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had his on, and everything else was white snow or gray tree trunks or black river. He stopped working on his fort wall and started to walk over. His mom thought he was a little kid still, but he wasn't. He was ten years old now and he'd picked up a fallen cottonwood stick as big around as his wrist, and he was stomping fast through the deep snow, watching his mother the whole time.

When he got closer, he could see his mother wiping at tears, smiling. This was fairly common now too. She had her cheerful voice and then her even more cheerful wiping-away-tears voice.

"It's fine," she said. "I'm okay, honey. Say hi to Ken. We were just talking."

"Hi, Ken." He still had his stick resting on his shoulder. Ken's eyes were red rimmed, and his nose was running. He was leaning over doing something with his hands in the snow next to his leg. He threw the snowball with almost no warning. "Batter's up, kid," was all he said.

Probably Ken thought he'd miss, but his dad had taught him how to hit a long time ago, and he was ready even though it looked like he wasn't. He swung his cottonwood stick as hard as he could, and the snowball evaporated into a mist of cold white powder that slowly filtered down over all three of them. He could feel it melting on his neck under his collar. It turned to wet drops like tears under Ken's cheeks. It coated his mom's dark hair so it looked like she'd instantly gone old and gray.

"Hot damn," Ken said. "What a cut that was. You might make the big leagues yet."

ONE MORE LAST STAND

At the last rest stop before Crow Agency, Perry pulled off and donned the uniform in a stall in the men's restroom. Navy-blue wool pants and high-topped leather riding boots. A navy-blue wool tunic with gaudy chevrons and large gilt buttons. Elbow-length calfskin gloves. A broad-brimmed hat with one side pinned up rakishly. He smoothed his drooping mustache and ran his fingers through his long blond hair. When he got back into his car, he had to take off the hat. He was tall, and the crown crushed against his Camry's low ceiling.

Out over the Bighorn range the sky was going red, a red shot through with sooty black tendrils of cirrus horsetail. He came in fast, pushing the Camry up to ninety down the last hill into the Little Bighorn valley. It felt like a charge, headlong and headstrong, brash, driving hard into the final waning moments of a lurid sunset. He put the windows down to feel the rush of air. Only in this place, Perry thought, could the sky look like an expanse of infected flesh. What was the saying?

Red sky at night, sailors take fright?
 Red sky at night, keep your woman in sight?
 How about: red sky at night, bad men delight?

He'd gotten his usual room at the War Bonnet Motel and Casino. There was a king-sized bed and an ironing board that folded down from the wall and an unplugged mini-fridge. The first thing he did was plug in the mini-fridge. The second thing he did was take off and hang up the uniform. Then Perry stretched out on the bed in his boxer shorts and undershirt and fell asleep.

When he woke an hour later it was full dark. He drank a beer and flipped through the channels until he found the weather and was pleased to see the weekend forecast called for high eighties and almost no chance of rain. It was going to be hot and dusty out there but better than rain. Nothing like rain to ruin a reenactment.

Perry called home. It was only nine, but Andy sounded sleepy when she answered.

"Did I wake you?"

"No. It's okay."

"It's only nine, I didn't think you'd be asleep."

"It's okay. It's just I had a feeling like I wasn't going to be able to sleep tonight so I took something, and then there was this documentary about meerkats on PBS, and I started watching that and fell asleep and was having these absolutely insane rodent dreams. You know, that's the problem with when you take something, you fall asleep and then you dream so hard it's like you have a full day or sometimes it seems like a year, and then, just as you are ready to lay down for sleep, you wake up. You know what I mean? You take something and you sleep, but you're not rested. Anyway, how was the drive?"

"Fine. Long. I got an audio book at a truck stop in Sioux Falls. It was about this guy in New York who tried for a year to follow the Bible exact. Did you know that the Bible says you shouldn't wear clothing that is made of fabric that mixes wool and linen?"

"I had no idea."

"Seriously. Also you shouldn't trim your sideburns, and the corners of your garments should have tassels."

"Tassels?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I'm not sure. But, according to the book, there's a store in New York City that sells nothing but tassels. Tassels Without Hassles."

"What?"

"That's what it's called. The store. Tassels Without Hassles."

"Huh. Why was this guy doing this? Trying to follow the Bible exact, I mean, what was his reason outside of trying to come up with an idea for a book?"

