

# SIHU



By

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### Dedication

For A. There was a fair time gap between writing Hina and then Sihu. My girlfriend A was both inspiring and controversial and in some way or other, I don't really understand myself, she made me want to write and complete this trilogy. And so, despite everything I dedicate Sihu to her.

THIS IS A FIRST DRAFT FOR THE BENEFIT OF FEEDBACK. PLEASE FORGIVE ERRORS AT THIS TIME.

## Part One

Well, I suppose I should start at the beginning. That is the usual thing to do, and who am I to break with convention? My name is Joshua, and I live near a logging town, near Two Rivers, Minnesota. The State is also known as the land of 10,000 lakes, although some people say there are more than that, and there are, if you count fish ponds and the odd neglected bucket left out in the open. Aren't 10,000 enough without some greedy buggers wanting there to be more? And word has it that we have a new president of our nation as well. The news sheet should come out next month with all the details.

I don't really know why I am telling you my story, it's just that I think it might be time to tell someone before I fall off this planet and into death. Some people might say living in a deserted wilderness is a bit like being dead anyway, but when I look back, it hasn't been so bad.

With 10,000 lakes it should come as no surprise to you that I live right on the edge of one of them. The fishing is easy, so easy in fact that even a bad fisherman like me cannot but help catching something nearly every time I cast a line. And every so often, when I catch more than I need, I stroll up the path to the few Chippewa Indian settlement houses and give a few of my fish to a good friend of mine, Odahingum. She is Chippewa and her name means *Rippling Water*. And every now and then, she wanders down the path to my home and brings me meat; anything that the men who live there have caught. I am sure that she doesn't need the fish I take her, but she is always grateful and, I suppose it is company for her as it is for me. When she comes, we sit on the veranda and talk of the old days, and rock back and forth in our chairs. We drink coffee, and she cleans up my place a bit from time to time after admonishing me for not keeping everything clean and tidy. Then she goes back up the path, muttering old words that I don't understand. I do know one Chippewa word, *aaniin*, and that means hello. Anyway, everyone speaks English, however broken or incomplete.

So why am I so important that I need to write things down for other people to read? Well, I am not important. I was when I worked for the logging company all those years ago, until one day, a tree fell very near me and a branch hit me, and left me alive but unable to work. Well, I am not important now except for one incident that occurred a few years after that accident. I think it was about twenty years ago now. I fell very ill with some malady or other and was near to death. That's when Odahingum came down the path to my cabin for the first time. She says that I was barely alive and with no one to care for me, I would have died on my own in that cabin. She rushed back up the path to the medicine man who mixed a concoction

and administered it to me. It took me 8 days to recover enough to sit up and drink soup on my own. Odahingum stayed with me for all that time.

Whilst I was recovering I had so many dreams and experiences that changed my life forever. I began to hallucinate but the Indians said it was more than that. They believe in all sorts of magical worlds. Anyway, when I came round, I pretended that nothing had changed and I was the same person as I ever was. Odahingum knew different but said it was between me and my spirits and not for her to know. To cut a long story short, I had the ability to half sleep and imagine other worlds, I don't really know where from, whether in this world or some other. I don't know whether they are real experiences or not, I am not that clever. And, I suppose, it doesn't matter.

So anyway, I wake up every morning just before dawn and after a wash in the barrel outside, I watch the sun come up, as I drink a cup of coffee. Then I think about my empty belly and get some breakfast. I have a wood burning oven. So I have something hot, usually oatmeal porridge, to warm me up. Then I just sit inside my cabin door, keeping warm from the cooking heat, and look out across the lake. There are always so many birds coming and going, singing their tunes and quarrelling. Mid-morning I go fishing; well it's just a few yards to the edge of the lake. Then I leave my fish wrapped up from the hungry birds, on the boardwalk, for whenever I want it. I like to light a fire outside to cook the fish because I love the smell of nature and watching the smoke rising. I might stroll up the path some way but not always as far as the Chippewa settlement, or partly round the lake, to get up an appetite for lunch. Then I nod off and on for the afternoon in my rocking chair, and the sun warms me. And that is really my day. As it gets dark, I poke my belly to see if it needs more food, otherwise I sit outside until the chill of the evening drives me indoors.

It's during my afternoon nap, or during the night that I travel. Sometimes there is nothing, but at other times the dreams are very vivid and for me they are real, as real as the rest of my life. They can be of anything. I don't decide. Sometimes they are about strange lands, deserts, forests, and the like. And that is why I am writing this story. Because of everything that has happened in my life, these experiences are the only things worth noting. And maybe, someday, someone will recognise them and say that they can also imagine.

What makes me think that my experiences are real is that places have names. How, otherwise would I know these names? There isn't a book in my cabin or a library to visit. There are some exact references to places that I have never been to. And other things, like the names of things and practices and rituals and stuff that don't

happen here in Minnesota. And such detailed images; I can often see things really close up. There is no one living near here I would want to share my experiences with; they would probably think I was mad. But I don't mind keeping it all to myself as long as I know there is a record that one day someone else might find and look at. I don't know why, but that is important to me and that is why I record some of the happenings here.

This is my cabin, on the edge of the lake where the fish almost jump out and into the cooking fire.



