

An artistic illustration of a Native American man and a young boy in a forest. The man, with long dark hair and a necklace, stands in the background with his arms outstretched. The boy, seen from behind, wears a blue t-shirt and yellow shorts, and is reaching out towards the man. They are surrounded by tall trees and a large, layered rock formation. The title 'THE TRICKSTER OF TWO RABBIT MOUNTAIN' is written in large, white, serif capital letters across the top of the image.

THE TRICKSTER OF TWO RABBIT MOUNTAIN

Created by
The Native Diabetes
Wellness Program

Based on the original
Eagle Books characters by
Georgia Perez

Written by
Terry Lofton

Illustrated by
Patrick Rolo

The Eagle Books

In the original *Eagle Book series*, a young boy, Rain that Dances, discovers an unhappy eagle. Mr. Eagle is tearful because many of the people in the community are developing a disease called type 2 diabetes. Rain that Dances invites his friends Thunder Cloud, Little Hummingbird, and Simon, to hear what the eagle has to say about staying healthy. The great bird assures the children that people can help to prevent type 2 diabetes by eating nourishing foods, being active, and following the traditions of their ancestors.

Coyote and the Turtle's Dream

In the original *Eagle Books stories*, Rain and his friends were about six years old. However, in this new story, *Coyote and the Turtle's Dream*, they are entering the seventh grade. Once again, the eagle gives a warning to Rain, but this time it is about the disappearance of water on their reservation. Never forgetting the health messages taught to them by the eagle, the kids embark on a mystery/adventure to solve a riddle about ancient fossils that will restore the water's flow.

Hummingbird's Squash

In *Hummingbird's Squash*, our young heroes continue their adventures under the watchful eye of Sky Heart, the eagle. In this story, Hummingbird pursues an ambitious plan to grow healthy foods that will help the community prevent type 2 diabetes. Little does she know that Coyote is leading her, Rain, Boomer, Simon, and her new "sister" Arianna, on a path of knowledge that reveals what it means to embrace all of one's relatives and honor the wisdom of ancestors.



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Graphic Design by Airam Gessner, Kauffman & Associates, Inc.

Based on the original Eagle Books characters by Georgia Perez

Eagle
Books



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Division of Diabetes Translation
Native Diabetes Wellness Program

Dedication

This book is dedicated to Lorelei DeCora (Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska) and Dr. Judy Goforth Parker (Chickasaw Nation) for their outstanding service and unceasing commitment to the improved health and well-being of Native peoples.

The Native Diabetes Wellness Program (NDWP) has been blessed by their support for the Eagle Books.

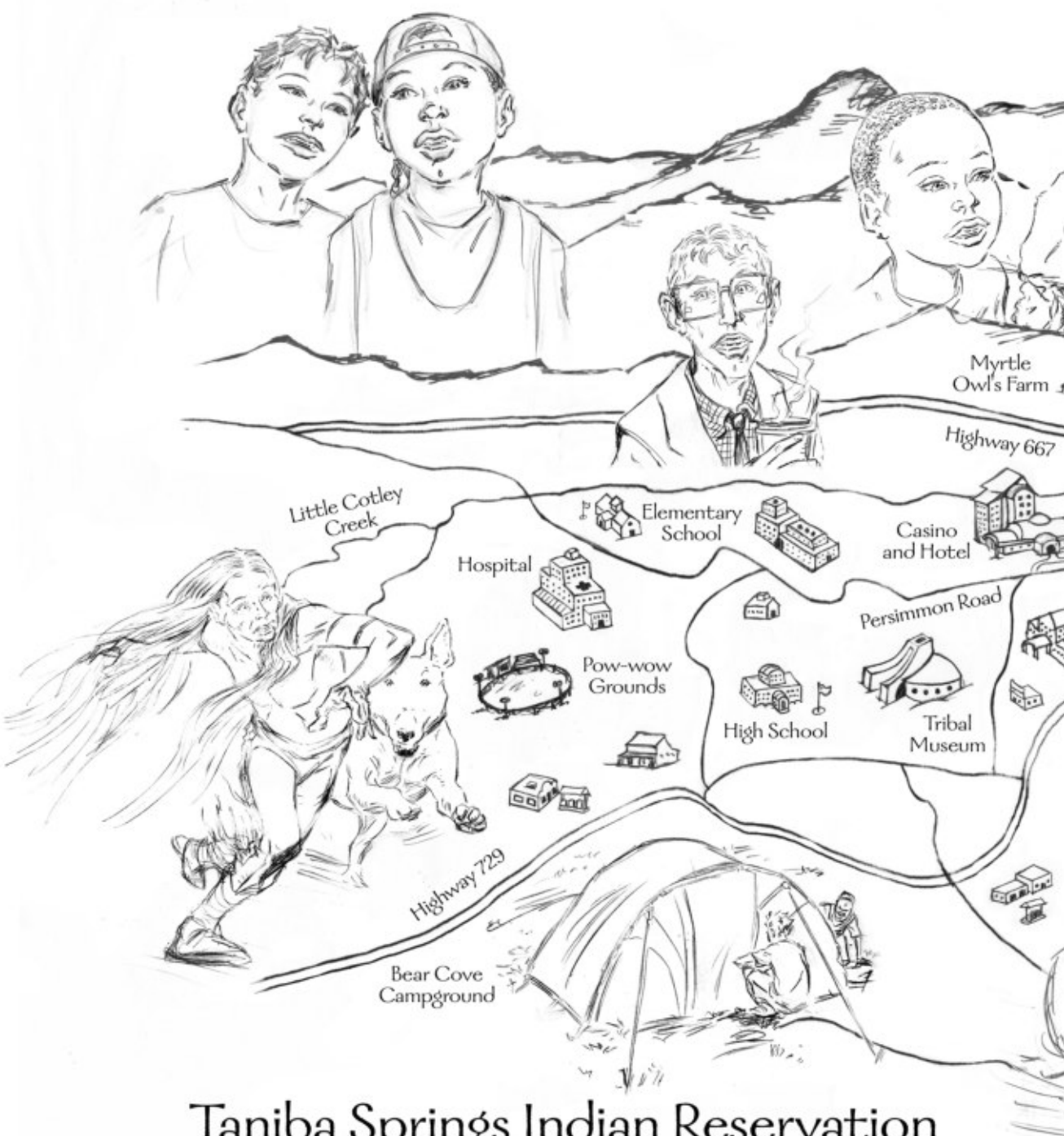
During her tenure on the Tribal Leader's Diabetes Committee, Dr. Goforth Parker embraced the project from its inception, and since that time has championed usage of the books through Eagle Adventure, a type 2 diabetes prevention program for children sponsored by the Chickasaw Nation. This award-winning program is now being adopted by other tribes.