"To awaken his spiritual side I guess. Connect to his Old Testament ancestors."

"Is he Jewish, the author?"

"Yeah. In the book he went to a Hasidic dance in Crown Heights in New York, which, from what I gather, is like an Indian reservation but for Orthodox Jews. There weren't any women there—they didn't allow them to come to the dance. It was a life-changing experience, he said."

"Sweet, sounds fun."

"Yeah."

"I think if I were a Hasidic woman I'd have a big problem with not being allowed to dance."

"Perry, I think I'm going to go to bed now."

"Sounds like it might be a good idea. I'm tired myself from all the driving."

"Love."

"Love."

Perry drank another beer, then put on the uniform and headed down to the War Bonnet Lounge. He was surprised to see a new bartender this year, a young guy with a black goatee and a spider-web tattooed over his elbow. "Well," the bartender said when Perry bellied up, "looks like the reenactment is in town. Either that or you're lost. In the wrong century." He laughed.

"Maybe both," said Perry. "Where's Nolan?"

"He died."

"No shit. When?"

"April."

"How?"

"He was old. And diabetic. And Indian. How do you think he died?"

"I was accustomed to seeing him here. We were kind of friends. I didn't know. How old was he anyway?"

"I have no idea, old enough to die and not have it be much of a surprise to anyone that actually knew him."

"Okay, fair enough."

"Beer?"

"PBR with a shot of Evan."

Perry shot the Evan and chased with a small sip of Pabst. He scanned the slot machines. When the bartender came around, Perry asked about Kat.

"Kat who?" the bartender said, narrowing his eyes. "Kat Realbird?"

"Yes, Kat Realbird. She been around tonight?"

The bartender leaned his elbows on the bar and spun an empty shot glass around on the bar top.

"Not tonight. Last night, though."

"How was she? I mean, how did she seem? How did she look?"

"What do you mean, how did she seem? She came in and played nickel slots with her old grandmother. She had two Coronas with lime. She looked fine. She wore pants. And a shirt. And she had black hair. And she looked Indian. I mean what the fuck do you want from me here?"

"Nothing. That's it. That's all I wanted. Thank you."

Perry finished his beer, and when he did, flagged down the bartender.

"Another?"

"No, I'm done. But a quick favor for me, if you would. When you see Kat Realbird give her a message for me. Tell her the General is back in town."

That night Perry fell asleep waiting, nursing a beer, still in full uniform on the king-sized bed. When the knock on the door came, he thrashed awake and spilled the beer down the side of his tunic.

She stood in the shadows thrown by the motel vapor lights. She was in full regalia—a turkey-bone breastplate, a fawn leather breechclout—her hair braided and adorned with a single raven's feather. Her paint was different this year, the left side of her face starting below the eye was chalk white; the right side was unpainted except for a red, quarter-sized circle on her high cheekbone.

Crossing the threshold she was on him hard, her hands

twisted in his tunic, her lips dampening his full mustache. She drove him back onto the bed and her smell—a mixture of leather, bear-grease face paint and knockoff Chanel No. 5—came over him. He breathed in where her neck met her shoulder and it was like a return home after a long journey fraught with uncertainty and peril.

“I think about you,” he said. “Back home at work I sometimes put on my uniform and imagine this. I’ll sometimes spend whole days downstairs in my office, in full dress. I do conference calls in my hat and gloves and cavalry pants. It makes me feel closer to you—to this.”

He was still on the bed. She was in the room’s small bathroom washing off the face paint and rinsing the grease from her hair. She came out toweling her hair, her face clean and bare. He could see the faint pockmarks on her cheeks.

“I have to wash that stuff off, or I break out terribly.”

“Kat, did you hear me?”

“Yes.”

“And? Do you think of me? During the year, in your real life?”

“I do. But it doesn’t change anything, so I try not to.”

She got in bed and put her body tight next to his, her face on his bare chest. She twisted a lock of his long blond hair between her fingers and then put the ends in her mouth, wetting it to a tip like a paintbrush. She traced invisible designs on his chest.

“You painted your face different this year,” he said. “I almost didn’t recognize you.”

“Oh? You have a lot of half-naked Indian women in traditional dress coming to your hotel rooms these days?”

“Of course. But I send them all away.”