## Part Two - Sihu

It was on a calm night, when the moon was full and heavy, that I first saw Sihu, (flower). I was in between sleep and waking when, in my cabin, she just appeared and stood there. She looked like the Indians at the settlement houses, was pale brown, young, about 20 or so, and very pretty. I asked her who she was, but I wasn't really frightened, I suppose because she was just a young woman. We never spoke English, or any language, but we did communicate very well somehow. She said her name was Sihu and she was the spirit of a young woman from a small village near the mountains. She described the place where the village was sited. I didn't know where that place was, but I suppose it doesn't matter does it? We all live somewhere. We didn't do much else then, but look at each other. Then she vanished.

The next night she came again and I said I liked her coming because I lived on my own in this middle of nowhere place. She said she didn't know why she had come last night or tonight. I said that sometimes we don't know things and it is alright not to know because if we need to know it will be told to us. We talked about all sorts of stuff but I can't really remember it now. I suppose it was small talk. I was really drawn to her and felt all sorts of excitement and stirrings. I told her I would think of her and hopefully she would appear again. She did appear lots of times but always stayed just for a short time and then disappeared as if someone was calling her away.

One night, I woke up after midnight and felt that Sihu was somewhere nearby but I couldn't see her. I got up and looking through the window, realised that it was snowing outside. It was supposed to be spring but it was late coming this year. I wrapped a blanket around me and went out. At the end of the boardwalk, sitting down, was Sihu. She was looking out at the lake and had her back to me. So, I went out and sat down beside her. We had never been this close before. She acknowledged me and then turned her face back to look out over the lake. She said: *I sometimes used to fish across there, on the other side of this lake.* Then she was silent again. I was shivering with the cold but she seemed impervious to it. *Shall we go inside?* I asked her after a while, and then realised what a stupid question it was. She wasn't cold after all, because she was a ghost. She said *yes*, clearly understanding my discomfort and then she disappeared. She was inside my cabin when I got in.

She told me about her life as a girl, long ago, and that she had become a ghost after being ill for a long time. I asked her what she did and she said that she just was, neither getting any older or younger, just was here, sometimes in the forest and

sometimes by the lake. I asked her if she saw any other people or ghosts. She said that she did see an old Indian, called Chogan (blackbird), and he told her long stories about the old days. Other people couldn't see her, but she didn't know why. She said she could see everything in the world that I lived in, but no one noticed her except me.

I lit the fire to make something warm to drink and almost asked her if she wanted a drink. She said that one thing she really loved was the smell of a wood fire and also enjoyed music if anyone played. As I sipped my early morning tea, and it was still very much night outside, Sihu said she would tell me the story of how fire was invented. She said that she had heard the story from Chogan, the old Indian.

*In the beginning there was no fire, and the world was cold, until the Thunders, who lived up beyond the arch of the sky, sent their lightning and put fire into the bottom of a hollow sycamore tree that grew on an island. The animals knew it was there, because they could see the smoke coming out at the top, but they could not get to it on account of the water that lay between them and the island, so they held a council to decide what to do. This was a long time ago.*

*Every animal that could fly or swim was anxious to go after the fire. The Raven offered, and because he was so large and strong they thought he could surely do the work, so he was sent first. He flew high and far across the water and alighted on the sycamore tree, but while he was wondering what to do next, the heat had scorched all his feathers black, and he was frightened and came back without the fire. The little Screech-owl volunteered to go, and reached the place safely, but while he was looking down into the hollow tree a blast of hot air came up and nearly burned out his eyes. He managed to fly home as best he could, but it was a long time before he could see well, and his eyes are red to this day. Then the Hooting Owl and the Horned Owl went, but by the time they got to the hollow tree the fire was burning so fiercely that the smoke nearly blinded them, and the ashes carried up by the wind made white rings about their eyes. They had to come home again without the fire, but with all their rubbing they were never able to get rid of the white rings.*

*No more of the birds would venture, and so the little snake, the black racer, said he would go through the water and bring back some fire. He swam across to the island and crawled through the grass to the tree, and went in by a small hole at the bottom. The heat and smoke were too much for him, too, and after dodging about blindly over the hot ashes until he was almost on fire himself he managed by good luck to get out again at the same hole, but his body had been scorched black, and he has ever since had the habit of darting and doubling on his track as if trying to*

*escape from close quarters. He came back, and the great blacksnake, "The Climber," offered to go for fire.*

*He swam over to the island and climbed up the tree on the outside, as the blacksnake always does, but when he put his head down into the hole the smoke choked him so that he fell into the burning stump, and before he could climb out again he was as black as the little racer. Now they held another council, for still there was no fire, and the world was cold, but birds, snakes, and four-footed animals, all had some excuse for not going, because they were all afraid to venture near the burning sycamore, until at last the Water Spider said she would go. This was not the water spider that looked like a mosquito, but the other one, with black downy hair and red stripes on her body. She could run on top of the water or dive to the bottom, so there would be no trouble to get over to the island, but the question was, how could she bring back the fire? "I'll manage that, said the Water Spider; so she spun a thread from her body and wove it into a bowl, which she fastened on her back. Then she crossed over to the island and through the grass to where the fire was still burning. She put one little coal of fire into her bowl, and came back with it, and ever since we have had fire, and the Water Spider still keeps her bowl.*

By the time Sihu had told the story, it was getting a little light outside. It had been a long story, and to be honest I was a bit bored by the end. Anyway, she was happy that she had told me the story and I said she was very clever for remembering all those details. Then she said she should go, and standing up, she simply disappeared. I thought to myself that it was a bit rude to just disappear. I would have liked to talk with her some more and maybe give her a hug and a kiss on the cheek, but then again, I didn't know if you could hug or kiss a ghost. I went back to sleep. When I woke up, it all felt like it had been a dream but I just accepted it as something that had happened either for real or something else.