Lorelei DeCora, a diabetes educator and activist who has promoted tribal self-sufficiency and the wisdom of Native health traditions, facilitated uptake of the Eagle Books by encouraging tribal resolutions of support for their continued funding and intensely promoting distribution and use of the books across Indian Country.

To both of these dedicated and generous women we are deeply indebted.



For more information about CDC's Native Diabetes Wellness Program and the Eagle Books educational materials, please go to www.cdc.gov/diabetes/projects/diabetes-wellness.htm. Additional information about diabetes and diabetes prevention can be found at the National Diabetes Education Program's website, <http://ndep.nih.gov/>. Under "Find Publications for Me," select the drop down for "Age" and find "Teens and Children." Posted are tips for teens with diabetes, and tips for how kids can lower their risk for developing type 2 diabetes.



Taniba Springs Indian Reservation



Two Rabbit
Mountain

Turtle-town

Wetumka Mountains

Wildcat Creek

Big Myrt's
Fruit & Veg

Sky High
Tours

Reservation Road

Fun Park

Conetah River



About Diabetes

Diabetes is a disease in which blood glucose levels are above normal. Most of the food we eat is turned into glucose, or sugar, for our bodies to use for energy. The pancreas, an organ that lies near the stomach, makes a hormone called insulin to help glucose get into the cells of our bodies. When you have diabetes, your body either doesn't make enough insulin or can't use its own insulin as well as it should. This causes sugar to build up in your blood.

Type 1 diabetes, which was previously called insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus (IDDM) or juvenile-onset diabetes, may account for about 5% of all diagnosed cases of diabetes. The causes of type 1 diabetes appear to be much different than those for type 2 diabetes, though the exact mechanisms for developing both diseases are unknown. The appearance of type 1 diabetes is suspected to follow exposure to an "environmental trigger," such as an unidentified virus, stimulating an immune attack against the beta cells of the pancreas (that produce insulin) in some genetically predisposed people. Researchers are making progress in identifying the exact genetics and "triggers" that predispose some individuals to develop type 1 diabetes, but prevention remains elusive.

Type 2 diabetes, which was previously called non-insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus (NIDDM) or adult-onset diabetes, may account for about 90% to 95% of all diagnosed cases of diabetes. A number of studies have shown that regular physical activity can significantly reduce the risk of developing type 2 diabetes. The Diabetes Prevention Program (DPP), a major federally funded study of 3,234 people at high risk for diabetes, showed that people can delay and possibly prevent the disease by losing a small amount of weight (5 to 7 percent of total body weight) through 30 minutes of physical activity 5 days a week and healthier eating.

For more information, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Diabetes Public Health Resource at <http://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/consumer/index.htm>.

Preface

In 2005, the U. S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Native Diabetes Wellness Program introduced children in American Indian and Alaska Native communities to the Eagle Books. In these stories, written by Georgia Perez, an eagle brings important messages about prevention of type 2 diabetes to a young Indian boy and his friends. The eagle teaches that Native knowledge provides the wisdom and power that helps friends and family stay healthy. By eating the foods their ancestors did and being physically active, children learn that much can be done to prevent type 2 diabetes.

