

**ANGELS**  
*from*  
**ASHES**  
**HOUR OF THE WOLF**

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## CHAPTER 1

“The early Celtic Christians called the Holy Spirit ‘the wild goose.’  
And the reason why is they knew that you cannot tame him.”

– JOHN ELDREDGE

Arms clasped around her knees, Chloe Clark sat on the dock overlooking Green Bay, watching the sky lighten just as she had so many other summer mornings. *But how different this year.* From a deep-purple flush stretching across the horizon, the sky transformed into luminous shades of crimson, turning to rose and ginger as the sun dawned a shimmering gold.

She glanced at the water below, so still it seemed a mirror, reflecting the sky, doubling its splendor. Then she caught her own reflection. A serious face with a shy smile stared back through dark eyes. Shoulder-length, tawny-brown hair the sun had lightened to sandy framed her face.

When the honking cry of a Canada goose broke the stillness, she turned to watch its swooping touchdown on the water, creating a V of waves. She stretched, arching her back, and then checked her watch. Time to get back.

Kicking up sand with her sandals, she walked along the path to her Great-Aunt Edwina’s weathered house. Waves of nostalgia washed over her. So many carefree summers here. Not like this one. Sighing, she pushed open the screen door leading into the kitchen and inhaled the fresh coffee’s fragrance. She poured two cups, placed them on a tray, and headed to her great-aunt’s room.

Tapping lightly at her door, Chloe called, "Are you up yet, Aunt Ed?"

"Come on in," she answered.

Chloe smiled at her favorite relative—the white-haired, eighty-year-old woman in bed, whose blue eyes were as clear and sharp as her wit. Her great-aunt wore a black bed jacket and a white cast up to her elbow on her right arm.

"Good morning." Chloe set her great-aunt's cup on the night stand. "How's your wrist today?"

"Ornery, like me." Edwina's snort serving as a laugh, she reached into the top drawer, pulled out a flask, and liberally poured into the hot coffee.

Chloe turned a blind eye. Her great-aunt had been adding brandy to her coffee for as long as she could recall, whether eight in the morning or eight at night.

"Would you like pancakes for breakfast?"

"You needn't go to any fuss." Her forehead puckering, Edwina glared at her cast.

Chloe recognized her bitterness at the enforced convalescence. Edwina had been her role model growing up. Self-determined, counter-cultural, her great-aunt had never married. Instead, she had earned a doctorate in the 1950s, something few women had attempted, let alone achieved, in that era. Chloe understood Edwina's pride in self-reliance.

"No fuss," said Chloe as she sipped her coffee. "Have to make breakfast for myself, don't I?" She shrugged. "No more trouble to make it for two than one."

Chloe thought of all the summers she had spent in Door County with her great-aunt instead of cooped-up in her parents' cramped Milwaukee apartment. Without those welcome escapes, her childhood would have been bleak. *You've made me hundreds of breakfasts. Glad to pay it back.*

"In that case, how about pancakes with fresh raspberries?" Edwina's eyes lit up like a child's.

Chloe grinned. *Self-reliant, but not above small indulgences.* "Sure, it's raspberry season. They're everywhere for the next week or two. Then they're gone. Might as well enjoy them while we can."

The light faded from Edwina's eyes. "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may . . ."



Chloe grabbed a quart container and took the sand path to the nearest raspberry patch, a dilapidated fence overgrown with brambles. Lush with raspberries, the briars sagged under their weight. Aunt Ed had taught her to reach among the

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thorns and pick fragile berries without getting scratched. Musing about summers past as she picked, she heard a young girl's voice.

"Do you live here?"

She turned toward her. "Just for the summer."

"Did you move in with Miss Ed?"

Chloe nodded. "Just 'til the cast comes off my great-aunt's arm. Do you live around here?"

"Yup, over there." She pointed farther down the path. "I'm Rose Beaulieu."

"Pleased to meet you, Rose. I'm Chloe Clark." Tilting her head, she asked, "Beaulieu, isn't that French?"