### Part Three

I sat at the edge of the lake one morning and tried to understand what was happening. I liked her a lot and wondered if I could somehow guarantee that she would come to me every night. Anyway, she didn't come again for nearly two weeks and I was perturbed. I wondered if she would ever come again. I tried all sorts of things; calling her name in the night, trying to visualise her, and even trying to draw a picture of her. Then I thought it might have been a figment of my imagination.

Odahingum came a few days later and I told her all about it. I was frightened that I might drive her away in fear, but when I told her, she was quite relaxed about it and told me that it wasn't uncommon in her Chippewa society, although it was the medicine man who saw spirits and not just anyone. Then she reminded me that I was not just anyone either. I had survived the illness and had great visions. She told me a story:

*One night a strange woman walked into a village. The stranger needed a place to stay for the night, but the villagers did not invite her into their homes. Finally, at the edge of the village, she came to the house of an old man and an old woman. They welcomed the stranger because they didn't get many visitors. The woman was also young and reminded them of their granddaughter who lived far away.*

*The young woman said that she was only going to stay for a few days, but a few days turned into a few weeks and then into a few months. The stranger and the old couple became good friends. Many nights were spent telling stories. The young woman listened respectfully to the stories of the old couple.*

*One day the old couple went berry picking and when they returned home, the young woman was gone. The old couple asked the villagers if they had seen their friend. One villager said he saw her leave in the same direction from where she first came.*

*The old couple was very sad. They went into the room where the young woman slept and searched for a clue to let them know where she had gone. While searching, they found a box, and inside the box was the most beautiful stone they had ever seen. They couldn't keep their eyes off it! There was also a note in the box. In the note, the young woman explained that the stone would give them the ability to contact her if they were ever in great need.*

I didn't get it. It had nothing to do with my issue. But Odahingum clarified it for me. She said that the woman had left behind a stone. What I needed to do was get something from Sihu and then the connection would remain. I could call her to me whenever I wanted. Then I remembered that she had kept looking at my knife, the one I used every day to gut my fish and other small cutting jobs. I thought that if she was attached to the knife, I could use it to associate me with her and her with me.

But then, in a dream, I found the way to make her mine. I imagined myself catching a fish that I wanted to share with her and then saw myself gutting and cutting up the fish. She came then and I realised that it must be something to do with the knife and the fish as well. The combination of the two drew her to me. In

the dream, we sat, and I ate the fish, cooked on an open fire just outside my cabin. After that, nearly every time I pictured the knife and the fish, she came to me. So, I had managed to tie Sihu down in a particular way. I didn't really understand anything about this, or a lot of other matters actually, but I decided to just go with the flow on these, and concentrate on Sihu. I wanted to bring her here, to live with me in my cabin but then I thought that might be difficult. I could see her simply in my dreams. So she was really with me all the time.

This arrangement worked well for a long time. I always knew where she was and she was mine. I think some people would say I was being unfair, keeping her almost like a prisoner, for my own gratification. But I had never had a wife or any woman for any length of time and I was lonely, living on my own by the lake. Sihu was someone I could look forward to. Instead of long cold nights, I now couldn't wait for the night to come on so that I could go to bed and dream and see her. And I couldn't think that she was missing anything by being with me. She was just a wandering spirit. She might even get into trouble if she were left to her own devices.

#### Part Four

One day, whilst I was fishing for my lunch, I got a pull on a big fish. Now, my fishing tackle isn't much more than an old rod and some line, and so I was really surprised when I pulled in a huge lake trout. It was massive and the biggest I had ever caught. I was sweating and panting by the time I had it neatly laid out on the boardwalk, and then I sat down to think about what to do with it. I sat there for a long time. The weather was too clement and so there was no way of freezing it, and so I decided to ask Odahingum.

I normally trudged up the path to the Indian settlement houses, but today I had a spring in my step. She was glad to see me and poured me a cup of coffee and told me to sit and get my breath back first. When I told her, she nodded in approval and was impressed. She said it was the bounty of nature and since it was too much for me, she could come down and cook it for me and I could invite people to visit. I have no friends, apart from Odahingum and so said that she should invite all the people that lived in this hamlet of houses.

We both went round and she introduced me and then I invited them to come down to the party. I did know some of them by sight, but had never really talked to them. Like me, the men in this hamlet didn't do a lot of socialising or talking. It was mostly, fishing or hunting, eating and existing, living by the arc of the sun.

Odahingum came down and started collecting wood for a fire and told me that it was auspicious for another reason. One of the boys at the settlement also had a birthday. So the rest of the day was spent meeting and sharing conversations with each other and drinking beer, brewed by one of the Indians. I sat for a while with Odahingum like we sometimes did on our own, and talked about stuff, and then I mentioned Sihu.