These diabetes prevention messages were carried forward in the first two youth novels, *Coyote and the Turtle's Dream* and *Hummingbird's Squash*. In both stories, Rain that Dances, Boomer, Hummingbird, and Simon learn more about diabetes from their new friend, Arianna, who has type 1 diabetes. Sky Heart (the eagle) and Thistle (the rabbit) also guide them through Coyote's tricks and challenges to learn how healthy communities are promoted through good nutrition and physical activity, honoring of Native culture, protection of the land, and positive social relationships.

In this third novel of the trilogy, *The Trickster of Two Rabbit Mountain*, the diabetes prevention health messages continue in an exciting new setting. Rain and Boomer accompany Gerald, Rain's dad, on a trip to

the Taniba Springs Indian Reservation. Located in the southern highlands, the reservation's confederated tribes are hosting a Native economic conference. They soon meet two African-American kids, Marcus and Hailey Jackson, whose dad is also in town for the conference. Almost as soon as you can say "Coyote," the boys and their new friends embark on an exciting adventure where they encounter the mythic and elusive Little People. Troubled by an ominous helicopter that has been flying over their towns, the tiny folk ask for help in preventing their discovery in the deep forests of the Wetumka Mountains. Readers will meet Sigigi, a young man of the Little People, and "the Two Rabbit," a comical storyteller with many names whose tales bring together trickster stories from Native America and West Africa. Sigigi and the Two Rabbit teach the young adventurers how small, seemingly defenseless individuals can use their wits to overcome bigger adversaries. They also show them that when many small voices join together, they can become a powerful chorus for change.

Not to be left out of the excitement, Hummingbird, Simon, and Arianna help Rain, Boomer, and the Jackson kids (via the Internet) to pull a very big rabbit out of a hat. And Thistle and Coyote, with inspiration from Sky Heart, entreat a great trickster to unite with them in preventing type 2 diabetes.

To help young readers enjoy the story, Patrick Rolo, our illustrator, once again brings to life the characters and settings in the novel. He provides a map of Taniba Springs to assist them in finding their way around the local geography. A glossary at the back of the book also provides a little extra help when an unfamiliar word shows up in the story.

The Native Diabetes Wellness Program and Terry Lofton, the author, hope that you are entertained by *The Trickster of Two Rabbit Mountain* and learn more about living a healthy life in balance. Just say the magic words, “big ear and bob-tail,” and start reading!

Acknowledgements

The NDWP would like to acknowledge the following people and resources that have been so helpful in developing *The Trickster of Two Rabbit Mountain*.

We once again express our gratitude to the Indian Health Service's Tribal Leaders Diabetes Committee (TLDC) for their continuing support of the Eagle Books project. Almost a decade ago, the committee saw the potential of storytelling to reach children with the powerful message that type 2 diabetes is not their inevitable future. In particular, we want to recognize Buford Rolin, chairman of the Poarch Band of Creek Indians, Chair of the TLDC, and Vice Chair of the National Indian Health Board (NIHB), and former members of the TLDC, Dr. Judy Goforth Parker (Chickasaw Nation), administrator of the Chickasaw Nation Division of Health, and H. Sally Smith (Yup'ik Eskimo), secretary of the NIHB and its Alaska Area Representative.

Many thanks also go to the Indian Health Service, Division of Diabetes Treatment and Prevention, for their continued partnership and friendship. The Tribal Advisory Committee for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry also provided much appreciated support.

The NDWP also thanks Georgia Perez, the author of the original Eagle Books. Her work as a Community

Health Representative for the Nambe Pueblo and her dream of an eagle who brings healing messages encouraged her to write *Through the Eyes of the Eagle*, *Knees Lifted High*, *Plate Full of Color*, and *Tricky Treats*.

Georgia's characters—Rain that Dances, Thunder Cloud (Boomer), Hummingbird, and Simon—are still inspiring us to write about good health and good friends. We applaud Terry Lofton, our author, for creating another adventurous story that revisits the original characters in the summer following their seventh grade year. Accompanied by their new African American friends, Hailey and Marcus, Ms. Lofton takes Rain and Boomer into a new setting far from their home reservation, where they encounter Brother Rabbit (a renowned trickster), the Little People, and a greedy villain. Patrick Rolo (Bad River Band of Ojibwe Indians), of course, receives our accolades for capturing the exciting scenes in wonderful color illustrations and chapter drawings.

Reading and reviewing manuscripts is an important job. For their editorial commentary, we want to thank Dr. Lawrence Barker, Associate Director for Science, CDC's Division of Diabetes Translation, and Melinda Frank (Navajo Nation), health scientist/epidemiologist with CDC's Division of Diabetes Translation, NDWP.

The NDWP also wants to thank our adult reviewers and the Native American and African American middle school students who read drafts of *The Trickster of Two Rabbit Mountain* and gave us valuable feedback.

Our Native American child readers represent the Three Affiliated Tribes, Spokane Tribe of Indians, Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, Jicarilla Apache Tribe, San Carlos Apache Tribe, Navajo Nation, Osage Nation, and Cherokee Nation. Our African American readers included boys and girls from Atlanta, Georgia, and Catonsville, Maryland. We additionally appreciate Arianna Baros and her family for their reading of the draft and their continued participation in the development of the youth novels.

