



*Record
Keepers*

*Theresa
Chaze*

She halted beneath the weather worn sign that had once read "Ferrari's Market". She stood erect, watching the crowd of policemen hiding behind their autos; some had their revolvers drawn. Beyond them, Kaleva's thrill seekers gawked from the schoolyard, not realizing the distance capacity of the old woman's bullets. Slowly she descended, each wooden stop creaking under her weight. The Sheriff dashed across the payment and dragged her behind the barricade.

"What did she say, Shawna? When is she giving up?"

Shawna stared up into his brown eyes and he shifted his gaze from the harshness he saw. "She isn't."

Angrily, he grabbed her shoulders. "You were supposta make this easy--so no one else would get hurt! Instead you just wasted valuable time."

"You didn't get exactly what you expected. You thought it would be easy to steal Agnes's land. She eighty-three. Helpless. Or so you thought."

"Agnes is senile!"

Deliberately she reached up and bent back his index fingers, forcing him to relinquish his grip. "It's a little late to whine. You bribed, blackmailed or whatever to have Agnes committed and become her legal guardian. You started the war. But she'll fire the last shot."

"She's just an old lady!"

"A woman with a rifle and a grudge in her heart."

"Those apartments are very important to the community. You can't expect us to let a run down--"

"How much are you willing to pay for the land? Your life maybe? Another deputy?"

Shawna purposely pushed past him and walked into the crowd, a path clearing before her. "I'll call the State Police! They won't be so nice! We need those apartments!"

She continued to walk in the opposite direction.

Anna Lynne Mckenzie watched from the safety of her hotel room. Leaning against the headboard, she listened to the familiar heckling of the crowd. She had expected some controversy over the planned destruction of the historical sites, but an elderly woman holding off the sheriff and his deputies for two days, while the town sat in the peanut gallery, wasn't what anyone would expect to find in small town USA.

Closing the window, Anna could almost convince herself that this was a normal shoot. Usually Anna liked taking pictures for the Michigan Historical Society, but most of her assignments had been restorations not mass destructions.

Kaleva was notorious for negating its past. Two years earlier, the Catholic Rectory celebrated its centennial; several months later, it was condemned and torn down. The year after, the school beside it caught fire and was destroyed. The blame was placed on four grade school boys. But after reading the reports, Anna knew the four-story structure constructed mostly of brick and marble could not have turned into an inferno within a few hours just from careless children playing in the basement. With the land cleared, the church officials built their badly wanted, but little needed community center and two more historical sites vanished.

Anna believed the town was trying to erase its heritage by razing the buildings from its prosperous era. At one time, Kaleva had been billed as the "city with more millionaires per capita than any other in the United States". Millions had been made from the vast forests of Michigan and the Kaleva River, which transported the logs to Lake Michigan. Lumber barons created mansions, wealth and fierce pride, while stripping and corrupting the land; then following the receding tree line, they vanished, leaving those that remained embarrassed and resentful.

She considered photographing the farce below, representing Agnes Ferrara as the eighth monument Kaleva set out to destroy. In a way it was true. The Ferrara family was one of the founding members of the town. The store was the first in area and had been the center for many years. But gradually the center of power shifted, but the store remained mostly unchanged.

Looking out the window, she realized that this was a no win situation.

Carefully she stepped over the fallen elm and continued over the path she knew so well as a child. Her heels sank in the damp soil and she removed her shoes, not caring that her hose would be ruined. She remembered running barefoot down the path, leaping the log and disappearing into the foliage.

But it was the smells she remembered the most. The wild herbs. Fresh greens growing unhampered in the dark soil. Damp moss. Mushroom living off dead stumps. Agnes had taught her the difference between the poisonous and the edible. Life had potential. Shawna felt strong. Agnes happily stocked her shelves, gathered gossip through her customers, and read Tarot cards in the back room. Laughter and the thrill of discovery dominated Shawna's life. She had loved spending rainy days at the library and working at Agnes's store for college tuition. Agnes had become her mentor and friend.