"My great-great-grandfather was French-Canadian." The corners of the girl's dark eyes smiled. "Beaulieu means beautiful place."

Chloe glanced up at the clear sky and then scanned the surrounding greenery and wildflowers. Within eyeshot, she recognized wild strawberry blossoms and wild roses.

"Door County is a beautiful place, isn't it?" At the girl's nod, she added, "Must be a great place to grow up." *Compared to Milwaukee.*

Rose stooped to pick something. "Do you know what this is?" She phrased the question as a challenge. Then Rose lifted her eyebrow as she held up a ten-petaled, pale-yellow flower.

Chloe shrugged. "A buttercup of some sort?"

Rose shook her head and grinned proudly. "It's a small-flowered crowfoot, and it's poisonous. Although the Menominees, the Native Americans who lived around here, used to grind up its roots to make an antiseptic."

Chloe opened her eyes wide, impressed with the girl's knowledge. "How would you know something like that?"

"Pop-pop taught me, and his grandma taught him." Rose straightened her shoulders. "She was a Menominee."

"Pop-pop?" Chloe scratched her neck.

"My grandpa."

"Your grandpa must be a smart man, a good resource for you."

"He is." The girl grinned. "If you want, I can teach you what he's taught me."

Chloe chuckled at the idea. "Sounds like fun, but I have to make breakfast and then go to work."

"When are you through?"

"About five."

“Okay, I’ll meet you at five.” With a wave, the girl was off.

Chuckling to herself, Chloe waved and finished picking her raspberries. Back home, she added half the berries to the pancake batter and smashed the other half with sugar to make a simple sauce, the way her great-aunt had taught her when she was Rose’s age.

As they ate breakfast, Chloe told Edwina about her little friend.

“What did you say her name was?”

“Rose, Rose Beaulieu.”

Edwina’s eyes clouded over. “You said her grandfather taught her. Did she mention his name?”

Chloe shook her head as she studied the older woman’s reaction. “Why? Is anything wrong?”

“No.” Edwina poured herself another cup of coffee, lacing it with brandy from her flask.



At five o’clock sharp, Chloe heard a knock.

Opening the screen door, she saw it was Rose. “C’mon in. I’ll just be a minute while I shut down my computer.”

“What kind of work do you do, Chloe?”

As she logged off, she turned toward the girl. “I’m a technical writer for a Milwaukee software company.”

“You work from here?” Rose looked around the dining room that Chloe had hijacked for her temporary office—her laptop on the table, stacks of papers and user manuals surrounded it.

“While Aunt Ed heals, I’m telecommuting. I can work from anywhere.”

“Even outside?”

“Only if there’s Wi-Fi, which there isn’t here.”

“I’m supposed to give my brother these.” She held up a bag. “And along the way, I can show you the wildflowers. I know a shortcut.” Her face brightened. “Ready?”

“Lead on.”

They started on the packed-sand path. Then they turned off onto a narrow rabbit trail through a stand of white birch trees. Dried leaves covered the young forest’s floor. Chloe saw a tri-petal white flower, and then another and another

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among bright-green, tri-leafed plants. Soon the area was a green-and-white carpet of delicate blossoms.

“What are these?” Chloe stooped for a closer peek.

“Trillium. Aren’t they pretty?”

“Beautiful. I’ve heard of being given the red-carpet treatment, but I’d prefer this white carpet any day.” Standing up for a better look, she gazed at the flower fairyland.

“It’s also called birthroot.”

“Birthroot? Let me guess, can it ease childbirth?”

Rose nodded. “It was a sacred female herb.” Her voice was serious, hushed. “Only medicine women could speak of it.”

Chloe smiled. “Then how did your grandfather learn about it?”

The girl grinned and then turned away, trying to hide it. “Come on. If you like this, I’ll show you something even prettier.”

Chloe followed Rose along the path until they came to a patch of white flowers with dainty, yellow stamens.

“These are gorgeous. What are they?”

