hanging into the aisle. The bus was unheated, the vinyl on the benches hard and noisy.

That first meeting lasted only a few minutes, just long enough for Floyd to state our demands. Brother Kroner said the Alexians' position was clear: as long as we held the novitiate, they would not negotiate for the property. "We can't condone violence," he said.

Floyd thought that was funny coming from them. "We won't leave without the deed," he said. We hooted and yipped when he told us that.

They met again the next day, this time for nearly an hour. During the night there was more gunfire—more Warriors slipping through. What if

the Alexians could get us immunity? Or get most of us immunity? “You’ve dragged a lot of people into this,” Brother Kroner had said to Floyd.

Each time Floyd returned from the bus and told us how the conversations had gone, told us little things he noticed—how Brother Eaton had a habit of picking at his fingernails, how spittle would always blossom at the corner of Brother Kroner’s mouth if he spoke too long—I believed him. Floyd told us about the offers the Alexians made—amnesty for everyone except the leaders, a promise to work in good faith towards establishing a hospital on the site, or a center for drug and alcohol treatment, a center they would then administer. He didn’t leave that stuff out when he talked with us. But when Floyd went on to say that we couldn’t trust the Alexians, that we’d already been taken by those kinds of promises before, I wish he would have left that out, no matter how right he was.

After two days of failed negotiations, the sheriff cut power to the novitiate, cut the heat, cut the phone line. Without electricity the well pump wouldn’t run, and we had no water. Pipes froze then burst, flooding the basement. We broke furniture for firewood.

FRAN SET ANNA on my coat and took one sleeve, while I took the other. We walked as evenly as we could, pulling Anna through the hallways, the motion putting her to sleep.

The sky was clear and bright. We were supposed to stay away from the windows, but the light felt nice on my face, and each time we passed through a patch of warm sun I lingered. Down the hill, past the steaming rapid, most of the river had frozen over—all but a black ribbon of water snaking down the middle. Snowmobile tracks cut across the snow, and I was surprised by how close to the building many had traced. One of them crossed over a circle of blood in the snow, a stain from where the dog had been, before something had carried it off.

Franny and I walked quietly, listening to the coat purr across the floor. In the few days since the sheriff had cut the power, we’d been melting snow by the fireplace to get drinking water. You had to melt enough extra if you wanted to flush the toilets, many of which were clogged. Some people had started using different rooms around the novitiate as bathrooms, leaving piles in the corners.

We turned down the south wing of the building. I guessed it had been

the dorm area. The small rooms off the hall were identical: a ceiling light; a closet; a little window. The rooms were empty, but the air seemed to hold some kind of secret. “Can you see this as a hospital?” I asked Fran.

It reminded me of how my father had described Indian school—the run of doors, everything the same size. At Indian school they’d all slept in one big room, their beds only a few feet apart. My father told me that corn grew in rows, not Indians.

“It should be something other than this,” Fran said.

We walked to a dead end. A statue of Jesus stood recessed in the wall, his arms open to us. It was made of porcelain, or plaster, something as white as the snow outside. I knew the Lord’s Prayer, but couldn’t remember the last time I’d said it. There was the part about forgiving those who trespass against you, which was hard to do, unless you remembered your own sins, and all the people you hoped would forgive you. To forgive, you had to believe that all sins were equal, or that it didn’t matter if they weren’t. Or that it didn’t matter if you got an apology, or if the truth ever came out.

One of the smuggled-in newspapers had an article about the Alexian brothers’s history with hospitals. They’d administered a large hospital in Chicago, had established medical clinics in Africa and South America.

We turned around. I gave Franny the sleeve. “You’re on your own for a bit,” I said. “I’ll catch up.”

Behind the novitiate, the river channel narrowed, and the water cascaded down a long shelf of granite. At the bottom of the rapid, the river pooled and widened, willow trees hanging over the lazy water. I’d been there so many times, mostly in the spring, when those willows were just budding. Novitiate Falls used to be the farthest upstream the sturgeon could make it, and I’d go there with my father during the migration and watch as he and the other men spearfished.