She had always needed more than the family baseball team and high school flirtations, followed closely by tossed rice and messy diapers. She needed to grow, to realize her potential, to reach out into the abstract and ground her ideas in reality. Yet with all her search, Shawna could not find satisfaction. She

learned but the knowledge seemed empty with out someone she could share it with. She had tried to find someone who could understand--a doppelganger, a twin on the inside. But seemed that she was destined to walk a solitary path throughout this life.

Walking further into the forest, she allowed herself to drift back in time. The August sun warmed her face. She smiled, remembering and reliving her exploration.

The reliable, old elm, that she dubbed her wishing tree, stood between her and Gurney Creek. Buried on the left, a metal box contains representatives of things she wanted to come to pass; on the right, in a wooden box, those Shawna wished would end. Between them, Shawna had laid to rest her canary, Billie. Agnes helped her dig the grave and cover the little yellow body encased in a glass jewelry box. She wiped Shawna's tears and told her not to cry that crying only touched the cheeks of the weeper, but remembering kept the spirit alive. Shawna had stayed behind, staring at the reflections of the bridge, the trees and the peg-horned buck, which had come to drink. It was dusk when she stood to leave, naming the burial site, things that can not be changed.

Now fifteen years later, she stood beneath the tree, relishing the old memories and preparing herself to say good-bye to an old friend.

Anna Lynne tossed off the sheet. The room had become too hot with the window shut, yet by opening it she allowed the slaughter below to intrude, to poke at her conscience, reminding her of her duty. Reluctantly she opened the window and the cool air momentarily refreshed her damp face.

Below, more people, more police, more activity swarmed around the shabby store. Parents permitting their children to watch the official slaughter, unknowingly setting precedence for their own future.

She thought of her children, Michelle and Linda. She would never allow them to view such a scene. They were too young to be exposed the horrors of life. Except they already knew first hand about the cruelties life can bring. They now lived with their father, nursing scars and nightmares that had once kept Anna awake.

For years she had been able to control the violent impulses. There had been enough self-esteem from her work to carry her though the Dr. Seuss and jelly stains. But after David had been given the junior partnership, he slowly forgot everything except his advertising cohorts and impressing potential clients. He no longer asked if she was available to attend his business parties; he just expected her to be at his side, impressing everyone with her beauty and silence.

Anna resented being herded into a corner with conversations Elaine Powers and which gynecologist had the warmest hands. Bill and his partners excluded her; the women bored her. Bill argued, begged and demanded that she keep her place. Hating Bill and herself, Anna allowed herself to be bullied into acting like the dutiful, little wife. She put on a plastic face and followed three paces behind. She felt

like a whore, using her body as a means through which he achieved his goals. He needed her body to look good and to give him children. For spite, she gained twenty pounds. Because she no longer could control the impulses she inherited from her mother, she taught her daughters fear and pain.

One day she could no longer tolerate to see the fear in their eyes and her mother in her own reflection. Anna realized she had two avenues of escape, through the front door or by slitting her wrists. She did the former. Taking her favorite clothing, she dusted off her cameras and emptied the bank accounts—even hookers, she reasoned, deserved financial compensation. She drove to the airport and flew away, without a good-bye, without a note. With the help of several friends from her childhood, she started her new life.

Guilty Anna realized how much others had suffered to bring her to this motel. And she lay there, wasting the opportunities she had stolen. Outside, another woman fought for the same goals.

Turning her back on the window, Anna knew she had the strength to run, but she couldn't predict if she had the guts to stay and fight. She wished the decision was not hers, yet she had fought so hard to regain her independence. The desire and fear tore her in two opposite directions.

Across the room, her cameras sat on the schedule book. Today the bridge was to be shot. Leonard Martin, chairperson of the Kaleva Historical Committee, had promised to guide her to the old train bridge. He is probably in his favorite church, she thought, thanking God for the delay.