“Goldthread.” Rose made such a sour face, Chloe giggled. “It’s also called mouth root because it’s good for canker sores. Just chew its bright-gold roots, and the sores go away.” Puckering her lips, she closed her eyes, scrunched her nose, and shuddered. “But it’s bitter.”

“I’ll remember that.” Chloe chuckled. “Your teaching style makes things . . . unforgettable.”

Just before she saw the bay through the trees, the rocky path gave way to a sandy mix and then to a packed-sand beach. As they walked out of the woods onto the shoreline, Chloe gazed up at the expansive sky. After the leafy canopy, it felt good to see the sun again.

Ahead, stacked canoes and kayaks lined the banks. Rose led her onto a wooden pier with a sign at its end reading “Sunset Cruises.”

“This is where my brother works.” She turned to give Chloe a knowledgeable nod. Then, spotting a bare-chested man wearing a captain’s cap over a dark mane of hair, she waved.

The broad smile from his finely-chiseled face caught Chloe’s eye as he started toward them. His lean body moved sinuously, like a tawny cat’s. From his taut pectorals, Chloe could see he worked out. Not what she would describe as

brawny, his upper body was toned, well-defined. She caught her breath. *Just about right.*

As he approached, she noticed where his tan line ended, just above his jeans. He took off his captain's cap and ran his fingers through his shock of silky, dark hair.

"Hey, Rose, what brings you here?"

She held up the bag. "Mom wanted you to have these."

He peeked inside. "Strawberries. Thanks." Then he gave her a hug.

"The first of the season," said Rose. "She knows you like them."

"Appreciate it." Then he turned to Chloe. "Who's your friend?"

"Chloe. She's staying with Miss Ed 'til her cast comes off."

His warm smile faltered for a moment. Then it returned, and he held out his hand. "Pleased to meet you, Chloe. I'm Hud Beaulieu."

"Chloe Clark," she said. An electrical jolt ran up her arm as their hands connected. Again, she caught her breath. "What an interesting name," she said, finding her tongue. "I've never known anyone named Hud. Is it Native American?"

He shook his head. "Okemos is my Native American name."

"What's that mean?"

"Little Chief."

"And Hud?"

He smiled. "I was named after my father. My grandfather gave him his Native American name, and my grandmother nicknamed him Hud for Hudson."

She watched his flashing, dark eyes. "Hudson, what's it mean?"

This time he blushed as he glanced at his sister.

"Go ahead." Rose shrugged. "It's nothing I haven't heard before."

"Technically, it's Old English for Son of Hugh." Rubbing his nose, he chuckled ruefully. "As the story goes, my father was conceived in the back seat of a Hudson at the drive-in." As he hooked his thumbs under his arms, he grinned sheepishly. "The nickname stuck."

Hunching her shoulders, Chloe chuckled. "So . . ."

"Back then it was called a shotgun wedding." Sighing, he shook his head. "Apparently, it was a stormy marriage, but it was strong." He gave a fervent nod. "It lasted until she passed away two years ago at the age of eighty."

"I'm sorry." She blinked, sobering. *The same age as Aunt Ed.*

"She had a good life."

"Then your grandfather's still living?"

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“Oh, yes. Very much so.”

“I wonder if my great-aunt knows him. What’s his name?”

“Jake.”

She opened her eyes wide. “Jake Beaulieu?” *I wonder . . .* The name jarred her memory, but she couldn’t place it.

His eyes lingered on hers for a moment. Then he turned to Rose. “How would you two lovely ladies like to go on a sunset cruise?”

Chloe felt at her pockets. “I didn’t bring any—”

“As my guests. I’m taking a group out right now.”

Rose’s eyes lit up. “Oh, yeah. Chloe, you’ll love this.”

Chloe mentally reviewed her to-do list as she studied his finely-chiseled features. *Got to make dinner. Don’t want to worry Aunt Ed. Besides, this isn’t going anywhere. He’s out of my league.* “I shouldn’t leave Aunt Ed alone too long.”

“We’ll be back in less than two hours.” Hud’s dark eyes bored into hers. “If you haven’t seen the Door Peninsula from the bay, you haven’t seen it.”