I told her that I had used the hunting knife, or dagger as Sihu calls it, to bring her to me in my dreams. I said that she was mine now. Odahingum wasn't impressed and said it wasn't good to hold a spirit against its wishes. I told her that I thought she was happy to be with me and she hadn't said she was unhappy. Odahingum sat then, and rocked in her chair whilst she thought. After a long silence she asked me if I had asked her if she wanted to be with me. I told her I hadn't asked her anything; we just got along together fine. Then Odahingum looked at me and said nothing, but her look told me that she wasn't happy.

*Shall I ask the medicine man?* She spoke with a reverence. So we did, or rather she did because he doesn't speak English. He told her that I should let the spirit go, or marry her. I was surprised! How can you marry a ghost? He said that he could send a dream to me to tell me how and where to go to do it. I said I would think about it. Then, the medicine man opened his pouch and gave me a little mixture of what looked like ash and some ground seeds. He said I should put a little on each side of my outside door, and some at the foot of my bed. Then he took three leaves from a nearby tree and said I should wrap the mixtures in these before placing them. I said I would.

The party ended when the fish was finished and surprisingly the beer finished at the same time. Then everyone shook my hand as they left with smiles on their faces, back up the track and home.

Some nights later I had a strange dream. In the dream, Sihu and I went across the lake and there we lit a fire and went through some sort of ritual. I couldn't really remember it very well. The next day, I mulled over the dream and went to tell Odahingum as well. She said the dream was a sign and that the medicine man had done a good job. That night I went to bed a little bit earlier and called Sihu to me. I told her about the dream, about the medicine man and then asked her what she thought. She said she didn't know and so we left it there.

## Part Five

The party with the Indians and the fish led to me having more friends and Odahingum thought that was a good thing. She came to see me one morning and asked if I wanted any supplies since she was going in to town with Ogima. He was a sort of leader and Ogima means Chief. He had a horse and trap of sorts which was useful for fetching things from town or elsewhere. Then Odahingum said that instead of her going for my stuff, I should come along. I hadn't been anywhere away from the cabin for god knows how long, and quite frankly had no real interest in going. In any case Odahingum knew what I needed and was frugal with money. But, there was one thing she couldn't do for me, and that was withdraw a little money from the bank for me. So I said yes, and put on my least worn out pants and my Sunday shirt, even though I had never gone anywhere on a Sunday for years. Ogima was a man of few words and so we didn't speak all the way into town, and I couldn't speak to Odahingum because she was sat in the back and facing away from me. The town was like a sick man, dying a slow death. Ever since the lumber company had finished its logging and had moved away, there were not so many people left and there was little money. The shops were unpainted and looked unloved.

I went to the bank to take out a few dollars and then met Odahingum at the supplies store. She got everything for me and I just stood there and watched her and then paid at the end. She got me a sack of grain for my porridge, flour, honey, sugar, coffee, and lots of little bags of spices and dried herbs. There was cinnamon, and cloves that I recognised, and salt and nutmeg. The others I never knew what they were; I just sprinkled them on to my fish or whatever I was going to eat. I got all my fruits and berries from the trees around and about my cabin, and Odahingum grew vegetables like peas, pumpkins and potatoes. It made me think that I was fairly self-sufficient.

Odahingum wasn't finished with me and made me follow her into another store. There she got me some mixture to make beef tea, and some cocoa. These were luxuries for me, but Odahingum said she would make drinks for us when she visited me from time to time. It made me happy because it meant that I would have her company perhaps, more than usual, although I didn't see why we had to have new drinks. I was quite happy with my habits of coffee and sometimes fruit concoctions if I was feeling under the weather.

On the way back, she told Ogima to stop about a mile from home. He still hadn't said anything to me. Anyway, she told me to get down and then Ogima went off again. She told me that there were some fruits and berries to pick on the way home

from here, and so we did, and walked slowly, filling her basket. By the time we did get home my supplies were stacked by my door and I invited Odahingum in and she said she would make some beef tea for us both. It was very nice as we sipped it and sat on the rocking chairs listening to the silence of nature all around us. After that day, Ogima occasionally came down to my cabin and we sat together, but he never really said anything.

## Part Six

Sometime after the shopping trip, Odahingum invited me to come to her home and from there we would celebrate a special day in her culture. I knew that they had parties, and stuff up there in the settlement but I had never been invited before. Since the party with the big trout, I had become more popular. Although most of the Chippewa Indians didn't talk to me, they seemed to smile a bit, or were at least, not distant. I could feel something in their demeanour. She told me it was all about celebrating nature, and fertility. They celebrated so that nature would be good to them and their crops would grow. I didn't see them planting many crops, but I suppose their vegetable gardens were very important to them, and the few fields of corn.

All the Chippewas were gathered together and there were about thirty of them in all. I sat with Odahingum and she explained the stories that were being told. There was lots of food and some more of that beer we had at my fish party. Some Indians played their drums and that was quite hypnotising. There was also some singing but Odahingum didn't explain it line by line. But it was enjoyable. Then, after he drumming and singing, and when everyone had a full belly, Ogima raised his hands up in the air and everyone gathered around him and fell silent. This was the first time I was going to hear more than a few grunts and solitary words from his lips. He said:

*There was an eagle that lived in the mountains. When the season was right it flew down to the plains....* Odahingum's English wasn't that good and she didn't translate everything, and so I didn't get much out of the stories. What I could decipher was that this celebration was about the sun and the corn, about how nature provides for everyone and that we should be grateful for them.