At the base of the falls, the monks had set up a diving board. I’d see them in their swim trunks on the other side of the river, even though that water was cold. They’d cannonball into the big eddy, or have chicken fights in the shallows, spurting water from their mouths. Sometimes they’d wave, and my father or one of the men would wave back. Sometimes we’d wave first. Other days it seemed like we all just ignored one another and stared at the water, watching for the sturgeon’s rising snouts.

But because of the dam the sturgeon no longer make it past Shawano.

All that remains of the diving board is a cement stand, the lime leaching onto the rocks. During the migration we used to have a feast and ceremony and dance, but no one fished the falls much anymore. Now there was an old mattress back in the woods for people to play on. Hidden under the snow, beer cans and cigarettes and half-burned logs littered the shoreline. It was the wrong way to scatter tobacco.

“No one ever took you fishing down there,” I said, turning from the window. Fran stood thirty feet down the hall. “You never saw the harvest.”

“I’ve been fishing there before,” Fran said. She kept pulling Anna, worried that she’d wake her if she stopped. “Or we went to the falls one time and someone had fishing rods,” she said. “I don’t think I ever caught anything.”

“I almost drowned there,” I said. “I slid in right after my father told me how slippery the rocks were—that I should be careful.” Fran smiled at that, how I’d not listened. I told her how I stayed on my feet, but kept sliding deeper into the water, until the stronger current pulled me all the way in. I swam as hard as I could and was still sucked downstream. “My father,” I said, “and everyone on the shore, they all were reaching for me. They told me to stop swimming and reach.”

The water dragged me under, and I fought harder. I tumbled through the last part of the falls, striking the back of my head on a rock. When I surfaced in the pool below, one of the monks had already jumped in, and he swam me to shore, where my father was wading out to help.

“It was the last time my father let me come along,” I said.

“He was mad?” Fran asked. She had stopped to let me catch up.

“The river still scares me.”



WE HEARD THAT the parishioners gathered in the Holy Cross parking lot after mass. A few had brought signs, and after retrieving them from their trunks, they passed them out to whoever would take one. Farmers were angry that a week’s worth of milk had not gotten delivered, angry that the tanker trucks couldn’t get past the barricades. Some people thought we were nothing but drunks wanting a handout. Many of the hand-painted signs were directed at the sheriff, calling on him to remove us by force. *YOU DON’T, WE WILL!* Two men from Shawano, each with hunting rifles, had already been

arrested trying to sneak past the sheriff's roadblocks. Another sign called the sheriff an Indian lover. We wondered what was so wrong with that.

The next day, across town, supporters of ours gathered at the sheriff's office. They brought blankets and coats and food for us. They marched the sidewalk and chanted. "The people united, will never be defeated! The people united, will never be defeated..."

A deputy took the supplies and put them in a closet, where they stayed until they were thrown out several weeks later.

When the American Indian Movement's building in Keshena was fire-bombed, members of the tribal board caravanned to Madison and asked Governor Lucey for assistance. We'd been in the novitiate for twelve days. The whites sent their own caravan to Madison, demanding that the sheriff be forced to act. After the meetings, the governor held a news conference and told of his reluctance to get involved. "The quickest, easiest way to end this," he said, "is for the Warriors to surrender at once."

Inside the novitiate, we had only a handful of bullets left. We had children with ear infections, and nothing to give them but a few aspirins. We ate crackers and relish, and we had to reuse coffee grounds. Even the Multi Purpose Food was gone. We prayed a deer would wander up from the river.

A few days later, after a priest's body was found scalped the next county over, Governor Lucey ordered the sheriff to stand down and replaced the police with two hundred National Guardsmen. Some of us were sure that a white had killed the priest. At the end of the driveway, tanks had replaced the patrol cars.

FRAN STOOD NEXT to the fireplace, orange light flickering across her face. I watched from the back of the room, hidden in the dark, awake among the sleeping. Holly was with Fran, and they both stared at the fire. They'd hung out a lot in high school, even though Holly was a year older. Whatever Holly was saying was making Franny laugh.