Shots were fired. Anna screamed, frightened to look and terrified of not knowing. She peeked around the sill. The crowd had disbursed. A man in blue lie beside his patrol car.

Anna had seen enough. Grabbing her equipment and a map of the area, she dashed out the door, determined to find the bridge without help.

Wading though the creek, Shawna concentrated on the cool water and the muck oozing between her toes. She wondered why she was different. Why she always felt like she was drowning in a substance she could neither see nor fight.

People had always been specimens to be observed and discussed, but she never felt like part of the species being studied. She was the technician assigned to collect data. To celebrate her eighteenth birthday, Shawna arranged for contraception for herself and seduced her part-time boyfriend to learn what sex felt like. It was not love; it was not lust, but an intellectual experiment, carefully thought out to satisfy her curiosity.

Many of her classmates had also attempted similar procedures, only not under such sterile conditions. They followed the D-T-D tradition--diploma to diapers. They remained in Kaleva to make quaint, little

homes just like their parents and grandparents before them. Shawna continued to learn and research life. They went on predictably multiplying--at least they learned a little about mathematics.

Before her the bridge reached across. The Chippewa Indians once crossed there; settlers followed with their wagons, building the original structure from the surrounding trees. The railroad replaced it with a modified version. Externally it appeared to be the same covered bridge, however concealed in the inside, metal supports and rails revealed its functional purpose.

She altered her course toward the center of the creek, watching the reflections distort in the ripples she created. Shawna felt the water deepen, the cool dampness defying the laws of gravity as the water, intertwining with the material of her skirt and blouse. The water pushed against the back of her thighs, massaging and stimulating the nerve endings of her mud covered toes, reaching up to penetrate the most primitive parts of her brain. She shivered.

Lowering her hand to the surface, her fingertips sensed the liquid a millisecond before they touched. Turning her palm upward, she stared at the water running down her fingers. Carefully she brought them to her mouth, sliding her damp fingers over her lips. She felt the skin beneath her blouse dampen. Impulsively she dove into the current.

Treading water to stay afloat, she surfaced beneath the bridge. Her clothing restricted her movements, clinging tightly in places, while sagging in others. Dipping her head backward, she sank far enough to push her hair back over her forehead, molding it into place. Resurfacing, she searched for a place to deposit her costume.

On the opposite bank was a clear area. She swam to the shallows near it; quickly stripping, she tossed the garments on the damp sand. Languidly she returned to the creek. The water felt cleaner without the inhibiting material.

Floating on her back, she realized that nothing had changed. It was as if the fifteen years had not happened. The scent of pine still filled the air. Goldenrod and Lady Slippers decorated the forest floor. One was plentiful. The other was endangered. Both were beautiful. Chirping and chattering. Quick flights, long slow glides of the multitudes of birds. Dragonflies. Colorful damselflies. Soft moss to sleep on. Wild blueberries and raspberries grew unhampered by man. Not even Agnes realized how much time she had spent in the solitude of this place. It cleansed her soul and restored her spirit.

A jay circled and landed on a dead stump. She watched it search for insects, wondering if Agnes was still alive and who was not.

After last night, Shawna understood why Agnes couldn't leave her home. Why she wouldn't move to Shawna's new sanctuary. She had used what her mentor had taught her to build a retreat, close to the established society, yet it was totally separate; it was truly a place where she could drop the facade.

It had always been her dream to bring Agnes to live with her, to care for her like a daughter would a beloved mother. Agnes refused, trying to delay the revelation of her secret. After last night, Shawna had understood and agreed with her reasons. In comparison, her own needs seemed paltry and selfish.

Diving beneath the water, Shawna forced her thoughts back to the creek and the sensations the water aroused.

Anna wiped the sweat off her upper lip, confident that her heels had already blistered. Her calves ached and the bug bites itched, yet she loved every step. Before she married David, every weekend had been spent tramping through the forests, wading streams and climbing hills, just to get the right angle. The magazines and the models remained behind supporting her adventures, but never being her life's ambition.