She tried to stifle the timid smile she felt creeping at the corners of her mouth. “Though I spent summers here as a child, my great-aunt never would let me near the bay.” She looked at Rose. Then, as she looked at Hud, she made her decision. “I’d love to.”

He escorted them to the end of the pier. Then, giving her his hand, he helped Chloe up the plank. At his touch, a tingling sensation raced up her arm again as his energy flowed into her. She gazed into his eyes and saw they were locked on hers. *He feels it, too.*

Her eyelids fluttering, she felt a combination of triumph and terror. Since her breakup with Aaron, she had lost confidence in her ability to attract anyone’s attention. *Admit it. You’ve lost all self-confidence. Period.*

Letting go his hand, breaking the link, she wondered if the real reason she had come to her great-aunt’s aid was to get away from Milwaukee—sneak off, tail tucked between her legs, and hide. Maybe that scenario was closer to the truth than the one of the caring, dutiful niece.

*But I love Aunt Ed. I want to be here for her.* She shook her head, trying to shake off the memories and aftereffects of Aaron. *See? I don’t even know how I feel anymore.*

Then she glanced at Hud. He was still staring at her. She blinked, not believing her eyes. The attraction was unmistakable . . . and mutual. Despite the warm afternoon sun, a shiver ran down her spine.



The assistant unhooked the ropes tethering the boat to the pier, tossed them to Hud, and jumped aboard. As the boat powered off from shore, Chloe felt her qualms slipping away. A breeze caught her hair, clearing her mind, carrying away her regrets. She took a deep, cleansing breath.

Hud pointed out the wildlife and told legends about Green Bay while the boat plowed through the water.

“On your right, look high into that group of oak trees, ladies and gentlemen. If you have binoculars, get them out for a rare treat. A bald eagle’s perched on the tallest tree at three o’clock.”

Murmurs came from the passengers as they opened backpacks and carrying cases, uncapping their binoculars and camera lenses.

As the bird took flight, Hud added, “And just below the eagle, do you see what looks like white flags waving? That’s a herd of white-tailed deer.”

Farther up the coast, he spoke into the microphone. “Those craggy rocks along the shoreline and the bluff above it are part of the limestone outcroppings of the Niagara Escarpment.”

“Does it have anything to do with Niagara Falls?” asked a passenger.

“What you’re looking at is the same cliff you’d see at Niagara Falls.” He grinned, his white teeth flashing against his tanned face. “Just a tad smaller, of course. The Escarpment runs from New York State, arching through Ontario, Canada, Michigan, and down the Door Peninsula of Wisconsin.”

He pointed out cherry and apple orchards. “If you’re here in July, you can pick your own cherries. Then you can stay and, depending on the variety, pick your own apples from August into October.”

As the sun began to set and the sky glowed a fiery, salmon color, he turned the boat around, heading back to port. All the while, he told them Door County legends and stories of haunted lighthouses, ending with a tale of the *aurora borealis*.

“How many of you have seen the northern lights?” Half the passengers raised their hands. “The Menominee people believed the lights showed the location of the *manabai’wok*, the giants, who were the spirits of great hunters and fishermen. Think of that the next time you see those color-ful displays.”

Then he handed the wheel to his assistant and joined Rose and Chloe. “Enjoying the tour?”

“You’re an excellent guide,” said Chloe. “Listening to you, I’ve learned a lot. How long have you been doing this?”

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“Every summer since high school,” he said.

“Summers?” She studied him. “What do you do the rest of the year?”

“He teaches history at the university,” said Rose.

“Really?” Opening her eyes in surprise, Chloe did a double-take.

Smiling proudly, Rose nodded. “He just became an associate professor.”

He tousled her hair. “She’s my biggest fan.”

Chloe was unsure how to word it. “It’s none of my business, but I’m curious. Why are you giving rides to tourists when . . . ?” *You could be doing more.*

He filled in for her. “When I could be doing something more academic, like research?”

She shrugged. “Research, teaching summer school . . . I don’t know.”