When had Fran last slept? The bags under her eyes swelled as she smiled. Her hair was tied back into a messy ponytail, and its shadow on the wall looked like a feathered headdress. I remember watching her with a kind of wonder that night. I could still see the little girl in her—the Franny who liked playing with dolls and who loved ponies, the Franny who would stand on the stool in the kitchen to help me make biscuits and spend the whole

time just playing in the flour—she was still in there, however much the shell had changed.

Fran bent to stoke the fire. When she stood back up, she looked into the darkness for a moment, as if she felt me watching. She had always survived. Outside, the cold stars moved across the sky. Those stars held our stories, and those stories were older than time. No matter how her life turned out, I knew that night, whatever challenges Anna might pose, whatever challenges Franny had already had, I thought my daughter would do just fine.

COLONEL WILLIAM STRAND'S first gesture was to restore power to the novitiate. He sent us a radio and some blankets and venison, more canned vegetables than we needed. Some of the blankets we ripped apart and used for diapers.

Colonel Strand also renewed the negotiating sessions. On the school bus, he often sat a few rows in front of the others, or if he got restless, he stood. The colonel wore the same green fatigues as the rest of the guardsmen, carried around the same metal helmet. The stubble on his face looked blue. When the talks would slow, or someone would start to get tired, he'd have them take a break, or he'd change the subject, would talk about Hank Aaron and the Brewers, or about how he wanted to make it to Florida next year. "This can't go on forever," he said. "But we've got a little while."

It went on for weeks.

Colonel Strand began meeting with Floyd alone. The colonel brought a thermos of coffee each time, brought two tin cups that clinked against one another as he walked in from the road. He pre-mixed the coffee with cream and sugar.

Something about the colonel seemed to relax Floyd. I know they sometimes talked about the Army, about boot camp and Korea and Vietnam, about the horrible ways they'd seen people die. From the colonel's press releases, and from all that he's said since the standoff, I know he really did want to end the occupation peacefully. Until the very end, his men carried unloaded guns.

Floyd told the colonel about the ways people were dying on the rez—the suicides, the car crashes, the slow rotting. Floyd had told the colonel it was just as cruel as war.

"Maybe crueler," the colonel said.

One afternoon, after they'd met for nearly two hours, I watched them bet on whether they could hit a tree with a snowball. They took a long time, each of them pointing at the pines, making sure they were talking about the same tree, or I suppose, settling on the wager. Floyd went first, his snowball breaking apart in the air. When the colonel's snowball splatted white against the tree trunk, I could hear Floyd groan from all the way up in the sitting room.

Floyd couldn't hide his smile. The colonel had his palm out, waiting for the money. Floyd dug into his pant's pockets, pulled them out to show how empty they were.

THE RUMORS ABOUT Marlon Brando started to spread after the AIM leaders, Dennis Banks and Russell Means, showed up in Keshena, the FBI trailing them. The FBI followed them wherever they went those days. Governor Lucey dismissed Dennis and Russell and all the people they brought with them as outside agitators. Even though he was no longer in charge, the sheriff held a news conference and called Dennis and Russell terrorists. He warned women in Shawano not to walk alone at night.

After AIM organized a march on the novitiate, and for a brief moment tried to push through the roadblock on County T, Governor Lucey doubled the number of guardsmen and issued them riot gear. We'd been inside for almost four weeks. The guardsmen stood shoulder to shoulder, waiting behind their face shields. They pounded their hickory batons against the tips of their boots to try and keep their toes warm.

In Shawano, the same picketers who had gathered in the parking lot at Holy Cross now clogged the sidewalk in front of the IGA. Whole families had come. Pickup trucks, some with shotguns poking from the windows, crept down the street and honked in support. One child in a stroller, a child who wasn't even old enough to read, had a sign in his lap that asked *Where's John Wayne?*

A few men spoke of marching on the novitiate themselves, of giving us a taste of our own medicine. A local reporter interviewed one of them. In the newspaper photo, the interviewee wore a one-piece snowsuit, and he'd rolled the bottom of his stocking cap above his ears.