She remembered camping out all night, waiting for the sun to reach the exact position to reflect off the steam flowing over the exposed quartz. Within fifteen minutes, the shadows had reclaimed the view again hiding the splendor. For those few minutes, Anna had looked on Eden and she had the pictures to prove it.

Only the Adam she chose wasn't the outdoor type. He never forbid her expeditions; he simple refused to join in. At first she had been starry eyed, relinquishing her boots and forests for the husband and wife bowling teams and a rented garden several miles from the apartment. Anna kept herself hypnotized by the rush of activity, convincing herself that nothing was missing. Later after the rush was gone, she just didn't have the energy to make the climb. Looking back, Anna realized the moment she had betrayed herself to insure David's love was when her downfall had begun.

Slowing her pace, she allowed the thought to mature, carefully excluding her lips from the process; once spoken, she could no longer deny the truth. Had she held the key all along? Where there any bars? Anna didn't know any more. For years she blamed David, yet she had willingly given away her hiking boots. It had been her own insecurity that influenced her decisions; David had just reinforced her doubts. The system had developed subtly. She would disagree. He'd pout. Anna could concede. David would be overjoyed until the next time she tried to be independent.

Why did she marry him? Her family liked him, even her mother. They dated throughout high school, kept in touch during college and while David fought in Vietnam. She defended his enlistment to her friends, while she marched protesting the war.

Again Anna realized her cowardice had been her undoing. The sexual revolution had one major affection and Anna had caught it. With only two recourses at the time, acceptable and safe or illegal and possible deadly, Anna chose the former. Friends and family shook their heads with great understanding, only her mother advised the latter.

Their first daughter was born five months later. Linda was born fifteen months later. David decided they would keep trying until she gave him a son. She didn't want any more children; she had tried to explain her reasons, but he refused to listen. With her mother's help, she found a doctor who wouldn't insist on telling her husband before giving her birth control.

For three years, she was able to keep her secret. But the night before she left, David slammed into the house; she didn't know how, but he knew. The memory of the beating and the forced sex after made her stomach tighten with fear.

This isn't getting me anywhere, she thought, and neither is this path. She stopped and looked around for the landmarks the farmer had told her about. Anna didn't understand him. He left his garden to show her the way, yet he wouldn't help the woman he called friend.

She had seen him come out of the store on the second day. He never came back. Instead he pulled weeds from his cucumber path, as if the shots hadn't been fired or the deputies hadn't died.

Leaves rustled off to the left. She turned. A large jay leaped into flight. Anna became aware of her surroundings. Catnip grew near by; its fragrant leaves scented the air. Instinctively she pinched off a leaf. Inhaling, the intoxicating aroma revived her survival instinct. Shutting her eyes, she forced her other senses to reawaken to the sounds, smells and the long dormant sense of self. Anna felt the dampness of the creek through the air. Blindly turning, allowing the latent animalistic strengths to control the direction of her feet, Anna opened her eyes and followed the unblazed trail.

Shawna stretched out on the bank, folding her arms behind her head. Closing her eyes, she smiled at the sheer delight of being alive, of knowing that Agnes had given her the knowledge and the means to destroy all their petty schemes.

Anna approached the bank, startled by the presence of the woman. Last night after she had disappeared into the Ferrara's Market, she had asked questions about her. She didn't have a problem learning about the elegant stranger. Her name had been Shawna Demira until she moved to New York. There she hyphenated "Ferrara" on the end.

The manager of the hotel said the Demira family was large and middle class. Their family's fame came from the sporting events they excelled at--everything from baseball to bowling. Of the twelve children, three had already achieved national notoriety; the two oldest boys belonged to national baseball teams and the youngest girl had made her mark in tennis. According to the manager, Shawna had never fit into the family. The town thought she was strange. Her family tried to force her to conform; in their eyes, she was an embarrassment and a failure.