“Sha, you know no one but me is crazy enough to do this with you. Just so you know, I wasn’t going to do it this year, the reenactment. But when I came to the War Bonnet, and heard you were back I just couldn’t not come. I gave John some half-assed excuse and came up to my cousin’s. You realize that I just snuck out and walked a mile across Crow Agency in the dark in a breechclout with no panties or bra?”

“Thank you. You were beautiful. You *are* beautiful.”

“Sha, yousay. General?”

“Hm?”

“I’ve had a bad year.”

The first day of the reenactment went as well as could be expected. They did three shows each day of the weekend, and the first was always the roughest. There were always logistics to be straightened out. Horses that acted up. That was Perry’s least favorite part about the whole thing. The horses. Inevitably he got stuck on some knobby nag that wanted to stop mid-battle to take a mouthful of grass or take a shit right were Perry was supposed to lie after being killed.

As had become their custom, on the first day Perry waited on Last Stand ridge until Kat had time to get there and kill him. He knew it pissed some of the guys off, the way he refused to go down until Kat came flying up the ridge and vaulted from her horse with a piercing war cry—but so what, tough shit for them. She would run at him and he would fall under her weight. As she pretended to slit his throat she always gave him a full kiss on the lips, her body shielding this from the people watching in the grandstands. He never wanted her more than right then. Pretend

dead on his back in the dust and the horseshit, an erection straining the front of his blue cavalry trousers.

This year was different, but only a little. Perry staggered and gestured as if he were in agony. The field was littered with the bodies of the fallen, and he could sense their annoyance. Fucking go down already, man, one of the dead bluecoats lying in the dust near him muttered. It's hotter than hell out here. Show's over. Warriors on horseback were circling and Perry stumbled and then rose slowly to his feet. The crowd was clapping and cheering, and he was scanning the ridgeline for Kat. And then she came and it was a sight to see. She and her horse were cast from the same mold. Her brown thighs rippled and tensed, echoing, rhyming the muscled brown haunches of her mount. Everything was black streaming hair, black flowing mane. He turned to face her and when she swung one leg and sprung from the horse he caught a fast glimpse of taut inner thigh. His heart hiccupped. She rushed him and tackled him full force. He tried to get a quick feel of breast as he went down but she made a show of pinning his arms as she straddled him with her knife between her teeth. She brought the dulled blade across his throat theatrically and when she leaned in close for the kiss he thought he saw tears smearing the paint on her cheeks. It could have been sweat. But then he saw her sad smile.

There were no good restaurants in Crow Agency—actually no restaurants at all if you didn't consider fast food a viable option—so he bought steaks and they grilled them on the small fenced patio off the back of his hotel room. It didn't matter, about the lack of restaurants, because they couldn't have been seen like that anyway, out together. The reservation was small. Word would have traveled.

Perry got the beer she liked, Corona, and they drank them while he messed with the steaks. Kat painted her toenails, her knees drawn up to her chest. Over the top of the warped vinyl patio fence Perry could just make out a ragged flock of turkey vultures circling over the battlefield, searching for stray hot dogs and partially eaten Indian tacos left by the tourists.

"Do you mind if I call my wife quickly?"

"You know I don't."

"Okay, we'll eat soon."

He went into the room and left the door open behind him. He sat on the edge of the bed and called.

"Andy. Hi, it's me."

"Oh, hi, I was just loading the dishwasher, just a minute."

Perry heard the phone being fumbled. He could see her fumbling it, her hands wet with soap.

"Okay, I'm back. How did it go today?"

"Pretty good. Hot and dusty. But we put on a good show. I think the people were happy. During the second act the guy that finally killed me was a little rough with the takedown. I've got some bruises."

"Geez, my poor banged-up man. What do these guys think? It's not your fault how everything worked out, you know, the scope of history and all that. They won the battle; we won the war. No need to take it out on you. Actually, I don't know how you do it. I think it would start to get to me, you know, dying every day. It's like you're a sacrifice."

"Or a martyr for the greater American conscience."

"Yeah, that's it, Jesus H. Custer dying for our sins. Three times a day."

"Whose sins exactly, do you suppose?"

"I'm not sure, everyone's, I guess. What are we even talking about?"

"I don't know either, never mind. How are you feeling today? Yesterday you seemed tired."