"I can see this will be one of our last stands," he'd said. I imagined him rocking up on the balls of his feet for emphasis. "With welcome bullets."

GOVERNOR LUCEY READ from a written statement. More armed locals had been caught trying to sneak around the checkpoints. “We wish to avert the tragedy of the loss of life,” he said. “But we cannot make ourselves vulnerable to the force of lawlessness.” He pronounced it *vul-ner-bull*.

“Like the lawlessness,” Fran said to me, “of broken treaty promises.”

We were given three days. Once the deadline was set, Colonel Strand phoned to give us instructions—we’d exit the front door, lined up single file, hands atop our heads.

Floyd told the colonel he’d send the women and children at the deadline, but that the rest of them would leave when they got the deed. “A half-now-the-other-half-later deal.”

The colonel had just called to give Floyd the information, not to negotiate. “If anyone does not vacate the property, I am authorized to use deadly force until compliance.”

“You can only shoot us until we’re dead,” Floyd asked. “Is that what that means?”

“Or you begin to leave the novitiate, and turn yourselves in.”

We gathered as usual in the sitting room. Floyd had told us everything the colonel had said. It was our turn to talk.

Many people, Fran included, wanted to stay, but said that the elders and anyone else who wanted to leave should leave. “Mom,” Franny said, bouncing Anna on her knee, “you should take Anna and go.”

About half of us wanted to quit, wanted to take the Alexians’ promise of continued negotiations and go home and get the tribal board and the rest of the reservation involved. We didn’t need another massacre that would be forgotten about. On the other side of the room, behind Franny’s head, Patrick Sanapaw had drawn a picture on the wall. It was the profile of an Indian chief—big nose, red face, feather in his hair. Above it, Patrick had written: Bury my heart at the novitiate.

“We should go,” I said, standing up. I looked down on Anna’s head, pretending that I could see into it, to where all the wires were crossed, and that I finally understood how to uncross them. “But she’s your daughter,” I said to Franny. “If you want Anna to leave, you have to come out with her.”

“Women and children,” Floyd said. “The rest of us will stay. We’ll get the deed.”

Sammy Fish hollered in approval. “Deed or death,” he said to applause.

When Marla asked him if we had a surplus or something, when she asked him to explain how any dead Indians would help us, Sammy laughed as if she were stupid. “Dead Indians,” he said, “is our long tradition.”

WE ONLY HAD to make it a few more days. I couldn't settle, so I wandered the halls until I found the chapel. Someone had left a light on in the corner. How long had it been burning? A basketball hoop, the rim scavenged from outside, hung above the door. Close by were two empty dishes for holy water. A picture of a saint I didn't know had been pulled from the wall and torn from the frame. The pews had been shoved against one side of the room. In the center of the floor was the sweat lodge we'd built, its frame wilting.

Some of the prayer candles had been knocked from the stand, and I started picking them up. I could tell that a few were new, that they'd only been burned a few times, though they were covered in dust and cobwebs. You were supposed to say something when you lit them, something about the light of Jesus. I used to know. I used to know what you were supposed to do.

I couldn't find any matches, but I still went through all the motions. I blew the dust from the mouths of the candleholders. I pretended to strike a match along a matchbox. I went from one to the next, lighting each candle—one for Anna, one for Fran—shaking out the match when it burned down too close to my fingertips. I struck another and kept going, name by name.

Just before daybreak, after I'd finally fallen asleep, two Molotov cocktails crashed through a downstairs window. One of the bottles hit the back of the couch that Wilbur was sleeping on—like napalm, he said, a *whoosh* of red heat. The other bottle smashed into the wall, flames splashing everywhere.

FRAN WAS ON her way downstairs to help fight the fire. “Stick with the others,” she said, shaking Anna's foot good-bye.

Floyd had the colonel on the phone, trying to figure out what happened. Because of the broken pipes, the water was still off, and Floyd wanted to get the main valve opened. The colonel had given us barrels of drinking water when he'd supplied us with food, and Franny and the others bucketed the water from the barrels to the fire, where it did almost nothing. When that water was gone, and the blaze still growing, they dragged the barrels outside so they could fill them with snow.