Yet the person who walked out of the shabby market did not lack self-esteem or self-control. By her very posture, Anna sensed this woman would not be dominated and did not understand why she hadn't

saved the woman she cared enough about to take her name.

Staring at her relaxing in the sun, Anna felt indigent. Stepping forward, she pushed back the branch and continued onto the bank. "You seemed to be pleased with yourself."

Shawna slowly opened her eyes, scanned the figure and closed them. "You're the photographer the Historical Society sent to cause trouble...the grapevine works both ways."

"Why won't you help her?" Anna heard the pitch of her voice rise.

"Why don't you?" Wondering if she was the one, Shawna again opened her eyes.

Anna hesitated. "Everyone said the two of you were close and you'd be able to talk her out. No one else needed to get hurt. Everyone knows she isn't in control."

"Everyone?" Shawna rolled onto her side. "Agnes Ferrara knows exactly what she is doing. She is fighting to determine her own future and having the time of her life doing it. If I did anything, but what I'm doing now, she'd be furious. But if you need to express your anger over the injustice, use the energy to help her yourself not attack me. Represent Agnes as another historical monument Kaleva hunted down and destroyed. It'd make good copy."

Anna felt her cheeks warm with embarrassment. "It's more than what you're doing. But you are right. Kaleva is known for destroying, burning down to be exact, its history. And people like you, educated, well spoken don't give a damn enough to stop it!"

"What makes you think for one moment I could stop this? You're right. They used to burn, now they shoot." She stood, brushing off the dry sand. "What you don't understand is that Kaleva isn't trying to succeed. They advertise themselves as a Victorian Village. Yet they've destroyed most of their historical buildings. They have a part time mayor, who is also a part time doctor. A city manager, who put the hospital on the outskirts of town, on the other side of the railroad tracks that are frequently blocked. Of course it was for the good of the town, not to mention his father-in-law who owned the land."

"That's illegal!"

"Not in Kaleva. Here they do whatever they please, because no one cares. Everyone gossips, but they don't do anything. Once it had more millionaires per capita than any other town in the US. Now it's bars, churches and gas stations. Drinking and baseball in the summer. Drinking and foot ball in the fall. Drinking and bowling in the winter...and if you have been listening, you'd know what the favorite past time is."

"There is still the theatre, museum and the library."

"The theatre is only open in the summer, for the tourists. The library and the museum operate on federal grants."

"That's a very nice speech, but what does it have to do with Agnes Ferrara?"

"It'd take me a week to explain and frankly the whole situation makes me feel dirty." Standing, Shawna pivoted on her toes and sauntered back into the water. "You can join me or judge me. I don't care one way or the other." She dove into the current, leaving Anna on the bank.

Downstream, Shawna broke the surface, dipping her head backward to float her hair from her face. Treading water, she wished her life had been different. Her family had given her shame and anger. Agnes showed her how to make it work for her. She had learned how to walk alone, to have the strength of will to be independent. At home, she created a reservoir of contentment and safety, a Camelot in the heart of Manhattan. But here in Kaleva, the old torments had awakened. At home she had peace; here she found only the old negative behaviors. Shawna wanted to honor Agnes request. She owed her so much, but there was no way she could stay.

She watched the woman sitting on the shore and wondered if she was the one the Goddess sent to help them both. Instinct leading reason, she submerged. Swimming to the shallows, she walked onto the shore. Sitting a comfortable distance away, she watch the closed off individual in profile. She needed to know, but she didn't know how to ask.

The sun had begun its downward journey, the shadows lengthened and animal life reawakened with the cooling. The fragrant moistness of the shade began winning the battle with the dryness of the direct sun. Shawna remembered calling the Deva's of the forest, reverently asking questions about the meaning of life.