We would also like to acknowledge the resources used to develop the characterization of Brother Rabbit and the culture of the Little People in the novel. Our author, Terry Lofton, found Julius Lester's *Tales of Uncle Remus: The Adventures of Brer Rabbit* (New York: Dial Books for Young Readers, 1987) to be a treasure of inspiration for the personality and behaviors of Brother Rabbit in *The Trickster of Two Rabbit Mountain*. A modernized adaptation of the African American trickster stories retold by Joel Chandler Harris, Lester's book received the Parent's Choice book award in 1987 and was chosen a Coretta Scott King honor book in 1988.

Another important resource for creating the unique bicultural "ancestry" of Brother Rabbit was the book, *When Brer Rabbit Meets Coyote: African-Native American Literature*, edited by Jonathan Brennen (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003). This historical exploration of cultural exchange and development of distinct African-Native American

traditions aided not only in establishing Brother Rabbit's alter identity as the Two Rabbit, but also in creating the shared aspirations of our Native and African American child characters to prevent type 2 diabetes in their families and communities.

In regard to the Little People of the imaginary Confederated Tribes of Taniba Springs, they do not represent the story tradition of any particular tribe. They are, rather, a composite of story elements from many tribes across the western hemisphere. The common and unique characteristics of Little People in the Americas identified in *The Deetkatoo: Native American Stories about Little People*, edited by folklorist John Bierhorst (New York: William Morrow and Company, 2003), were extremely helpful in developing the appearance, life ways, and behaviors of the Little People in this novel.

Another great resource was *The Secrets and Mysteries of the Cherokee Little People*, written and illustrated by Lynn King Lossiah (Cherokee, North Carolina: Cherokee Publications, 1998). A member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, she includes in this small book the ancient stories recorded by James Mooney in the *Myths and Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees* and stories of events as recounted by the people of the Qualla Boundary. We hope that this novel inspires our readers to follow Lossiah's wise advice about the Little People: "Be open to mystery and allow for phenomena of nature beyond your present experience."

The NDWP also wants to acknowledge the valuable

incorporation of the original Eagle Books series into the Diabetes Education in Tribal Schools (DETS) Health is Life in Balance curriculum. This alignment of the Eagle Books' messages with the type 2 diabetes prevention lessons in DETS has helped to promote the uptake of the books in Native communities across the country. Continuing this important collaboration, we have cross-walked the health messages in the Eagle Books youth novels with selected lessons in the DETS grades 7 and 8 curriculum.¹ This guidance is provided in the *Eagle Books Youth Novels: Educators and Community Guide*, a set of school and community activities that supplements the novels.²

And lastly, we want to express our thanks for the hard work and commitment of our partner, Kauffman & Associates, Inc., in the management of the novel's production. Their creative collaboration with our author and illustrator has produced in *The Trickster of Two Rabbit Mountain* a book that concludes beautifully the Eagle Books youth novels trilogy.

¹The DETS curriculum Web site can be found at <http://www3.niddk.nih.gov/fund/other/dets>.

²The *Eagle Books Youth Novels: Educators and Community Guide* can be found at CDC's Eagle Books Web site: <http://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/pubs/eagle/index.html>.

Praise for *The Trickster of Two Rabbit Mountain*

“Articulate, factual, science-based. Well-paced, intriguing, interesting, and gripping. Sassy, creative, and inspirational. Graceful and respectful. Educational. *The Trickster of Two Rabbit Mountain* – a good read.”

- Rosemary Morgado Anslow, MA
New Mexico Diabetes Advisory Committee

“*The Trickster of Two Rabbit Mountain* is a wonderful story with fascinating characters, great adventures, and education in healthy living. The author captivates and draws you in with illustrative descriptions of characters and scenes. A good book for audiences of all ages. Humorous and enlightening, I truly enjoyed this book. I couldn’t put it down!”

- Nitanis Largo
Ojibwe, Atikameksheng Anishinawbek
Registered Practical Nurse
Ontario, Canada

“This book is well written, with splendid details of all the characters. I could see the story happening as I was reading it. As a Native American, I see my people battling diabetes, so I love that this story included diabetes awareness. A story for all walks of life to read and learn to live a healthy life. Napevomohtahe (feeling good and healthy). Aho.”

- Ray Binglefthand
Northern Cheyenne Tribe
Lame Deer, MT

“The Trickster of Two Rabbit Mountain is an appealing read for adults and youth readers. Each chapter kept me interested in what was to happen next. Living and working in Indian communities I feel this book is a tool to encourage and promote health and healthier lifestyles. As Indian people we learn and teach by our stories. This novel story teaches about the importance of diabetes awareness.”

- Paula K. Garcia

Navajo/Acoma Pueblo

Albuquerque, NM

“The Trickster of Two Rabbit Mountain is a clever combination of adventurous storytelling mixed with health education messages about type 2 diabetes prevention and healthy eating. The power of storytelling is evident throughout the book. Using relationships and emotion to lend authenticity and context to the characters’ motivations and behaviors, the author hooks you into the story, creatively intertwining the wisdom of different cultures. The book illustrates that ‘We Have the Power’ to combat type 2 diabetes by making lifestyle changes in our communities. One comes away from the heartwarming ending with a new perspective on health.”