Whoever had thrown the firebombs had waited for us to leave. The first

bullet missed. The second hit Danny Besaw in the thigh. Fran fell next, the slug ripping through her stomach. They shot her another time on the ground. Webster Two Shoes, Raymond's nephew, took a shot in the shoulder trying to pull her back to safety.

I knew what had happened as soon as I heard the gunshots, felt something tearing me open. We had gathered in the hallway, ready to evacuate, and suddenly I heard Fran, as clear as if she were right beside me. Anna was resting against me, her arms draped loose around my shoulders. She wasn't moving or fussing or making any kind of noise, only felt as heavy as stone, which I wanted to mean something—I wanted Anna's stillness to mean that nothing had changed.

"Carry me," I heard Fran say. It's what she used to say when she'd fallen asleep on the couch in front of our little TV and I'd wake her up and send her to bed.

"Carry me," she'd say.

"You're too big," I'd answer, even when she wasn't.

THE FIREMEN SAT in their trucks and tried to get warm, their long underwear soaked through with sweat. Way up in the sky a lingering cloud of smoke pulled apart and drifted east. The trucks idled so loudly some of the novitiate's windowpanes rattled. The air inside the building reeked of wet wool and charcoal. One of the trucks had run lines all the way to the river so it could draw water. Once the fire was out, as the firemen broke down their equipment, they pulled the hoses back up the hill hand-over-hand, as if they were pulling in nets heavy with fish.

When I saw Franny, I collapsed. Arnold grabbed hold of me, tried lifting me to my feet and walking me further into the room, but I couldn't stand up, and all he did was drag me screaming along the floor. I pulled away from him, swatted at his hand as he held it there for me.

I crawled over to Franny. Floyd's jacket covered her chest, but the blood had soaked all the way down to her knees. Raymond prayed over us. Anna was in the sitting room with Marla. Fran looked so restful, which was such a rare thing for her, and I tried so hard to understand that she was dead, that her body was no longer her home. I ran my hands through her long hair, waiting for her to open her eyes. I looked at her smile lines and wrinkles, the markings of her years. She'd lost one of her earrings: bright turquoise, a tiny

arrowhead. I thought of that time I fell into Novitiate Falls, all those hands reaching for me. I wanted to grab hold of something and claw my way back in time and change things. *Franny, what could we grab?*

I straightened her pendant, which was speckled with red and had twisted on her neck, and I wiped the beads clean, asking Otātshia to take my daughter home.

Later, when I brought Anna to see her mother, she wouldn't look. I set her down on the floor and held her by the hips, but she turned away and hid her face in my armpit. I wanted to believe Anna was just being shy. I put my arms around her and rubbed her back and tried to turn her, tried to pretend everything was all right. Someone shouted in the hallway, and a few others ran to see what was happening. Some felt sure that the lingering fire trucks were only cover for the guardsmen to raid the novitiate.

"Okay," I said, as if I understood what Anna was trying to tell me. I unclasped her from my shirt. Even though it was morning, I told her that we had to tuck Franny in. It was one of Anna's routines, and her routines are the most comforting things she has in life. "Let's say goodnight."

I didn't tell Anna until after the occupation that her mother had died, and I had to tell her again over the years as she began to realize what death really meant. She had to learn different things than some of us, like how to put the right emotions with the right events, or how, even as an adult, to use gentle touches.

Anna fussed with the edge of the blanket I'd found, making sure it was tucked under her mother's shoulders the same way Franny did at bedtime with her. Anna leaned over and closed her eyes and pecked Franny on her cold lips.

"Goodnight, Mommy," she said. She looked up to see if she'd done it right.

"Goodnight, Mommy," I said, starting to cry again. I'd wanted to give Anna one last memory of her mother, but I had no way to make her take it. "Sleep tight."

"Sleep tight," she said, smiling.