"Yeah, to tell you the truth I hardly remember our conversation. I was a little whacked-out. This new stuff they've got me on is potent."

There was a pause, her sharp intake of breath, and a soft laugh that couldn't mask what lay underneath.

"Jesus, I feel like shit."

"I'm sorry. Maybe I shouldn't have left."

"No, it's not your fault. It's just the thought of another round of this next month makes me want to die. I mean, seriously. I'm actually surprised that I'm saying this but maybe they should just cut that fucking thing off and be done with it. I could get a prosthetic. I could still wear bikinis."

"They make those? Prosthetic breasts?"

"Yeah. You can pretty much get a prosthetic anything these days."

Perry could tell she was crying and trying to hide it. He could smell the steaks cooking on the grill, could hear Kat humming tunelessly to herself out on the patio.

"I know it sucks now but it will all work out. You won't need a prosthetic anything."

"Promise?"

"Yes."

"Okay, I'm being depressing. Let's say good night."

"Love."

"Love."

They ate their steaks out on the patio. There was no furniture, so they sat on the bare concrete with their plates balanced on their

laps, cutting their meat while a dusky swarm of moths batted around the single halogen bulb.

"We've been doing this for a long time now," he finally said.

"Yes. This is our seventh year. And?"

"And, it's funny to think that we existed, us together, before either of our marriages."

"So?"

"Doesn't that beg the question, which is the marriage, which is the affair?"

"I married John at the First Church of Christ in Hardin. We live together. Every day. That's the marriage. Don't be dumb, General."

Kat was right, of course. She had a smear of steak juice on her upper lip. Perry thought that that was unbearable.

Later, she emerged from the bathroom in a one-piece dress of white beaded deerskin, cinched at the waist with a wide, quill-stitched belt. Her face was scrubbed clean without paint, and she had used a thin plait of her own hair to tie the rest back into a ponytail. The dress was short and ended in fringe at her upper thighs. Strong thighs, horse-squeezing thighs. The dress was new. A new thing for them.

"Christ, you are beautiful."

"Sha, yousay."

And then she straddled him on the bed. Rode him like she had stolen him and god himself was in pursuit.

After another hot day on Last Stand ridge, Perry spent an hour posing for photographs with tourists. He put his arms around two rotund sixty-something women and they all smiled for the photographer.

"We are twins," one of them said. "And we're from Michigan. Did you know Custer was from Michigan himself?" Perry smiled behind his mustache and made a show of examining the women. He thought they only looked like twins the way all fat older women looked like twins. He wanted a beer, he wanted a steak, and he wanted Kat's head in his lap. "We love Custer trivia," one of the twins said. "Did you know he graduated from West Point at the top of his class and would probably have been made president one day had his career continued on its natural path?"

"I did know that. In fact I have a PhD in Custer studies, and my dissertation was a theoretical projection of the scope of American politics had Custer survived the battle and gone on to be elected president." Perry thought this to be sufficiently lofty to discourage further conversation.

"Oh, how interesting! Did you know that Custer had size-twelve feet and was married to Elizabeth Bacon?"

Perry was developing a headache. There was a shimmer of heat out over Last Stand ridge, and he could feel hot rivulets of sweat roll from his underarms.

"I did know that," he said, "now I have one for you ladies. Did you know that when a reinforcement cavalry regiment finally arrived on the scene of the battle, they found Custer had received over thirty-two assorted stab wounds, arrow punctures, and rifle shots, was scalped, and had his penis and scrotum cut off and stuffed in his mouth?"

That night after dinner, they walked together on a path along the bank of the Little Bighorn River. They slapped mosquitoes off each other's necks, and Perry threw pebbles in the air to make the bats dive to the ground in pursuit.

"It's because they can't see," he said, "that's why they chase a pebble. They emit noises too high for the human ear to hear and it's like sonar. The sound bounces back to the bat, and that's why they think any small thing flying in the air is probably a bug."

"Bats have eyes don't they?"

"I think so."

"Well, they must be able to see a little then. I'm nearsighted too; I know what that's like. It's not the same as blind. General?"

"Yeah?"

"Do you think you could catch a bat that way, if you wanted to? Like have a net ready and when one swooped down for the pebble you could snag it?"

"Maybe. But, I guess this begs the question, what would you do with a bat after you caught it?"