- Melva Zerkoune, MS, RDN

Registered Dietitian/Wellness Coordinator

Primary Care Department

Komatke Health Center, Gila River Health Care

Laveen, AZ

“Follow the characters on an intriguing journey as they learn the importance of teamwork, diversity, traditional foods, humility... and the power of enduring stories. All ages will enjoy this great novel.”

- Chelsea Wesner

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

Program Planner

American Indian Institute, University of Oklahoma, Norman

“The Trickster of Two Rabbit Mountain is a wonderful story for readers of any age. It reminds us how important storytelling is in our Native culture. The Two Rabbit teaches that sharing our stories keeps our history and culture alive. The stories our elders share with us now still carry messages from which we can learn important lessons about staying healthy, working together, helping others, taking care of the environment, and understanding the impact of our actions. This novel, which reinforces the Eagle’s messages about preventing type 2 diabetes and shows us the traditional villages where the Little People still thrive, is a beautiful reminder of how our ancestors lived and how we can all live healthy lives today.”

- Jill Fox, MSPH

Chickasaw Nation

Eagle Adventure Coordinator

Ada, OK

“This was an interesting book with characters that definitely promote healthy living and healthy choices. I think it is a good read for both children as well as adults. Being African American, one can relate to many health challenges that Native Americans face, which are similar to those faced in African American communities. Diabetes is one of those challenges. I found the book to be good in that it subtly mentioned how African Americans and Native Americans have parallels in some aspects of life as well as health. The illustrations were good too.”

- Timothy Kinnard, DDS, MPH., RDH

Dental Director

Oklahoma City Indian Clinic

Oklahoma City, OK

“The wisdom of Sky Heart, the eagle, reaches far beyond Thunder Rock, location of the previous tales of Rain that Dances, Boomer, Hummingbird, and the others. In this rousing adventure, we not only learn that Sky Heart’s lessons apply everywhere, but we also meet the mysterious Little People of the southern highlands and a trickster who can give Coyote a run for his (or other peoples’—it is Coyote after all) money. That’s a tale worth telling—and, if you don’t already know the importance of the stories, you will after reading *The Trickster of Two Rabbit Mountain*.”

- Dr. Lawrence Barker

Associate Director for Science

Division of Diabetes Translation

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

“*The Trickster of Two Rabbit Mountain* made me ask my mother about stuff from my tribe (Navajo), such as the little people from the past called ‘Anasazi.’ Living in the city and attending a non-tribal school is sometimes hard to learn about your culture. The book made me feel more connected with my traditions and helped open a whole new world of imagination for me. I am glad this book has names such as Rain that Dances and talks about tribes and reservations to help educate other kids. I play basketball and will try to eat healthier now because I don’t want to be sick with diabetes.”

- Twiylah Lakota Lupe

Navajo/San Carlos Apache

Albuquerque, NM

“My favorite part of the book was when the children go on an adventure and discover the Little People of the cave and their culture. They teach the children about keeping their bodies and lands healthy. They are taught to eat healthy, to exercise their bodies to stay strong, to hunt off the land, and to respect the environment. They learn that diabetes can affect them if they do not exercise or eat right. My parents tell me lots of stories like this book. Through stories and teachings we are taught to keep our culture alive. I really enjoyed the story because it was interesting and funny!”

- Alex Wells

Navajo/Jicarilla Apache

Dulce, NM

“My favorite part of the story is when Rain was talking about diabetes. This part I can relate to because I watched my grandmother go through this disease, and now I am watching my dad going through it. I also thought the part about protecting the environment is important because this is where we live. If I ever have kids I would like for them to live in a clean world, where they can go fish in the waters, pick wild berries in the woods, and have their own gardens to grow healthy food.”

- Aeyana Jace Kearns

Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians

Kennewick, WA

“The book was great for teaching children how important it is to stay active and eat healthy in preventing diabetes. I really had fun reading the adventures in *The Trickster of Two Rabbit Mountain* and enjoyed the folktales in the book. I love how the book had some Cherokee elements in it, such as Brer Rabbit and the Little People. I have heard many stories of them before in our Cherokee stories. This book is really good.”