WEBSTER TWO SHOES trotted down the hall after me. His left arm rested in a homemade sling, which he had to hold still with his other hand as he

moved. He kept asking me to stop, to wait, and I thought back to the caretaker's friend who'd begged the same of us. Anna looked over my shoulder, and she kept waving at Webster. "Hi," she'd say, as if they were just meeting. "Hi."

I turned the corner into the foyer, and I found Floyd and Arnold talking with two outsiders, two white men, one who wore a clerical collar. It was Father Groppi, the civil rights activist from Milwaukee. Standing next to him was Marlon Brando.

Father Groppi seemed surprised when I told Floyd I was leaving. "You shouldn't go out there by yourself," Father Groppi said. "Not without warning them."

Marlon Brando asked if he could hold Anna. He wore a deer hide jacket, a new red flannel underneath. He looked older than I'd thought he would, and for a long while I kept thinking it wasn't really him, that it was a joke. His dark hair had faded, had even turned white in spots. He had that same chin, though, those same strong eyebrows, that same tough pose as all the guys he'd played in those movies.

"It was her daughter," Floyd said to Marlon and Father Groppi. Floyd didn't add anything else.

Marlon called Anna an angel. He asked if we'd come to the bus with them. "Let me get on that rig and tell the church about Anna," he said. "While this little angel sits right there, let me tell them how it's time for her to go home."

THE BUS SEATS felt like ice, so I moved Anna onto my lap. Her cheeks looked splotchy, and I put my palms against her face to warm it, even though she kept trying to wiggle away. We sat toward the back of the bus, behind everyone, and whenever Marlon Brando said anything about Anna or me—and when all the men turned to look—I stared back blankly, wondering what they were looking for.

Floyd would not surrender without the deed. The Alexians would not give us the deed as long as we held the novitiate. Marlon Brando asked Brother Kroner and Brother Eaton to think about how much blood they wanted on their hands. "How many more deaths?" he asked. "How much blood do you want associated with your name?" He deserved those Oscars.

"Zero," Brother Kroner said. He turned to Father Groppi for some help. "You know that's true."

“People have already died,” Father Groppi said. “There are two others hurt. That’s what we’ve got now. That’s what we already have. I know you don’t want more.”

Arnold kept pressing his fear that the National Guard had plans to storm the novitiate before the deadline, accused the Alexians of being in on it.

“You can end this,” Marlon Brando said to Brother Eaton and Brother Kroner. “Give the Warriors the deed, and the Warriors surrender. Work on the other details later. Move this forward.”

“Turn yourselves in,” Brother Kroner said to Floyd and Arnold. “Follow their orders and come out.”

“Follow their orders?” Floyd asked. “These are the kind of guys who order you to do something, and then hit you on the head before you’ve even had a chance to move.”

“That’s been my experience too,” Arnold said.

Thin clouds moved across the sky, dampening the light. Past the road was a dairy farm, its milk down the drain. Beyond the red barn an endless stretch of hills and hollows covered the land, contours carved by the last glaciers. Most of the area had been logged years ago, and it had all come back as poplars and ash and birch, deciduous trees, and in the winter, instead of green, the forest looked grey and slurry-like.

Anna kept squirming to get down and play in the aisle, but I wouldn’t let her. The men had stopped talking. I tried to whisper something to Anna about how it wasn’t time, how she needed to sit still. She pawed at my face, pushing her finger into my lips. She moaned and jerked, and as soon as I held tighter, she started wailing.

“I want to turn myself in,” I said, when Anna wouldn’t stop. “And her. We’re ready to go right now.”

Brother Kroner asked if I really meant it. I was trying to hold Anna’s hands down, and trying to bounce her, hoping that whatever was stuck inside her would shake loose. She cried so loud she sometimes made the men wince.

Even after I answered Brother Kroner, he looked to Floyd and Father Groppi for some kind of confirmation. Floyd tried to talk me out of it, talked about honoring the cause, honoring the people. He got up and was standing in the aisle. “Don’t leave your daughter,” he said.