"I don't know, keep it for a pet. Let it hang upside down from a hanger in my closet. Nice and dark in there. They are kind of cute, especially when they are babies."

"Bats? Cute? I don't see it."

"Pretty much anything that is a baby is cute. I read somewhere that's Mother Nature's way of helping something defenseless survive. Like, when I was a kid and we had cats that lived out in the barn. My dad always hated those cats, and bitched at the way they kept producing litters left and right up in the haymow. But, I remember one time I came out to the barn to get him for supper. He was sitting on a hay bale playing with a little calico kitten that was barely half the size of one of his boots. The rest of the litter mewled and rolled over each other in a pile of hay, and my dad had a gunnysack and a piece of twine in one hand and that little calico licking the other. I was young, maybe seven or eight, but even then I knew what he was going to do. He looked at me standing there in my barn boots, I was probably crying, I don't remember. Anyway, he didn't say anything, just pitched the

calico back in the pile with its brothers and sisters. He threw the gunnysack and twine in the trash on the way out of the barn, and he carried me on his shoulders all the way up to the house. I don't remember him doing that very much."

They had been holding hands but Kat pulled away and walked on a few steps ahead.

"Let's head back. These bats suck at what they do. The damn mosquitoes are eating me alive."

In Perry's room at the War Bonnet, she stopped him when he went to put on the uniform.

"Let's just do it like normal people tonight. If you don't mind."

"Normal people? I thought you liked what we do."

"General, you know I do. It's just tonight, I don't want to be your Indian tonight. How about we do something different. How about you pretend I'm your wife. How about we do it like that?"

"I don't know."

"Please, what does she wear to bed? How does she like it?"

"I don't know, Kat. It feels like a wrong thing. Dishonest."

"Just once, General. Then we can go back to the old way until you leave. You said yourself that you were unsure what was the affair, what was the marriage."

She had her arms around him, and was rubbing her fingers in tight circles down his back. Looking down on her he could see where she had missed some white face paint behind her ear.

"Okay. Fine. She wears one of my T-shirts and a pair of my boxer shorts. I usually work late and she likes to read. Most of the time she's asleep with her book by the time I get to bed."

"Sometimes do you wake her up?"

"Sometimes."

"Sha, I bet you do. Okay. Go into the bathroom and come out in five minutes."

Perry went into the bathroom and sat on the toilet seat. It was a small bathroom and his bent knees hit the shower door. He realized he had forgotten to call Andy. He waited as long as he could, and when he emerged, the lights were off in the room except for the small bedside lamp. Kat had let her hair down. She was on her back on top of the comforter and her black hair spilled across the pillow. She had the hotel Bible split open facedown on her stomach. She was wearing one of his white T-shirts, a pair of his white-and-red-striped boxer shorts. Her skin was very dark against the white cotton, her nipples erect and visible through the thin material. She had her eyes closed and her arms lay out by her sides.

"Oh, hi," she said drowsily, "I was asleep. I must have just nodded off while reading."

On the final day of the reenactment, clouds came down across the Bighorn Mountains and the sky opened up. It was a mud bath. Between acts everyone stood under the pavilion at the visitor's center. The warriors' painted faces streaked. Their feathers soddened. Soldiers drank coffee, miserable in wet wool tunics and pants. During a short break in the rain, Perry found Kat re-touching her paint, using the side mirror of a Winnebago in the overflow parking lot.

"Can you believe this," he said. "I checked the weather and there was no mention of rain."

"Imagine that, the weatherman being wrong." She was

using two fingers to rub the white paint over her cheek and the side of her jaw.

"In the last show I got killed in a puddle and had to lay there for fifteen minutes while the crowd cleared the grandstands."

"Poor General." She flashed him a quick smile.

"Kat?"

"Yeah?"

"My wife has breast cancer."

She turned to him slowly. She put her arms around him and her painted face left a dull smear on the rough wool of his tunic.

"But it's going to be okay. I think we're going to be all right."

After the last show everyone went down to the War Bonnet Lounge and got drunk. It was an annual tradition on the final day of the reenactment. All the reenactors piled into the dim bar, most still in full dress. The place was hazy with cigarette smoke and the stink of slow-drying wool. A gray-haired man in a full eagle-feather headdress played the jukebox. Grimy cavalry soldiers played pool with shirtless warriors. Perry ordered a beer and when the bartender—the same goateed guy from the other night—extended the bottle, he didn't release his grip when Perry tried to take it from his hand.