Afterwards, it was as if we had all been to church. Everyone was happy and I felt that in some way we had all been together to thank nature. I did feel better than I have in a long time and there was a warm feeling in my belly. And I think the

Indians were even more comfortable with me because I had been part of something that was very important to them.

## Part Seven

*...Suddenly, out of the earth a coyote came forth at a swinging trot that was taking the cunning thief toward the hills and the village beyond. Upon the moment's impulse, I gave him a long chase and a wholesome fright....*

...Sihu had taken to telling me stories whenever we met, and although I enjoyed listening to her, I was becoming attracted to her in other ways. She seemed oblivious to it all and must have thought that our relationship was just one of exchanging stories. Chogan, the old Indian spirit seemed to be a grandfather figure for her and I thought that storytelling was a good thing for them. But for me, although she was much younger than me, there were other sparks of attraction. I asked her what age she had been when she had become a ghost. She said the same age that she was now, and so I realised that she had probably never experienced love. Did that mean that she would never do so, or was it possible to have new experiences as a ghost? Did she only carry the experiences of her short life? It perturbed me and so I thought I'd better find out.

I asked Odahingum, and she said she didn't know. She thought the medicine man would know but she wasn't sure if such questions should be asked. We ruminated on that thought for a while whilst enjoying a hot cocoa drink in our rocking chairs. I think it had been a good idea for Odahingum to have bought me the cocoa and beef tea ingredients; it made a change for us from time to time. We left the thought there, and decided not to do anything about it until we were both sure we wanted to ask the medicine man or not.

Odahingum must have talked to the medicine man herself, and the next time I saw her she said that he had told her that he would send me a dream to explain. A few nights later, I did have a dream. It is difficult to explain it sentence by sentence but I can tell the story in my own words. In my dream, I sat with an old man who I didn't recognise. He said that when people die, they can take on any persona they want. So, if a woman thinks of herself as a young girl, she will appear like that. Sihu wasn't necessarily a young woman. She might have died as a very old woman but wanted to look like she did in her youth. Since I wasn't dead, I was projecting myself as an old man, as I was, and that is why Sihu might not see me in a romantic way. So, I should think of what I wanted to look like to her, and that is how she would see me.

When I woke up, I had a wash and made myself a cup of coffee. Then, I went out and walked up and down the boardwalk and tried to let it all sink in. What I wanted to look like was like I looked 30 years ago. Then, I was working for the lumber company, was a young man with strapping muscles, but didn't have much experience of life. In fact, I think I often looked back to those days with a desire to turn the clock back. I wouldn't have had the accident with the falling tree and that branch that hit me, and I would still have been a very active and physical man. So, I decided to project that young man to Sihu and see what happened.

All day, while I was going about my routine, I kept picturing myself as a young man. When I called Sihu to me in the evening, I looked carefully into her eyes to see if there was a difference. She did seem to look at me more often and so I decided to push it further. I asked her what she thought my age was. She shrugged her shoulders and said she wasn't good at guessing ages, but I pressed her to guess. She paused for a while and looked at me, up and down, and then said that I was about 25. I was amazed because I was almost an old man in real life. I told her that she was about 20. She said she didn't know, so I told her that we would make a good couple. I was really out of my depth and I don't know why I said it, but I had so it was too late to take back. She said she had never had those kind of feelings.

We sat then, at the end of the boardwalk, looking out into the lake and across to where she said she used to fish. I asked her why she used to fish; after all it was a man's job wasn't it? She said I was right, but she had accompanied her father when she was a little girl and just developed a fascination for seeing a shiny fish being pulled out of the water. They were different sizes, shapes and colours, and she loved eating fish. Her father had not encouraged her or prevented her and so it was just something they did together. I asked her about her brothers and sisters but she was very vague and said she didn't really remember. What I was really doing by asking all these questions was to hide my embarrassment at having said we might be a couple.

After a few minutes of silence, I turned to look at her and she in turn looked at me. There was that innocent moment when everything just stops, stands still, and I leaned forward and kissed her on the lips very gently. Then I pulled back and we both just sat there and looked into each other's eyes. She hadn't pulled away and so I kissed her again but this time lingeringly. Then I got up and walked back to the cabin. When I got in, she was already there and she asked me why I had kissed her. I had no words except to know that it had been right. I put some water on for a cup of coffee and made myself busy. She still stood there and just looked at me. In the

end I kissed her again and told her it was because I liked her very much. She didn't move and so I said that I might be in love with her.

I don't remember if I made the coffee in the end or not. I do remember that she went away soon after being kissed the third time. I felt light as a feather but also there was a small nagging pain in my heart; did I go too far? But I knew that it felt right. And I knew that I didn't like her; I loved her.

## Part Eight

When Sihu next came she told me that it was time for us to get married. She was just matter-of-fact about it. She said that the old Indian, Chogan had told her. I knew she was right because the medicine man had told me as well, in the dream he had sent me. We just sat together and looked at each other but inside me there was the sense of an inevitability about everything. It was as if I had no choice. She sat there as well and looked at me. I leaned towards her and kissed her. She let me, but then said that we had already gone too far and we should swear our commitment to each other before the sun, the moon, and the lake. The faces of Odahingum and Ogima passed through my mind, and then I knew, that it was, sort of, expected. I was in a dream, and it felt like there was no choice.