- Duane Wazhozha Palmer

Cherokee/Osage

Talequah, OK

Contents

1.	Gone to Taniba Springs.....	1
2.	The People of the Cave	13
3.	Real-life Leprechauns	23
4.	A Buffet of Introductions	31
5.	Little Tricks and Big Schemes.....	45
6.	A Powwow Trap.....	55
7.	Little Man Discovered	67
8.	Questions and Answers	77
9.	Thistle's Dream	87
10.	The Adventure Begins	97
11.	The Way to Turtletown	109
12.	Coyote Meets Chufezomo.....	121
13.	Big Myrt's Warning	137
14.	The Little People's Council.....	145
15.	Hospitality and Kindness	155

Contents

16.	Lennie in the Net.....	165
17.	The Laughing Place	173
18.	Wabbit Power.....	189
19.	Rabbit Comes and Eugene Goes	205
20.	Mr. Wang Tells a Story.....	215
21.	Max Crashes the Party	231
22.	Marcus's Briar Patch	243
23.	The Partridges Chase a Hawk	251
24.	Little People Justice	261
25.	The Spectacular News Story.....	275
26.	The Power of Stories	287
27.	Brother Rabbit's Gifts	293
28.	Epilogue	306
29.	Cast of Characters	309
30.	Glossary.....	315

Chapter 1



...the boys could hear a low engine drone transform into a high clatter as a helicopter lowered its altitude and changed direction toward them. “Hey, RD. Gimme the glasses!” Boomer yelled. “He’s gonna come right over us. Take a picture!”

Gone to Taniba Springs

Niska put down her gathering baskets on the bank of the stream and slipped her two-year-old daughter off her back. Turning to her young son, she cautioned him not to follow her into the water, but to watch his sister. Then she removed her moccasins and tightened the short mantle around her shoulders. After hitching up her fiber skirt, she waded into the chest-high water along a v-shaped stone weir that funneled rushing water into a

deeper pool. Her people had built the weir many years before, and it served them well. The weir guided fish into the pool where a cone-shaped basket was waiting to trap them. Niska hauled out the basket from the crystal clear water and was delighted to see that three fish were inside—two stonerollers about 4 inches long and a small rainbow trout. Niska was happy with her catch. She looked up to check on her children. Her son was giving his sister some berries from one of her baskets. She smiled and waved as she headed back to the shore with the basket over her head. She was thinking about the green crayfish she had collected that morning. The family would have a good dinner.

Suddenly, her ears filled with a strange vibration. Niska froze and listened. The pulsing shaped itself into a distinctive *whump, whump, whump*. She glanced up and saw it coming over the trees. Involuntarily, she cried, “The whirling bird!”

Caught in the open, Niska dropped the basket and stumbled through the water. She shouted to the children to run to the trees. When the roar of the whirling bird became deafening, Niska knew she was going to be spotted. She drew in a deep breath and dove below the stream surface, holding onto a large boulder.

When her lungs were about to burst, Niska raised her head and gasped for air. She saw the flying machine veering away from the stream. She waited until its



engine became a low hum, then struggled to shore and broke for the trees. Pushing her hair from her eyes, she yelled, “Nikkami! Foosi!”

Hiding in the bushes with his sister, the boy waited until their mother was under tree cover before he whistled their whereabouts. Niska ran to her children and grabbed up her daughter. She turned and raced toward the deer path that would take them home. A squirrel, spooked by Niska’s panic, jumped across her path from a low branch. He hit her shoulder before fleeing up a tree. The glancing blow knocked her off balance, and she fell heavily to the ground. The tiny woman, no more than 2 feet tall, quickly regained her feet. She picked up her crying daughter and ran after her son who was waiting up ahead. Niska’s only thought was that she must warn Turtletown!

A car hauling an old Airstream trailer traveled along a two-lane highway through the Wetumka Mountains. In the car, an Indian boy awoke from a short nap. His eyes closed, he punched up his pillow, but it was no use. Rain that Dances couldn’t get comfortable. He gave up and sat forward on the seat. “Hey, Dad. When do we get there?”

Gerald turned down the radio. “Another hour and we’ll be at the campground.”

Boomer chucked his comic book on floor. Hiccupping, he said, “Good. I’m ready to stop riding. Why does

reading in the car make me wanna throw up?”

Rain had his own complaint. Slapping his right ear, he groaned, “My ears are stuffed up. And now they’re popping.”

“We’ve been going up and down in elevation,” Gerald said. “We were at 2,000 feet above sea level and now we are going down into a valley.” Gerald handed back some gum. “Here. Chew on this. That’ll open up your ears.”

Rain popped a stick in his mouth and leaned back in his seat. He looked out the window. Intermittently, the thick pines that bordered the road would thin, and he could see the gray-green profile of the Wetumka Mountains in the far distance. Boy, this country sure doesn’t look like our rez, he thought. We’ve come a long way.

Rain had been looking forward to the trip for a long time. In March, Gerald had received an invitation to the Annual Native Economic Summit being hosted this year on the Taniba Springs Indian Reservation. As the economic developer for the Medicine Cave Tribal community, he had been asked to share information about some of their business successes.

Taniba Springs was known as having some of the best trout streams in the whole world. Rain was thrilled when Gerald asked if he would like to catch some big rainbows in those streams. It got even better when Gerald said he could invite Boomer, Rain’s oldest friend, to come

along. Boomer was excited to hear that the summit was being held the same week as the Taniba Springs July 4th powwow. The boys could dance in the powwow's junior competition. That would be fun, too.