“I’m helping our grandfather. He’s always helped us.” He reached for his sister’s shoulders, hugging her to him. “Now it’s my turn.” He looked into her eyes. “Something like what you’re doing for Miss Ed.”

Again, she examined her motives. *But am I helping or hiding?* She shook her head. “I don’t think I’m as selfless as you.”

“What do you mean?” His eyes probed hers.

She grimaced, her lips pressing into a tight line. *How do I put it?* “This is as much a vacation for me as a vocation. In many ways, coming here’s an escape.”

“Where are you from?”

“Milwaukee.”

His eyes twinkled, teasing her. “City slicker, eh?”

“Hardly.” She scanned the wide horizon over the bay, watching the changing colors of the sunset. “You can take the girl out of the country, but . . .” She turned back to Hud and took a deep breath. “I spent summers here as a kid but grew up in Milwaukee. After I graduated,” she shrugged, “I simply stayed where the jobs were.” *Did the “smart” thing.*

Hud turned to Rose. “Let’s see if we can’t persuade Chloe to stay here a little longer.”

She nodded. “I’m teaching her about herbs.”

“You two have a lot in common.” Chloe smiled, looking from one to the other, noting the family resemblance. “You’re both good at sharing knowledge.”

“You hear that, Rose?” He gave her shoulders an affectionate shake as he let go. “Maybe you can teach Chloe about the northern lights?”

The girl’s eyes lit up. “Sure.”

He turned toward Chloe. “Have you ever seen the aurora borealis?”

She shook her head.

“Then you’re in for a treat.” Rose grinned.

“Midnight’s the best time. Are you game?” His dark eyes teased, seeming to imply more.

Chloe’s heart beat faster as she recognized the challenge. “Sure.”



After dinner, Chloe stepped outside to test the temperature, then quickly stepped back in. “Once the sun goes down, it sure gets chilly fast.” She turned to Edwina. “Do you have a jacket I could borrow?”

Edwina set down her cigar. “Look in the back of your closet. There’s a second rack with jackets and coats.”

Chloe pushed aside the front rack of clothes and walked to the far end of her closet, where the light did not penetrate. The floorboards creaked as she stepped cautiously in the dark. Suddenly, icy chills swept down her spine. She chafed her arms, trying to rub away the goosebumps. Her fingertips felt like she had dipped them in ice water. Then they began to numb. Her teeth started chattering. Cobwebs brushed against her face. Yelping, she swept them away with both hands, grabbed the first jacket she touched, and scrambled out.

As she stepped into her bedroom, the temperature felt comfortable. The numbness began leaving her fingertips, but a sense of dread persisted. *What was that?*

She looked at the jacket and saw it was a winter coat, way too heavy for a June evening. Shaking off the sense of panic, she psyched herself to go back. *Only this time I’ll bring a flashlight.*

She found a pocket flashlight on her keychain. Gathering her courage, she took a deep breath and strode toward the back of the closet. Again the floorboards creaked, and the same icy fingers crawled up her spine. More spider webs brushed against her. She shuddered, but forced herself to put back the coat. Then her toe stumbled against something. She heard it slide aside, and she stepped away. Her fingertips shaking as they touched the clothes, she felt for a lighter-weight jacket.

Just as she pulled one from its hanger, her flashlight flickered and went out. *Good time for the battery to die.* She swallowed as she retraced her footsteps in the dark, the boards creaking when she stepped on them. As she groped her way

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along, something brushed against her arm. She screamed and ran out, knocking clothes off their hangers as she passed.

Once back in her room, she took a deep breath, letting the warm air revive her, but nothing could touch the chill at her core. She noticed the flashlight's beam of light. *Sure, now it's working.* She set it on the bedroom floor, its beam pointed at the fallen clothes inside the closet. Then she began hanging them up.

*What am I, a child?* She breathed deeply, trying to regain her composure. Then, in the flashlight's reflected beam along the floor, she saw a small box pushed to the very back of the closet. *That must be what I kicked.*

Groaning, wishing she had not noticed it, she felt more compelled to search it with every article of clothing she rehung. *What's in it? What if it has black widows or brown recluses?* She shuddered, hating spiders, knowing there was a distinct possibility she would find one.