We set out in my canoe across the lake, by moonlight, to the other side. Chogan, the old Indian that Sihu had told me about, met us there. I had never seen him before and knew only what Sihu had told me. He looked very old, about 80, and had lots of wrinkles. He wore a big headdress made of feathers but Sihu had told me he wasn't a chief. I thought it must be because he had lived so long that he was allowed to look like a chief. There was a small wood fire about ten feet away from the lake edge and just before the trees started.

Chogan motioned for me to sit and so I did, and Sihu sat opposite me with the fire in between. He then told us that our commitment was to be to the Creator, to God. There was no breaking that commitment. Then I heard a pipe playing in the distance, although it also sounded as if it were nearby. We each made a declaration that we chose to be known as husband and wife. Then we smoked from the pipe that I had not noticed before.

Sihu got up and walked off and then I could see a little of her as she undressed behind some bushes. Her skin was like ivory in the moonlight. Then she walked into the lake and bathed. I thought how cold it must be but then smiled when I realised she wouldn't feel it. I could hear both her and Chogan reciting something

in low voices. When she emerged there were some other clothes that she changed into.

As she returned to the fire, I noticed she wore a knee length sand coloured dress with tassels hanging down from the hem and from the arms. On her head she had a band with just one small feather sticking out at one side. She had plaited her hair into pigtails and they hung down each side, black, with red ribbons. This time she came and sat by my side. I couldn't help looking at her; she looked so beautiful. She glanced at me briefly, then returned her gaze straight ahead and looked impassive, expressing no emotion.

Chogan stood opposite to us, with the fire in between, and spoke the following words:

*Now you will feel no rain,  
For each of you will be shelter to the other.  
Now you will feel no cold,  
For each of you will be warmth to the other.  
Now there is no more loneliness,  
For each of you will be companion to the other.  
Now you are two bodies,  
But there is only one life before you.  
Go now to your dwelling place  
To enter into the days of your togetherness  
And may your days be good and long upon the earth.*

We sat there and Chogan went through some other little rituals including putting something in the fire that made it erupt and then die down straight away, and told us that the sun and the moon and the lake were given to us by God. Then we sat in silence. Chogan disappeared, and we watched the flames of the fire rise and ebb. Sihu then turned to me and I knew that she wanted me to kiss her and make love.

## Part Nine

Odahingum and I were drinking beef tea on my porch, sitting in our rocking chairs. It was a warm afternoon and I was wondering how I had ended up living two lives; one as an old man during the day, and then as a younger man married to Sihu at night. It was odd by any standards. My greatest wish was that Sihu could be with me during the day as well. Sihu had said that she didn't choose not to come during the day, but that it just didn't happen.

She must have seen a frown on my face and so Odahingum asked me what was troubling me. I told her. After a few rocks back and forth in her chair, she said that I needed something to attract her to me during the daytime. She said that she understood why Sihu didn't come; I had to wash and cook and fish and do other daytime activities, whereas at night I could concentrate entirely on her. Then Odahingum surprised me with her knowledge. She said she knew what ghosts liked to eat. *Eat?* I asked her.

She told me that ghosts didn't need to eat like the living did because they didn't have bodies that needed sustenance, but they did eat nevertheless. She said that it was smell and hearing that was important to ghosts. I never did ask her how she knew these things but she did sound certain. She said that we still wouldn't be like we were at night because my attention would still be on activities that related to my body, but she could come and I would feel her presence.

Odahingum told me that there were some flowers and leaves that had a scent. Well, I knew that! She told me that I was being too simplistic and then went on to tell me the process. First we had to collect the correct petals, flowers and leaves, and then they had to be dried. After that they had to be crumbled into a powder. Then I had to take a red ember of wood from my burner; one that was just red and not burning. When the powder is sprinkled on the ember, the heat helps the mixture to expel its perfume. And that was the first part of the process to draw Sihu to the cabin.

The second part was making music and for that we needed to make a dream catcher wind chime that would blow in the breeze and make the music of nature. An important consideration was the material from which the chimes are made. While the dream catcher itself will be made from thread woven around a circle of wood, the wind chimes can be made from many materials. The composition of a set of chimes will affect both their appearance and their sound. For instance, bamboo chimes create a low, knocking sound while metal chimes produce a higher, tinkling sound. All wind chimes are pleasing to the ear, but you must decide the correct tone for the job in hand. And that depends on what effect you want the music to have on Sihu.

I sat then and pondered all this information and sipped at my drink. I asked Odahingum when we could start the work to make both the powder and the dream catcher. She looked up at the sun and said it would be better to start tomorrow and we would begin with the collecting of the petals, flowers and leaves. I agreed to collect her from her home in the morning. She told me not to be late and then added that I should not be too early either. That made me smile because it told me nothing.

## Part Ten

The morning introduced itself with a strong sun and I knew it was going to be a hot day. I had told Sihu of my plans and she had just listened and said nothing. I think it was just that she didn't understand, but she did say that she loved me and would do whatever I wanted of her. I did ask her what she did usually during the day, but she said it was mostly nothing. She did visit the old Indian Chogan and listen to his stories and I told her that he could come as well, when the music played and the aromas burned.

