

Tears, Fears and Arrowheads

Weeping Eye Sings

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Book One, The Red Rock Road Trip Series



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*To Michael H., the real Tomas,
who really knew how to live*

Prologue

Nick Kosta unfolded the Pueblo Weekly News, licked his index finger, and turned the pages until he reached the obituary listings. Each week when Nick checked the obituaries, his regular customers who sat facing him at the diner counter ribbed him by asking if he was making sure that he was still alive.

“It doesn’t hurt to check...,” he would say, “... the way I feel.”

“The way you look, too,” the old timers would say.

Today, the obituaries listed three deaths, each one detailing the life and death of an elderly resident of Waipiti County. Nick didn’t know any of them or any of their family members listed in the death notices.

Page one, however, contained two articles that were the subject of great speculation by the early morning, farmer crowd at the Chicken Coop diner in Hidden City, Arizona. The short stack of the Pueblo Weekly News that Nick placed on the metal rack near the front door was quickly depleted as the farmers took their copies and sat hunched over the papers, thick near-white coffee mugs in hand. They pushed back the visors of their farm-implement company caps and frowned and shook their heads and argued about what probably happened.

The first page article reported a murder at an apartment building on the west side of town. The address—2604 Sandhill

Street, Apt. 107—was in an unincorporated area with a Hidden City mailing address. It was familiar to Nick; his cashier and waitress, Lisa Rainwater, lived at that address. Just yesterday she was here at the Coop, pouring coffee in the customers' cups and bringing plate after plate of fried eggs, bacon, and hash browns and more coffee. Today, Lisa had not shown up for work. The article reported that the police were looking for the tenant of the apartment. Anyone with information concerning the whereabouts of Lisa Rainwater was asked to contact Deputy Dan Weatherford at the Waipiti County Sheriff's Department.

Lisa's latest boyfriend, an Australian dude with a big gut and full beard, was also at the Coop yesterday, swabbing down the eggs and grease on his plate with a hunk of Texas toast and swigging coffee. Nick remembered that he had an odd name, something like Tinker, or Tonka... no, wait, it was Tanker. Nick had not noticed if Lisa and Tanker were not getting along; if they were fighting they were keeping it to themselves, at least at first. Tanker had been hung over, of course.

Then that kid—Possum—had shown up. He said something to Lisa before he came back to the kitchen to beg breakfast off of Nick. That was when Lisa began to get upset and started pushing Tanker to finish eating. A few minutes later Nick saw Lisa grab her purse and yell at Tanker to hurry up, and then they were gone.

Nick was pissed that Lisa walked off the job. When she came back, saying she was sorry and telling him what happened, she was going to have to beg for her job back. Until she decided to show up for work again, Nick would have to rely on Possum to do at least the easy work of the diner—making coffee and making sure that the customers' cups were kept full. Lisa had not been much of a waitress anyway, so slow and chatty that Nick would have replaced her with someone else who was a little faster, someone who would hustle when things got busy. Except that he didn't know anyone like that around here. Everyone moved slowly in the baked desert sun.

So Lisa and Tanker must have been in some kind of trouble. Maybe Tanker was running from the law. He sure had that drifter look about him. Nick noticed that Lisa paid for his meals at the diner. Maybe she was hiding him at her apartment. Hell, it wouldn't be the first time in Hidden City that a girlfriend

stashed a guy with a warrant hanging over his head under her bedcovers.

Nobody knew for sure what happened. But the Australian guy died of a gunshot wound, at close range, in his big belly. A neighbor heard the blast and called the Waipiti County Sheriff's emergency number. By the time they arrived on the scene, Tanker had bled out. There was no one else in the apartment, and Lisa had disappeared.

Nick and his customers were just as interested in the other page one article:

A sports car driven at a high rate of speed led to the deaths of the driver and his passenger. The bodies were burned beyond identification, but are believed to be a male and a female. The vehicle number from the remains of the vehicle, a late model Ferrari, is being traced to discover the identity of the owner of the vehicle. The Ferrari was traveling at a speed of over 180 mph when it became airborne as it went over a rise on Route 98. The driver apparently lost control and landed in the path of a semi trailer, skidding under the truck and bursting into flames. The driver of the truck, Ralph Pelfrey, was admitted for trauma at the Emergency Medical Clinic in Hidden City. The identities of the victims are withheld pending notification of next of kin.

Nick only knew of one Ferrari in Waipiti County. He couldn't bear to think of the female passenger who was the most likely person to have been in that Ferrari.

At the counter, Deputy Dan Weatherford pushed the wide brim up on his hat and held up his cup for a refill. Nick said, "Possum, it is about time that you learned how to work. Get Deputy Weatherford some hot coffee, and don't take all day doing it."