"Don't think people don't know about you, man."

"What?" Perry said, unsure he'd heard correctly in the noisy bar.

"Don't *what* me, man. You come to get you some red pussy? Is that your deal? John Reälbird is my cousin, man. You think you can come here and do whatever the fuck you want?"

Perry felt the blood coming to his face. He looked to see if anyone else was hearing the conversation. "I don't know what you're talking about, pal. I'm just here for the reenactment like everyone else. They pay me to come. I've been coming here for years." Perry backed away from the bar and the bartender said something but Perry couldn't hear over the jukebox and raised voices. Someone clapped Perry on the shoulder and pressed a drink in his hand. When Kat came in he nodded at her and left out the back door. After a while she followed.

They were both a little drunk, and in the room they got drunker. Kat perched precariously on the shaky foldout ironing board and Perry sat on the end of the bed. They passed a pint of J&B.

"My paint is different this year," she said.

"I know. I asked before, what does it mean?"

"I've been wanting to tell you. I just didn't know how."

She touched her cheek, the red circle. "This is a part of me, a piece of my heart that is gone forever." She touched the other cheek, the chalky white paint. "This is my soul, blank as a field of snow, white like a ghost wandering the world." Perry nodded solemnly. Kat gave a snort and shook her head. "You white people are suckers for that Indian shit. Hand me that bottle." She drank deeply and laughed like none of it was true.

He nearly forgot to call Andy, and when he remembered, it was late. Kat was slid up against him on the bed, maybe asleep, maybe just being quiet. He dialed with one hand to not disturb her.

"Hello?" Andy's voice was groggy with sleep.

"Hi, it's me. Sorry it's late."

"Jesus, it's late."

"I know, I just got caught up with everything here and forgot to call you yesterday and I just wanted to see how you were doing and so I'm sorry but I called you anyway."

"You sound kind of drunk."

"I am kind of drunk. End-of-reenactment party. Drinking firewater with the locals. That kind of thing."

"Sounds fun. I'm kind of jealous. Tonight I tried to make a tofu stir-fry. I'm not sure what happened but the tofu ended up scorched and the vegetables were still raw."

"Tofu can be tricky."

"Apparently. You know what else I did?"

"Hm?"

"I bought a pack of cigarettes and smoked almost half of them."

"Really?"

"Yes."

"What kind?"

"Don't laugh."

"What kind?"

"Virginia Slims. Long skinny girly ones."

"I've never seen you smoke before. I'm having a hard time picturing it."

"I'm new to it, so I'm not very good at it yet, but maybe I'll do it for you when you get back."

"Wearing something sexy, holding a glass of wine?"

"If you'd like."

Kat had reached one arm across Perry's chest and pushed her face down against his neck. The raven feather in her hair brushed his cheek. Her hand found his, the one that wasn't holding the phone.

"Okay. I look forward to it. Have you tried blowing smoke rings yet?"

"No."

"Well, practice."

"I will. I was going to leave it as a surprise. You know, you come home from your reenactment and all of a sudden you have a smoking wife. A wife that smokes. That is something you'd probably never expect."

"Well, it's still a surprise, this way. I almost don't believe it."

"Yeah, you know why I started?"

"It is a question I had considered asking. Why?"

"Because what's the point of not smoking? I've been not smoking for thirty-three years. Look at where it has gotten me. Now I'm going to be smoking. Make sense?"

"Perfectly."

"Okay, I'm going to let you go, very tired."

"Okay."

"Love."

"Love."

"Love."

Kat's lips brushed his ear in her whisper. He hung up the phone. He was a scalped and bloody mess.

Before dawn Perry woke to find Kat's side of the bed empty. He turned and saw her standing over him in the dark, fully clothed in jeans and T-shirt. She brought her fingers to his face and smoothed his mustache. When she moved her head down to him her hair folded like black wings around them.