I went to collect Odahingum early because the heat of the day might be too much if we went a bit later. She had her basket with her and we walked along pathways, she stopping every now and then, to collect flowers and leaves. She told me that it was important to take only a few flowers from every plant so that we didn't injure nature. There was bounty enough and we would collect a little here and a little there and so help nature to recover easily. That reminded me of the time when I was a logger and we just tore through the forests willy-nilly and never thought about nature at all.

At one point Odahingum stopped to collect some slivers of flint and she told me they were for the dream catcher. After a while Odahingum told me that she would point out the plants and I should do the picking because her back was beginning to ache from all the bending and straightening. She said it was also important for me to be part of the work because it would project my energy into the activity and so be more powerful.

When we got back to my cabin, I put down the basket and we went straight away, up the path to Odahingum's home. She gave me a big piece of cloth and told me that I should lay it out in the sun and spread all the flowers and leaves on it to get them drying out. It would take five to seven days to dry them out completely and then I could powder them up in my hands and keep the powder in a container with a tightly fitting top. She reminded me to keep moving the sheet around if the sunlight was blocked by its moving across the sky.

It had been a hard day and when I got back to my cabin I was too tired to do any more, and so I made a cup of coffee and rested. In the evening I explained everything I was going to do to Sihu. She looked impressed so I told her that really it was Odahingum who knew how to do all this. Then I picked a flower from the collection and a few leaves and crushed and squeezed them in my hands to release some fragrance and held them up to Sihu's face. She inhaled and her eyes sparkled with the perfume. She looked lovely then and we kissed. She said that she loved

me and I told her that she had given me a reason to live, and for the first time in a long time I was filled with all sorts of energies and desire.

Over the next several days, I put out the flowers and leaves early every morning and kept an eye on the moving sun all day in order to maximise the drying out process. After seven days I crushed them into a powder and put them into a container. There wasn't a lot of powder in the end, but Odahingum said there was more than enough for now, and we could go out collecting again in a few days' time. Meanwhile, Odahingum had made the dream catcher.



It was just the framework, and then we experimented with the flint slivers and hollow wood pieces to find the right sound. I said that I thought it would be better if the sounds were more high pitched than the wood allowed. The flint slivers were better but still a bit flat. Odahingum also had some coloured glass fragments, and I liked them the best. She told me that we needed a range of pitches and in the end we settled on some hollow wood on long strings that hung down the furthest. Then we added some flints and finally some glass fragments on strings shorter than the hollow wood ones.

We sat outside and drank cocoa drinks and listened to the beautiful sounds of the dream catcher. Then I got up and extracted a red ember of wood from the burner, placed it on the floor just inside the open door, on a flat stone I had taken from the edge of the lake and sprinkled some powder on it. It was so good to hear the music and smell the fragrances of the powder. Odahingum was the first to say she could feel some presence. Soon after that, I also felt Sihü nearby. Odahingum said there was more than one spirit and when I concentrated I could also feel other energies. I said I thought it might be Chogan. I said I would tell her tomorrow after asking Sihü tonight. Odahingum started muttering some words from her language, I suppose, to protect her from evil spirits if there were any. I knew instinctively that there was nothing negative here, and just smiled back at her whilst at the same time, trying to feel the energies.

## Part Eleven

In the evening, Sihu was already in my cabin when I returned from a little walk to settle my stomach after my evening meal. I kissed her and then asked her what she had thought of the music of the dream catcher and the fragrance. She said that she had been immediately drawn to the cabin, and she referred to *'the old woman'*, Odahingum also being here. But she said she was upset that I couldn't see her during the day. She had tried all sorts of things to get my attention but to no avail. Then she told me that Chogan had also been drawn to the cabin, but had stayed only for a short time before returning to the other side of the lake.

I hugged her then and said that I also wanted to be able to see her during the day, and Sihu said that Chogan knew how it could be done. I was intrigued and as if reading my mind, Chogan appeared just inside the door. I welcomed him in and he sat down on the floor, even though there was a chair next to him. He still had his elaborate headgear on with lots of feathers, and he did look like a chief. Sihu smiled hugely at him, like a granddaughter might appreciate her grandfather and then asked him to tell me what he had told her earlier. Chogan held up his hand indicating that she should be patient and then he just continued to sit there, on the floor. He looked at me then and told me he wouldn't be interrupting my nights because he knew I wanted to be with Sihu, and he would only come if I invited him. It was as if he had read my mind because that is what I had been thinking. Chogan said:

*the old woman knows much about the spirit world, but there are things she doesn't know. I like the dream catcher and I like the fragrance. The ingredients are not correct though. You should not add the wild rose and wisteria to the main powder mix. They are known as the love mixture if used alone. So, when you mix the next powders, dry out the wild rose and wisteria on a separate cloth, and then make powder and keep them separately. Not even just in different jars, but also in a different place. Then you need to pick a place for a chair....*

He looked around the cabin carefully, into the corners. Then he got up and pointed to one in particular at the end of the wall where the window was and furthest from the door.

*You should both agree a place in this cabin...  
...this is a good place because it is the darkest corner.*

So, he had essentially made the choice for us.