Chapter One

Espiritud Soledad heard a commotion in the twisted piñon tree that grew in the ravine just past the truckers' parking lot. The mad squawking of a flock of blackbirds drew her attention to a vicious race between a red-tailed hawk, silhouetted against the setting sun, and the crazed blackbirds. A small dark shape dangled from the hawk's talons. In the half-dozen times Espiritud had watched this battle, there was only one outcome—dinner for the hawk, a lost baby for the blackbirds. She always rooted for the swarming, pecking, smaller birds, and she always lost.

Battles were nothing new to her. As a Hispanic-surnamed female of Choctaw descent on her mother's side, she had found it easy to get into the law school of her choice. But once there she found the study of law to be like learning a foreign language. She struggled with the pedantic case studies. Her fellow students were unfriendly, cold, untrustworthy. Not that they singled Espiritud out; it was just the way law students acted at first, until a sorting out occurred. The one friend Espiritud had made, an older, rotund man who was starting a second career in the law, dubbed her "Sprite." The name stuck, partly because of her dark-haired, elfin hairstyle, but also because of her energy and perseverance in her law classes.

Sprite turned away from watching the blackbirds diving and furiously beating their wings to keep up with the hawk. The red-

tail's three-foot wingspan allowed it to soar on the high wind, conserving its energy, taking its time and always clutching the wriggling, skewered bundle.

"Hawks are trouble," said Nick Kosta, the owner and cook of The Chicken Coop diner, as he fired up a Camel and leaned against the doorway that separated Sprite's office from the back storeroom of the restaurant.

Sprite was adept at reading the messages of the spirit animals. The hawk was not in her personal totem, so most likely she was being given a message to beware, be cautious, something bad could be about to happen.

Bad things happening around her were a predictable part of the life she had chosen here, just outside the sprawling reservation that had been occupied by Native American people for about a century and a half. Not enough jobs, too much drinking, the easy access of drugs all led to husbands beating up their wives or kids—and sometimes the wives beating up husbands, kids, parents—whoever was making their lives hell at the moment. The tensions of law school, and of having to prove herself every day there, were nothing compared to the stress of everyday life helping the people of Hidden City, the residents of Waipiti County, and those who lived on the sprawling Navajo reservation.

The soaring temperatures of the Southwestern desert turned bad moods into violent fights. Knives and guns decorated the rickety bedside tables in almost every reservation ranch house—and frequently solved the issue of how to escape from a stillborn future, a rancid past. Children were the losers in such an uncertain world. One moment you had someone looking out for you, then there was screaming—mothers throwing pots at fathers; fathers backhanding mothers, whose heads snapped backwards at their necks just like in the cartoons. Only the heads didn't always shake back into place.

In these fights the children were forgotten, seeing things and hearing things between mother and father that children should never see or hear. The worst was when the fights were about something one of the children had done. Then the fear was topped with guilt, and terror that the parent taking the beating would blame the child and come after them next, belt in hand.

"That hawk is trouble for those blackbirds, that's for sure," replied Sprite. She couldn't look too long or too closely at the hawk

that the name Mississippi came from the Choctaw word Misha Sipokni. It meant beyond the ages, the father of all its kind.

But Tomas's father had taught him well. He passed down the stories he had memorized as he worked the land with his father and his grandfather. They, in turn, heard of how his great-grandfather had won his way off the reservation in Oklahoma through winning at cards. His name was Jawotnehe. He was a talented shaman, with extensive knowledge of woodland plants that he used to make poultices and brews for healing sores, cuts, and headaches. The more powerful herbs could help a barren wife conceive or a woman lose an unwanted and unexpected child.

Jawotnehe's spirit was said to have been reborn in Tomas. Those who could remember descriptions from the older ancestors swore that Tomas looked remarkably like Jawotnehe. And certainly his love and talent for healing, making medicine, and making money was all alive and well in Tomas. From the stories passed down, and in his own reading, Tomas learned the history of his people, the Cherokee nation, and the neighboring tribes, from the Seminoles in Florida to the Choctaws that filled the Mississippi Valley and the Ohio River basin tribes.



Long ago, in the early 1800s, the United States government officials robbed the tribes of their unique pasts by taking away their futures. They had a simple strategy—convince the leaders of the tribes and nations to sell their land at the lowest possible price. The Choctaw leaders reportedly signed treaties of land concession, after they were drunk, written in a language that they couldn't read. All of the fertile land east of the Tombigbee River under the control of the Choctaw was sold for a pittance, for less than \$2,000 in goods—a few sets of blacksmith's tools, woolen cloth, a few rifles, blankets, and a saddle. Leaders sold out their own tribe for personal gain, either in riches or in power.

Doesn't matter now, Tomas thought. And yet it did. It all mattered, the hundreds of acres his ancestors and their neighbors lost in North Carolina and Georgia, so many years ago. The way the United States Army soldiers were authorized to just barge in on the prosperous family farm and order the family, at the point of bayoneted rifle muzzles, to pack their personal items and get