In the morning Perry crammed the uniform, now smelly and stained, into his suitcase and gave a final look around the room to make sure he hadn't forgotten anything. He put the empty bottle of J&B in the trash can. When he went out to the parking lot, he found a fluorescent orange aluminum arrow shaft protruding from the rear passenger tire of his Camry. Perry considered the arrow for a moment and then pulled it, with some difficulty, from the tire. The fletches were glued-on pieces of hot pink vinyl. The shaft had the word WHACKMASTER printed down the sides, and black squiggly lines, which, coupled with the orange, were supposed to give the appearance of tiger stripes. The edges of the broadhead were chipped and rusty. Perry got the donut tire from the trunk and switched out the flat. He put the arrow in the backseat and left the War Bonnet driving slowly on the small spare.

The only repair shop in Crow Agency was Robidoux's Fix-it, a lean-to built off the back of a double-wide trailer. Perry pulled in and Ted Robidoux came down the trailer steps in his bathrobe running his hand through his short black hair. Ted occasionally rode in the reenactment. Three years ago he had taken care of a clogged fuel line in Perry's car.

"Morning, Ted. It's Perry. Remember me, the General?"

"Hey, Perry. Of course. I didn't make the reenactment this year. How did it go?"

"Well, it was a spectacle, as always."

"Good. Good. Looks like you got a bum wheel there. This country's hard on tires."

"And other things."

"Ha, well, I should be able to handle the tire at least. Let me go put my pants on."

He went into the trailer and reemerged clothed, with a mug of coffee that he handed to Perry. "Take a seat," he said. "This could take a few."

Perry sat on the porch and sipped at the hot coffee. It was still early and cool and the land seemed refreshed from yesterday's rain. There was a stack of freshly cut lodgepoles leaning up against the trailer wall, and after he had finished his coffee, Perry went over to take a closer look. He was running his hand over their smooth, peeled surfaces when Ted came from the lean-to.

"Hey," he said, "you like my new poles? I just finished peeling those yesterday. Last time we went to the mountains and put up the good ol' lodge I had two poles break in the middle of the night. You should have seen how pissed my old lady was when the whole thing came down on us and we had to sleep in the cab of the truck."

"Well, you did a good job with these," Perry said. "They're smooth. I can't imagine doing it myself. I can't even peel a potato."

"The secret's a sharp drawknife. And a light hand. And practice." Ted patted one of the lodgepoles and laughed. "Ah yes," he said. "The good ol' tipi." Then he patted the side of his trailer and laughed again. "And here's the new tipi. I got a leaky roof. Fuck me. Well, anyway, we got her patched—the tire. A good-sized hole."

"Thanks. It was the damnedest thing. I had an arrow sticking out of it this morning."

"An arrow? Like a good ol' Indian arrow?"

"Not exactly."

Perry got the arrow and handed it to Ted, who held it between two fingers as if it were something particularly distasteful.

"Whackmaster?" he said.

"I have no idea."

"Well, you know what we need to do, Perry?"

"What?"

"Back in the old days, if a warrior got hit by an arrow he had

to break the shaft to make sure the guy who shot him didn't still have power over him. So his wound would heal." Ted handed the arrow back to Perry.

"Really?"

"Sure. I'm an Indian. I know what I'm talking about when it comes to situations like this."

"Okay. How should I do it? Is there, like, a certain way it should be done?"

"I think just over the knee, like a piece of kindling for the fire."

Perry brought the shaft down over his knee. The aluminum didn't break, but bent sharply. He looked up at Ted, who shrugged. Perry bent it back and forth a few times and eventually the shaft broke cleanly, like a paper clip.

"There," said Ted. "Now you keep that forever."

BREATHARIANS

There were cats in the barn. Litters begetting litters begetting litters—some thin and misshapen with the afflictions of blood too many times remixed.

"Get rid of the damn things," August's father said. "The haymow smells like piss. Take a tire iron or a shovel or whatever tool suits you. You've been after me for school money? I'll give you a dollar a tail. You have your jackknife? You have it sharp? You take their tails and pound them to a board and then after a few days, we'll have a settling up. Small tails worth as much as large tails, it's all the same."

The cats—calicos, tabbies, dirty white, gray, jet black, and tawny—sat among the hay bales scratching and yawning like indolent apes inhabiting the remains of a ruined temple. August had never actually killed a cat before, but—like most farm boys—he had engaged in plenty of casual acts of torture. Cats, as a species, retained a feral edge, and as a result were not subject to the same rules of husbandry as those that governed man's rela-