*Put a chair there, and then during the day, when Sihu comes, she can wait in that chair. When you want to see her, sprinkle the powder on a red ember, and when the fragrance is strong, sprinkle some of the wild rose and wisteria on as well. She will become visible to you then but only like a shadow. You must also sit down and clear your mind of other thoughts. The more you can do that, the clearer she will appear to you.*

I listened to him very carefully because this was what I had wanted for a long time. Then I asked him if the dream catcher could be improved. He said that it was good as it was. I asked Sihu if she liked the music it made and she nodded with childlike enthusiasm. Chogan asked me whether I could play the flute but I said no. He nodded but said nothing more, and then he just disappeared.

Sihu and I spent a lovely night, surrounded by fragrances and little tinkles of music as the breeze played with the dream catcher. She did refer to Odahingum once and apologised for calling her an old woman. It was disrespectful and she said she would call her grandmother from now on. I liked her humility but she said it was expected in her society to respect elders.

## Part Twelve

I went up to see Odahingum the next day and updated her on the goings on. She was a bit nervous though and told me that really the medicine man should do these things and perhaps she shouldn't have told me things herself. I said it didn't matter because we were not doing anyone any harm, and she agreed. She said we should go for a walk and collect the wild rose and wisteria ingredients and then I could start drying them out at once. So we did.

Whilst we were on our walk, we bumped into the medicine man. Odahingum said, before we were in earshot, that this was no accident. He greeted us quite warmly and pointed to the sky and told us that he knew everything that happened under the sky that covered us, and so Odahingum said that it might be time for a chat. We sat under a tree that shaded us from the increasing heat of the sun. Then Odahingum told him the whole story in her own language that I didn't understand.

Occasionally, the medicine man looked at me and sometimes his eyes wandered into the distance. At the end of her confession, we all sat for a long time in silence, looking anywhere except at each other, like naughty children that had been caught out stealing apples from someone else's tree.

Then, after a long, long, time the medicine man smiled at me and said that as an odd pair, we had done quite well, but this could be dangerous and we should have asked him for help. We both nodded after Odahingum had translated for me. He told us that he knew Chogan very well and often met him in his dreams. He didn't know about Sihu though and said he would have to meet her to trace her family background. I said he could come tonight and then thought to myself that all I wanted was to be with Sihu but it seemed that the evenings would be filled with the whole Chippewa nation if we carried on like this. The medicine man looked at me and smiled. I am sure he had read my mind.

The medicine man went on his way and Odahingum and I went on ours, but she was very quiet and I think she felt really guilty about all the things she had done for me.

### Part Thirteen

The last three or four days have been all mixed up. I live alone, and besides Odahingum and Sihu, I don't see anyone else, sometimes for weeks. But with the goings and comings of the medicine man, Chogan, and the talk of stuff, everything is a bit muddled, but eventually sorted out. The medicine man came and told me a story. He said that there is a big difference between nearly achieving something, and actually achieving it.

*Some ducks hatch out their ducklings high up in the cliff face, to protect their eggs from other animals. The ducklings fall from their nests on only the second day after birth, and go to the water. If they jump down just before dawn, they will probably be eaten by the fox, but if they jump just after dawn, the fox is back in its lair, to sleep through the day, and the ducklings will make it to the water. In the same way, the powder mixture you have made is a nearly good mix, but very far from the right mix. Sometimes nearly is like the distance from here to the moon.*

*You must start the process again. Collect all the ingredients as before, the petals, flowers and leaves, but keep the wild rose and wisteria separate from the rest. Then you must also cut about one inch of the root trail from the wild rose plant and keep that separate as well. So you will have three separate amounts. Dry the ingredients as before and make powders. To make a powder from the root trail, you should slice it up into very small pieces. Then cut again and again, until it is like a wet powder. Then dry it out.*

*When you want Sihu to appear in the daytime, and remember that this is only for daytime use, take a red ember and sprinkle it with the powder. Then add a little of the wild rose and wisteria powder, and then add just one or two grains of the wild rose root powder. She will appear, sitting in the chair in the corner that Chogan told you to place. To improve her movement, draw a quarter circle from one wall, around the chair, and to the other wall. She will be able to move anywhere inside the quarter circle.*

*The best time to call her is in the morning, and she should go away before the sun is at its height at noon. If you want to hold her, you must put your hands behind her arms just above her elbows and draw her towards you. Really, you should only use this time for talking and not touching.*

*During the day, move the dream catcher inside. It will not make music, but Sihu will be able to listen to the memory of the music from before. Remember, her senses in the daytime are very acute, and so she needs the least of anything, fragrance or sound. Do not think that by making a bigger fragrance, she will be happier. NO! Make the fragrance as little as you can then she will be happiest. If Sihu doesn't want to come to you, she can still decide not to. So, don't think that the process is not working if she doesn't come. You are not in control of her. She is still in control of her own desires. If you have any problems, do not try solutions yourself; find me and I will tell you what to do.*

And with all that guidance and advice inside my head, I have now been left alone by the medicine man and by the ghost of old Chogan. Odahingum told me she would only visit me after the sun had passed its greatest height, and I decided to do my fishing a bit earlier and then eat a bit later, to accommodate Sihu and give us both more time together. All in all, my life has changed so much; from an old man waiting for the grim reaper, to an old man with a young visage, in love with a young woman, a girl even, and enjoying my life more than I can ever remember. Life has waited until nearly the end, to give me happiness.