Rain tried to concentrate on the scenery, but soon the trees and roadside rock formations became a blur as he began to daydream about fishing. The boy smiled as he imagined himself pulling in a big trout. As his mind wandered, he remembered that he had been fishing when the eagle had first spoken to him on that summer day when he was 6 years old. His smile grew wider. Rain liked to think about the eagle telling him about diabetes and how to prevent it. He replayed the memory of the great bird singing the game song about how kids should move their bodies. Laughing out loud, he recalled the eagle's friend, the little rabbit who urged him and his friends, Boomer, Simon, and Hummingbird, to eat fruits and vegetables.

Suddenly, Rain's expression became more serious. Oh, yeah, he thought, right after that the coyote showed up. The trickster confused him. The coyote was always full of disruption and monkey business—like last fall when he'd instigated the discovery of the Great Turtle's bones and the run-in with the fossil poachers. Then it was the trouble with the bullies at school, and the tricks on Hummingbird and the science teachers: exploding science experiments, giant squashes, a disappearing

garden, and the strange tree with...

“Hey!”

Rain shot his eyes open. Boomer was staring at him.

“What?”

“You’re being weird, man. You should see your face. What are you thinking about?”

“Our seventh grade year.”

“Gee, I didn’t think it hurt that bad...”

Gerald interrupted, “Guys, I’m gonna stop for gas in this town. This is our last stop before we get to Taniba Springs.” He pulled into a station and went into the store to prepay for the gas. The boys got out and went over to a cold drink machine. They bought a couple of waters. Standing side by side, the boys, so different in temperament, were beginning to develop different physiques as well. Both boys had had a growth spurt in the last year—Rain shooting up lanky and a bit awkward, Boomer developing a stocky, but more muscular shape. As always, they complemented each other.

“Boom, do you think that was our eagle who was flying ahead of us yesterday when we left Thunder Rock?”

“Could be. I saw him right after we turned on the highway.”

“He was with us for about 10 miles—then he turned back.” Rain nodded. “I know it was him.”



Boomer took a swig of water. “Man, it would be cool to run into the coyote again. I wonder what he’s up to.”

“Maybe it’s better we don’t know. Man, he was *tricking* us last year!”

“Yeah, he started a lot of trouble, but he helped us, too, RD.” (Boomer always called his best friend “RD.” He said he was too lazy to say “Rain that Dances” and thought “Rain” didn’t sound cool enough.)

“I know he did, Boom. It’s just that he put us in a lot of tight spots. Some of his tricks helped us, and some forced us to figure things out. But he played a lot of tricks...*just for fun!*”

The boys walked back to the car, discussing the coyote in the same way they would talk about a person. After 6 years, they and their friends, Simon and Hummingbird, accepted the animals of stories just as they would any natural being or event. This year they had added Arianna, a girl with type 1 diabetes, to their little band. Like them, she had learned to avoid talking about the animals in front of adults. It just got too complicated.

Rain got in the front seat and rummaged around on the floor for the snack bag that his mom and Granma had made for their trip. He was disappointed that his mom couldn’t come on the trip, but she had to look after his twin brothers and Granma. He found a sealed baggie of apple slices in lemon juice and a piece of bean bread.

Rain offered some to Boomer, but he waved off the



snacks. He had started reading a brochure about Taniba Springs—out loud. “Listen to this, RD. It says, ‘Taniba Springs is governed by a confederation of small bands from five tribes that negotiated a reservation in the highlands after being removed from several other states in the 1830s.’ We’re not visiting one tribe—we’re visiting *five*. How about that?”

Chomping on the last of the goodies, Rain balled up the empty bag and tossed it at his best buddy. Remarkably, the Boom reached up and caught it without looking up. Wiggling his eyebrows, he said, “Boomer have many magic moves.”

Gerald got back in the car and pulled out onto the highway. They drove without speaking for a few miles. Usually, it was Boomer who broke the silence, but this time it was Rain. (Boomer had made himself sick again by reading in the car.) “Hey, Dad. You were going to tell us about your friend and his kids who will be at the conference. Where are they from?”

“His name is Don Jackson. I don’t know his kids’ names. They’re from Charlotte, North Carolina. We met at an economic conference a couple of years ago. Don’s a smart guy. He has a lot of ideas for promoting small businesses that are environmentally friendly. He’s mostly done consulting and volunteer work with African-American communities. But he’s worked with some tribes, too.” Looking over at Rain, he added, “He likes

fishing.”

Suddenly, the trailer hitch started rattling and a vibration shimmied through the car. “Uh-oh. There it goes again. Dang! Why didn’t it act up before we stopped?” Looking for a place to stop, Gerald said, “Hey, we’re lucky. There’s a roadside overlook up ahead.”

Gerald pulled over into the parking area. He got out of the car and dug around in the trunk until he located his toolbox. Tightening the bolts on the hitch wouldn’t take long. Rain grabbed the binoculars from under the seat and jumped out with Boomer to appreciate the view. The boys walked over to the low stone wall that bounded a drop-off into a deep ravine. They couldn’t see it, but they could hear the rush of water in the stream that flowed, hidden, through the willow thickets below.

Boomer shaded his eyes with his hand. “Boy, it’s hot.”

Squinting his eyes against the glare, Rain glanced up, noticing that the sky was light blue, almost white. “Yeah, it’s a lot more humid than at home.”