Finally, the urge overcame the fear. She swallowed, pushed her clothes to one side of the rack, made a beeline to the box, and dragged it out into the light. Even moving swiftly, the floorboards creaked.

Rather than risk spider bites, she dumped the box in the middle of the floor. Picture albums and scrapbooks tumbled out, but no spiders. *Thank God!* Breathing a sigh of relief, she nestled the books back into the box and carried it to the living room.

"Aunt Ed, look what I found."

"Goodness." Edwina's eyes lit up as she lifted out an album. "I'd forgotten about these."

"I don't think I've ever seen them." Chloe helped her hold it open, as the older woman used her good hand to turn the pages. "Who are these people?"

"That's your great-grandmother, Maria O'Dell." Edwina swiveled in her seat to look at Chloe. "She was just a baby at the time, but she survived the Peshtigo Fire."

"Really?"

She nodded. "Her parents, your great-great-grandparents, are the ones who homesteaded in Door County." She turned a page. "This is the only picture we have of their daughter, your great-great-grandmother, Teresa Malone."

"I'm sure I've never seen these," she looked at her aunt, "or even heard of these people. Why?"

A cloud came over her aunt's eyes, and her shoulders sagged. "Their stories give me the blues."

“Why? Were they horse thieves or outlaws?” Chuckling, she tried to lighten her aunt’s mood.

She shook her head. “No, nothing like that, but . . .” Wearing a faint smile, she met Chloe’s eyes. “If you’re interested, I’ll tell you about them.”

“I’d definitely like to hear their stories. Why don’t you start at the beginning, with my great-great-great-grandparents?”

“I don’t know much about them. Martin Malone and his wife came to Door County by boat in 1857. They’d come from New York State, originally. Then they relocated in Ohio for a short time. After that, they moved to Milwaukee, then Manitowoc, and finally they settled in Door County. They had three small children. One of them was your great-great-grandmother, Teresa Malone.”

Repeating the name, Chloe thought for a moment. “The name rings a bell.”

“After living in Champion a short time, they blazed a trail with a team of oxen and moved to Egg Harbor. As the story goes, Native Americans were frequent visitors at their cabin, and wildlife was so plentiful, they could see it nearly any time of day, right from their doorway.”

Chloe shook her head. “It’s hard to imagine now, isn’t it?”

“That’s about all I know of them, but their daughter, your great-great-grandmother, Teresa Malone, was quite a woman. She was—”

A knock at the door startled them. Chloe checked her watch. *Midnight already?*

“Who’s that at this time of night?” Edwina scowled.

“It’s Rose and Hud.” She crossed to the door. “Remember, I told you we were going to see the northern lights. That’s why I needed the jacket.”

“Oh, that’s right.” Edwina grunted.

Chloe opened the door. “Come on in.”

Hud stuck his head in the door and nodded to each. “Hello, Miss Ed, Chloe.”

“Hi, Miss Ed,” said Rose, stepping inside. She looked at Chloe. “Are you ready?”

Chloe grabbed her jacket and keys. “All set.” Then she turned to her aunt. “We should be back in about an hour or two. Will you be all right? Do you need anything before we go?”

Scowling, Edwina snapped at her. “I’m not an invalid. I can put myself to bed. Go on, and don’t forget to lock the door behind you.” She picked up her cigar and, puffing on it, relit it with her lighter.

Chloe was not sure what to make of her great-aunt’s attitude. *She’s getting cranky in her old age.* “Aunt Ed can take care of herself. She’s a tough cookie,” she told Rose and Hud with a wry grin. “I come from hardy stock.” Then she

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thought of her closet's spider webs and creaking boards. *Hardy stock. Didn't say I was tough.*

They climbed into a pickup truck. Hud at the wheel, Rose between them, she turned toward Chloe. "You've really never seen the aurora borealis?"

"Nope. I've only seen pictures, not the real thing."