But he had already stolen her from me. She was on the floor in a room

with no heat. Anna kept squirming, and one of her hands slipped free and slapped me on the mouth. I knew then that I couldn't leave, that it wasn't over yet, not because of Floyd or the cause, but because if I got arrested they'd take Anna away from me, and maybe never let me have her back. I didn't even have the strength to point out to Floyd—that fool—how you couldn't leave someone who's already left you.

MARLON BRANDO CAME back to the novitiate with us, stood there and smiled patiently as everyone just stared at him.

A possible breakthrough had been reached. The tribe had agreed to provide the Alexians with fair reimbursement: the deed would be ours if we left the novitiate. Dennis and Russell had acted as liaisons to the tribal board, and they'd agreed in principle to the deal, an offer not much different than the one we could have taken weeks ago. This time it would not be a giveaway, but a sale. "That's the price they put on it," Floyd said. "Fair."

We were in the sitting room. The sky had begun to turn dark, and the long black hours were coming. "We would all face prosecution," Floyd continued. "They've offered no amnesty." He seemed more tired than ever, his words flat, nothing like they'd been on the bus. "We'd turn ourselves in to Colonel Strand," Floyd said, "and then get transferred to the sheriff."

"Our buddy," someone mumbled.

Everyone who wanted one was given a turn to speak. Many of the younger men, the same ones who'd already spent plenty of bullets, just wanted to keep shooting. "Let's die as Warriors," Tony Chapman said, and then hooted a war cry.

The majority of us wanted to take the offer. We'd been inside thirty-four days. The deed would be ours, which is what we had come for, so we had won. The longer we continued holding out, the more of the building we'd ruin.

When someone asked Marlon what he thought, he pointed to the *Deed or Death* written on Sammy Fish's jacket. "That says *or*, not *and*. But you've got *and*. What price is fair? You've already paid more than you should've." He quieted the rowdy ones right up.

Floyd was the last to speak. "We'll vote," he said, "and then that'll be our decision."

WE CELEBRATED THAT night. We pushed the chairs and couches out of the way and cleared a space in the middle of the sitting room so we could dance. The men set the drum near the fireplace, and the room got so warm, some of the drummers stripped down to bare chests. Marla and Holly's kids raced around, chasing each other, laughing when they got caught. Brenda Corn grabbed Marlon Brando and pulled him up to dance. He seemed to know that it didn't matter if you got the moves right, not for that kind of dancing, and he laughed when the young kids tried to show him the steps.

I sat in a hardback chair at the edge of the circle and sang along. I knew that Franny could hear. Anna was standing in front of me, stomping her feet. Jeremy Creapeau, Marla's little boy, came over and stood by us. He wasn't but six or seven, and was looking at Anna.

"Little dreamer," I said, tickling him in the side.

He tried doing the same to me, giggling whenever I reached out and grabbed at him. Soon Anna joined in and tried to help Jeremy. It was so easy to make them laugh. I could barely feel them, but I acted as if their hands were charged like an electric fence. "I'm going to get you," I'd say, letting them escape each time.



WE LEFT THE next morning. We gave the sitting room a final once-over, shuffling through the trash on the floor like we were kicking through autumn leaves. The fire had died out in the fireplace, and I could feel the cold air sinking down the chimney. Many people had already lined up in the foyer. Outside, a wrecker was parked in front of the school bus, hoods of both vehicles raised, jumper cables stretched between. A second bus was on its way.

"Here," Arnold said, reaching down and picking up Buddy Tepiew's teddy bear. The bear had matted, gray fur—the head lolling all over the place, as if it was about to drop free. "Look, honey," Arnold said, holding the toy out to Anna, as if it was now hers. He shook it like a rattle.

When the new bus arrived, the guardsmen stepped out and formed a line along each side of the front walk. Some of them stomped out little spots for their feet. The walkway hadn't been cleared since early New Year's Eve, when the caretaker had shoveled it for his friends.

It was women and children first. A few guardsmen wouldn't even look us in the eye. Others couldn't help but smile. "Nothing comes out," one said, grabbing at the teddy bear Anna had. When I spun and pulled Anna away, the bear's head ripped off. The guard dangled it by the ear, until the guy next to him yanked it away and tried to hand it back to Anna.