During her tenth year, she had been again drafted into the family baseball team; however instead of biting her lip and meekly following, she mutinied. She ran off leaving behind the over-sized mitt and a hate-filled note, expressing what she thought of the team and the sport.

Under the wishing tree, Shawna begged the forest spirits to take her away from the people who abused her. Lying on the grass, she cried until her sobs turned to slumber. Within her dream, a Deva calling herself Lonteeka knelt beside her and brushed the tears from her cheek. She said there was a reason and some day she would understand, but for now they could only send their love. She kissed Shawna's forehead and whispered, "The hearth is where the spirit finds comfort, not where the body resides. Remember they can not reach you, unless you let them in."

The memory brought a tear to Shawna's eye. Blinking it back, she turned to face the woman. Suddenly the situation became logical. "How did you find this place?"

"I was looking for the bridge."

"But how did you find it. Most people can't without a guide."

Suddenly nervous, Anna cleared her throat. "An old man--another of Agnes's so call friend led me to the path."

Nodding, Shawna suddenly knew she was the one. "Agnes Ferrara Reynolds was born on the second floor of the family store June 17. Her mother died when she was three. Her father, Ralph Ferrara--"

"Why are you telling me this?"

"You wanted to know." Shawna shifted her gaze to the surface of the water. "Ralph treated her as an equal, not as an extension of himself. He didn't dominate her, but guided this person who he just happen to help create. She never called him father, always Ralph. Whether or not others approved of his methods, he did his best and they loved each other."

"As Agnes grew up, everyone thought she was cute when she proclaimed that the store was her domain and that she would one day take over for her father. They'd laughed and told her that her husband would run the business. She'd be too busy having babies. But they were wrong. You see that was the only place where she could meet the world on equal ground. Every place else she was just a woman--expected to marry, have children and relinquish all control over her life to a man. Only she couldn't do that.

"Throughout school, she did her best. She rarely dated. She would work at the store. She listened to the gossips and kept notes. The town began to gossip that maybe there was something wrong with her, that no boy would have her.

"Then without precedent she graduated the top of her class and won a scholarship. The town was outraged. How could a mere woman accept this award when the bright, young men in the town couldn't afford to continue their education? Many stopped shopping at the market. But Ralph had a charm of his own, which kept the store profitable.

"Several boys tried to burn the store. One was killed in the process. Sheriff Dombrauski is his nephew. Ironic isn't it? Agnes returned three years later, single and with a completed degree. The town gossiped and ignored her, yet her every move was scrutinized.

"Ralph and Agnes lived peacefully for several years. She took more control over the store. Business improved. The people in this town have real short memories. What little extra money there was she invested mostly in property. When the market crashed, they lost very little. The store survived and they accumulated more assets. Agnes was smart, almost ruthless when it came to getting her own back. Kaleva owed Agnes; she collected.

"In August of 36, Ralph died. Six months later Agnes married Thomas Reynolds. She thought she found a man who believed as she did. But she was wrong. Quickly the relationship became a power

struggle. Thomas wanted to change the name of the store and add a pool table. Agnes refused to permit it. Thomas's friends laughed and accused him of being the woman of the marriage.

"Tension increased, as the couple remained childless. Agnes knew how to prevent such things. She wasn't going to allow a child to take away her freedom.

"In the fall of '38, a representative of A&P offered to buy the store and make it part of their chain. The deal included a position in the corporate structure for Thomas. He was ecstatic. Then the representative learned it was Agnes, not Thomas who made the store successful and withdrew the offer.

"Furious and embarrassed by all his high handed boasts, Thomas blamed Agnes. The abuse started subtly with verbal digs mostly in front of others to make more painful. The town laughed. Agnes wouldn't relent. The first time he hit her, she realized it would only end with her death or his. She climbed the stairs to the attic, retrieved her father's pistol, shot him and buried him in the back yard of the store. No one suspected what fertilized the vegetables she sold.. Kaleva thought he finally had enough and ran off."