Keeping his eyes on the road, Hud tilted his head toward them. "There's no guarantee we'll see it tonight."

"It all depends on the sunspot activity," said Rose.

"I hope whatever causes it happens so we see it." Chloe gave Rose a warm smile.

"Hud's taking us to a cleared field away from town," said Rose. "The less light scatter, the better the view."

Ten minutes later, they turned off the highway onto a grated, dirt road. From there, Hud unlocked a gate and turned onto a tractor path in a field. He parked, grabbed a few quilts from the back seat, lowered the tailgate, and smoothed out the quilts on the truck bed.

"Climb up," he said.

Rose grabbed a thermos and some cups before scrambling up, taking the center.

Chloe hesitated, then laughed to herself and climbed beside her. Hud climbed on the other side of his sister.

"Now what?"

"Just look at the stars." Putting her hands behind her head, Rose lay back and watched the sky.

Chloe followed suit. As her eyes became accustomed to the dark, she saw a star shoot across the sky and gasped. "Did you see that?"

"A bonus," said Hud, looking at her over Rose's head.

Chloe chuckled.

"Just wait," said Rose. "I have a feeling we'll see the northern lights tonight." Within seconds, her arm shot up, pointing. "What's that over there? Isn't that swirling light I see?"

"Yup," said Hud. "Here it comes."

Chloe could not believe her eyes. Rosy-purple and lime-green lights shimmered and swirled across the sky, ebbing and flowing like thick liquid. The lights danced, creating a fluid pattern that flickered, twinkled, shot out, and curved in on itself, creating new swaths of colors, ever new displays. A kaleidoscope, always flowing, always tumbling and whirling, the lights leapt and frolicked like a living creature.

From the horizon to the zenith, churning colors filled the sky. Wave after wave flowed over itself, wiggling, cavorting. At other times, the lights seemed like colorful spotlights, waving back and forth at a Hollywood premier. Sometimes, the lights began at the horizon and climbed the sky. Other times, they appeared from above and danced down to earth.

A ray of white light shot across the bands of color. *Another falling star.*

Chloe sighed. Barely a whisper, she said, "I've never seen anything like this. It's . . ." She scanned her memory for any comparison. "It's like food coloring swirled in a giant glass of water."

Smiling, Hud sat up, using the truck's body as a backrest. Then he found the thermos and cups. "Who could go for some hot apple cider?"

Chloe realized her fingertips were numb. "I could, thanks." Sitting up, she took the cup from him, warming her hands on its heat before drinking. Then she looked up at the sky. "It's so beautiful, I hadn't realized it was getting cold." She tucked the quilt around her.

"Yeah, there's nothing quite like it." He nudged his sister. "Rose, you want some cider?"

When she didn't answer, he chuckled as he pulled a quilt over her. "It's past her bedtime."

Chloe turned toward him, keeping her eyes on the swirling lights overhead. "Have you always lived in Door County?"

He nodded. "On my great-great-grandmother's side, always. I live about a hundred miles from where my family's always lived, where the Menominee tribe originated."

"Really?" She sipped her cider, savoring its warmth. It was cozy under the quilt, talking quietly beneath the shimmering sky. She saw his profile outlined in the faint moonlight.

"According to our creation story, our five clans were created at the mouth of the Menominee River. This is where our people's story began."

"You said five clans. What are they?"

"There's ancestral Bear, Eagle, Wolf, Moose, and Crane."

"Which is yours?"

"The Wolf clan."

"So are you born into a clan, or does something have to make itself apparent to you?"

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Though it was dark, she could see him turn his head toward her, observing her. “Why do you ask?”

“I’ve read about totems.”

“You mean power animals?” It was too dark to see his expression, but his tone was sharp.

“From what I’ve heard, it involves dreams or meditation.”

“I consider that slant spirit-wolf symbolism. Though it may have its origins in Native American cultures, New Age concepts usually distort it. The Menominee believe the wolf’s a creature of great wisdom and should be revered as a spiritual guide.” His tone softened. “You’re either born or marry into a clan.”