Out by the roadblock, our supporters beat on drums, the rhythms pulsing faintly through the air. As I clomped up the first slushy step, I noticed that the driver wasn't from the National Guard, that he was just a regular school bus driver who was worried about keeping his windows from fogging. I thought back to the negotiations on the bus, the cold sun as Anna and I sat on display. One by one we moved past, and the driver peered straight ahead, stealing a few glances in the rearview, as if he were already steering us away.

Anna and I shared a seat with Vicky Skenadore. The novitiate looked strange from outside, seemed not to match the place I'd just come from. Many of the windows had been broken out, but a few remained whole and clear.

When we'd taken the building I hadn't noticed the useless decorative shutters, or the large empty planters on the porch. The planters had square bases and looked hard to move, but I was surprised the caretaker had left them out over the winter, because a bad freeze was likely to crack them. What kind of flowers would the hospital plant? Above the front entrance, set into the brick, was a concrete cross. It could have been limestone. I thought we could paint it red.

The men started entering the bus. Arnold and Wilbur and Floyd stood last in line—a tail of guardsmen behind. A hearse had arrived, and one of the guardsmen helped the driver turn around and back into place. I would have to sign three times to get Fran's body released back to me, to bring her back on to the reservation. Raymond and Marla helped me bury her in that little cemetery by the mill, where the roots of the pine trees have tilted all the gravestones.

Floyd was smiling as he joined us on the bus. A few Warriors cheered and clapped, and some of us wondered what for. Floyd pumped a fist in the air until the guard behind him nudged him in the back. It would take more than one nudge.

The doors folded closed, and Floyd took a seat. After a moment the bus groaned and lurched forward. The guards standing in the aisle fought to keep their balance.

A MEDICAL CLINIC has finally come to the reservation, though there's still no hospital. We even have a new community center. It all came after the casino. Anna works at the hotel there, cleans rooms three times a week, gets a paycheck twice a month. She's employed through a special program, one that helps her manage her money. She shows me how she adds and subtracts everything nicely.

Our deal with the Alexians fell apart before the trials had even started. Floyd and Arnold would receive ten years in federal prison. Tony and Wilbur served two for violating federal firearms laws. The charges against the rest of us were dropped.

Three and a half years after the occupation, the Alexians sold the property to a Texas businessman who planned to turn the novitiate into a resort. The buildings sat empty for years, the windows boarded with plywood. The novitiate was sold again, this time to a man from Tennessee who had the idea to turn it into a tourist attraction. He repaired the caretaker's cottage and moved in with his family. He cleaned out the novitiate room by room, chased off anyone who came onto the land, even the few fishermen who tried to work the pool beneath the rapids. He built a little shop at the end of the driveway. He'd hung historical photos inside, planned to sell ice cream and t-shirts and postcards. The store burned to the ground the day before it was to open.

The clinic sits right on the river, and the last time Anna and I were there, we went back by the water and watched it sweep past. I thought about what the doctor had said. Upstream, only a few miles, was the novitiate. Downstream, where all things finally go, the ocean.

A fishtail splashed loudly and startled Anna. "Oh-ho," she said, putting her hand over her mouth. When I asked her if the fish had scared her, she said it had.

"Grandma," she wondered, "did it scare you?"

"Very much," I said. "Yes."

WE PASSED THE other bus, its hood still raised. The guards dragged back the barricades at the end of the driveway. A squad car pulled in front of the bus and we followed, jerking again in low gear. Guardsmen had pushed the onlookers to the edge of the road. Some of the whites tried, but they could not spit far enough. The drummers beat louder. One young woman on the

edge of the crowd had wrapped herself in an American flag, and was giving us the peace sign. She had dark hair, but wasn't an Indian. Maybe she had some blood. She was probably just some cute college girl from Madison.

The bus shifted and picked up speed. Floyd noticed the girl and turned to catch her attention. He returned her gesture, two fingers held in a V. It could mean peace, but also victory. It didn't matter. We had neither. He pressed his fingers against the window, smudging the glass.



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