A breeze blew her hair across her face. Shawna pushed it back. Glancing at her silent companion, she realized it was almost over. The sun was setting. The void began to settle.

Anna Lynne sat motionless, trying to absorb the tale that seemed all too familiar. She didn't know if she could have been as brave as Agnes. She had stayed and fought for what belong to her. Anna had run; she hadn't seen another option. Staring at the ground, she watched an ant crawl across her foot. The breeze felt cool, cleaner than it had in a long time. Slowly she tilted her head to meet Shawna's gaze. "No one suspected?"

Shawna shook her head. "That's why Agnes could never leave. Years later, Dominic Martin bought the old Heleminski farm. They met and fell in love. He was everything Thomas wasn't, uncomplicated, uneducated, but he had more common sense and sensitivity. Agnes used to say that Dom was strong enough to love and give like a woman, but she was certainly glad he wasn't." Shawna smiled. "He made her very happy. She went to see him the night before she locked herself in. They spent one final night together. He had known for years. She told me last night. Her secret is now my responsibility. Dom will soon follow her. I will have no one to...I can't stay here. It would be too painful for me."

A crane flew overhead, back tracking the path Anna had followed. Its harsh cry startled Anna.

Shawna head snapped backward, as the flame of awakening intertwined up her spine. She shuttered as the pain brought her to the breaking point. For an instant she couldn't breathe. The moment seemed to last an eternity as her body readjusted to the new talents she had just inherited. The power spread out to her limbs and filled her with wisdom Agnes didn't have time to teach her. Her blood became Shawna's; she knew Ralph as the father he had been to Agnes. Slowly tilting her head from side to side, the pain lessened and dissipated. "It's over. My friend, my mother, and mentor is dead."

"But how do you know?"

Slowly Shawna stood and started collecting her clothing. "It's one of my new gifts." Shawna slipped on her skirt and buttoned it in the back. "Agnes always said that everything happens for a reason. Whether we create through prayer or my physical manipulation. If you listen carefully, you can hear the great mechanisms of life at work. Agnes could sense what was to happen. But she couldn't change what was to be. Tonight that gift and many others became my responsibility. We are like the record keepers."

"That is bullshit!" Anna jumped to her feet.

"Oh really. Five years ago, Agnes called me home. She signed everything she owned over to me. The store is just a minor piece of what she had."

"Then everything--the killing was for nothing!" Anna pushed her backward. "You could have stopped all this?"

"No. I couldn't have." Shawna calmly picked up her blouse and slipped her arms in the sleeves. "Some day you'll understand."

"Give me one good reason, I shouldn't report you." Anna folded her arms across her chest.

Shawna continued to button her blouse, without making eye contact. "They'll know soon enough." Smiling, she tossed her hair back. "Agnes knew I couldn't stay. It wouldn't be emotionally safe for me. One can not face the monsters in the closet until you are ready to kill them. I'm not ready yet, so I must settle for wounding it and running for my life. Agnes said there would be another. A woman who would understand. She would be running from a past that would have killed her. This place doesn't hold the memories for you as it does for me. You will be able to heal and become strong enough here to kill your own monster. If you stay here, you can hide until you are ready to face what you are running from on your terms. You would be safe. No more running or hiding."

"I don't know what to say. It's been so long."

Shawna gently touched her shoulder. "Don't decide now. There isn't any rush. But I must go. Dominic waits for me." Shawna picked up her shoes and disappeared into the brush.

Anna stood, considering the possibilities. She shivered. The shadows lengthened. Silence enveloped her with the cold chill of peace, the aftermath following the war. Few birds chattered. The water darkened no longer reflecting the sun, but the twilight. Soon the darkness would be complete. Anna decided not to try to find her way back to town. Instead she gathered twigs, kindling for a fire. She would wait out the night and return in the morning. Suddenly the forest took on a new dimension, a strange clarity that was not there just moments before. Smiling, she felt oddly comforted by the new possibilities.