“So you don’t receive a sign in a dream . . . or a blog.”

She heard his soft chuckle.

“It isn’t like a horoscope.” He was quiet for a moment. “It’s more like a coat of arms or a plaid tartan that symbolizes your family.”

“Then what about people who’re descended from a particular clan but haven’t been taught about it?”

“You bring up an interesting situation.” He sat quietly. Then he spoke in a confidential whisper. “I’ve had a similar upbringing. Although my father was one-eighth Menominee, he taught me very little about our heritage. However, I’ve had a special connection with wolves since I was small.”

“How so?” She found herself leaning toward him—partly to hear better, partly because his tone drew her into an intimate circle.

“When I was four, I went on a hike with my grandparents and got lost in the woods. Not long after, a pack of gray timber wolves discovered me.” He rephrased it. “It’s closer to say they seemed attracted to me.”

“What do you mean?”

“What I suppose was the alpha female approached me, stopping just inches in front of me. She began licking my face, cleaning off the sweat and grime. It was a caring gesture, not aggressive at all. I felt safe. Then, when my grandparents called out to me several minutes later and I answered, the wolves left silently. My grandparents never saw them, but over the next ten years, I occasionally caught a glimpse of a white wolf puppy. It seemed to grow up with me, from then until I entered high school.”

“What happened to it?”

He shrugged his shoulders. “In the wild, wolves rarely live more than eight to ten years.”



“Did you sense anything when you saw it?”

“I just felt a deep bond, a connection. I finally asked my grandfather about it, and he said I had the wild but disciplined spirit of the wolf. That was when he told me I was a member of the Wolf clan.” His white teeth flashed in the moonlight. “It was the first I’d heard of it.” He studied her face. “Someday, I’ll ask him to tell you about his experience with a wolf.”

She nodded. “I saw a juvenile wolf once. It was in one of the Milwaukee County parks. It sauntered onto North Avenue and then loped out of sight. I only saw it for a minute, but I’ll never forget it.”

“Did you sense anything?”

“Besides awe? And fear?” She chuckled. Then she paused, thinking. “I felt privileged to see such a noble creature, but nothing beyond that.”

“Native Americans believe the wolf’s a teacher. Even its presence is a message of guidance. At the time, were you faced with a difficult choice, or did you lack the information you needed to make some important decision?”

Unwilling to reveal any personal information, she felt her smile disappear as her muscles tensed and her mind skipped back to Aaron.

“If the wolf appears to you,” he said, “ask advice from someone you trust. Think it over. Take the knowledge you need, and then take action with confidence. You’ll do the right thing.”

She was about to answer when she heard a wolf howl in the distance. She gasped. Then she began chuckling in nervous relief. “Talk about timing.”

“Did you know wolves howl in the key of E, just like whales and dolphins, yet every wolf has its own unique sound?”

“Interesting. I didn’t know that.” She shook her head and then looked at her watch. “It’s after two. Maybe we should start back.”

“Morning comes early, especially in late June. The sun will be up in three hours.”

Hud carried his sister to the back seat. Chloe nestled a quilt about her and folded the other quilts. Then, as they rode in silence, her thoughts turned to Aaron.

“Have you ever been to a fish boil?” His voice jarred her.

“What?” Flinching, her mind replayed his words. “No, what is it?”

“It’s more than a dining experience. It’s an event, something everyone ought to experience at least once.” She watched his cheek dimple as he spoke. “Basically, it’s whitefish, red potatoes, and onions boiled in a huge kettle over an open wood fire. The finale’s a tourist favorite. They pour kerosene on the flames to

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make it flash up. Then they serve it with plenty of melted butter, lemon slices, and parsley.”

“Sounds delicious.”

“It is.” He took his eyes off the road long enough to look at her. “They’re having a fish boil at Fish Creek tonight. Would you like to go?”

She gave him a sidelong glance, debating. *Watching the northern lights with his sister is one thing, but a date?* She thought of Aaron but surprised herself at how quickly she said, “Sure.”