Boomer pointed toward a black object that seemed to magically emerge out of the sun’s shimmering heat. “Look. What’s that?” Just as he asked the question, the boys could hear a low engine drone transform into a high clatter as a helicopter lowered its altitude and changed direction toward them.

“Hey, RD. Gimme the glasses! He’s gonna come right over us. Take a picture!”



Rain pulled out his cell phone and held it over his head, snapping shots. Boomer waved and raised the binoculars to his eyes. The pilot looked down and stared directly at them through black sun glasses. He did not wave back.



A grandmother said to the Speaker, "I've seen Sigigi with the talking box. It could be useful. It may tell us something."

Chapter 2



Small clusters of Little People were silhouetted against the brilliant sunlight that illuminated the cave's interior.

The People of the Cave

Carrying her daughter on her back, Niska hurried along the deer trail. Nikkami followed closely behind his mother. When the trees thinned, she anxiously glanced upward, terrified that the whirling bird would be watching. But the sky was empty. Trying to calm herself, she whispered, “I would hear it now—it can’t sneak up on us.” They crested a small ridge and followed the winding path downward into a valley. The small boy knew this part of the trail well and ran on ahead.

Now the forest grew so thick that the leaf cover arched over the trail, almost blocking the sun. In the green twilight, Niska spotted her son waiting for her. When she reached him, they darted off the path and into the laurel thicket that hid one of the entrances to Turtletown. With relief, Niska spied the circlet of stones that marked the opening to a small sinkhole. Nikkami smiled at her and disappeared down the opening. She followed. They moved confidently down a slope where water had worn natural steps into the limestone. Arriving at the bottom, they turned into a dark tunnel lit at intervals by torches. Up ahead, Niska saw two women approaching. She ran toward them.

Dropping her gathering basket, the younger of the two women, Niska's friend, Cholotka, hurried to meet her. "Niska! What's happened? Nikkami, are you all right? "

The boy nodded. "Yes, it was loud and flew around..."*

Short of breath, Niska gasped, "I've been seen! The whirling bird. At the fish weir. Here, Cholotka, take my daughter. I have to warn everyone."

*The Speech of the Little People in this book is an English translation of a *creole* language. A creole is a language developed from the mixing of parent tongues. In this case, the Little People mixed together several Muscogean and Iroquoian languages. When the Little People followed their Tribes to the Wetumka Mountains 175 years ago during the Great Removal, they could not understand each other very well. The people began to share words so that they could communicate. The children soon adopted this way of speaking, and a new language was born. Now all the Little People can understand each other. The original languages are still spoken, but mostly by older people.

The older woman, the wife of the town's Headman, caught up to them. "Did you say the fish weir? That is very near the town! Niska, how could you be so careless?" Shaking her head, she grumbled, "I'll have to wake up my husband. He'll have a short nap today."

Niska rushed ahead and flew down a level of steps before bursting through a small opening into the mouth of a giant cave. She stopped and cried out, "The whirling bird—the whirling bird!" Her warning echoed against the cave's high, dome-like ceiling. Small clusters of Little People were silhouetted against the brilliant sunlight that illuminated the cave's interior. They halted their various labors. Niska's mother jumped up from her cooking fire. "What's happened?"

Nikkami ran to his grandmother. "We had to leave our food at the river, Grandma. Pulling at her skirt, he whined, "I'm hungry ..."

"Shhh, Nikkami." To quiet him until the midday meal was ready, she gave him a spoonful of berries and crushed nuts. Looking up, she motioned her daughter away from the small crowd that was beginning to gather.

Niska sat down at her mother's fire. She could hear the murmur of alarm that was now spreading across the cave. Shamefaced, she watched the Headman's wife awaken him. She turned to her mother, "The man in the whirling bird saw me. My carelessness has threatened the town."

“Don’t blame yourself, Niska,” her mother replied. “He was bound to see someone. It was only a matter of time.”

The Headman got up from the sleeping platform where he had been resting in the cool of the cave. He calmly looked about and the people grew quiet. He turned to a young man who quickly set down the blowgun darts he had been fletching. “Tell the members of the council to assemble at the Council House. Then alert the crier to call the people to their houses.” He rubbed his eyebrow and said, “I don’t know how many men are out hunting.” He beckoned his granddaughter and told her: “Go to the gardens and bring in the women.” As she turned away, he added softly, “And get the children from the river.”

Osihishi, the Headman of Turtletown, picked up his cape and walked to the edge of the cave shelter. He threw the symbol of his office around his shoulders. He looked out at the town. In the summer, the forest canopy was so thick that the town’s thatched houses, ball grounds, and central square were obscured from the eyes of those who could see from above. In the winter, the clouds helped to hide them. Their small gardens, randomly scattered in tiny clearings where the sunlight penetrated, were also difficult to see. Here in the cave, however, the people and their activities were hidden. The cave concealed them in many ways, including the venting of smoke to

its interior where it dispersed, undetectable, along small shafts to the open air. The Headman sighed. Such were the concerns of the Little People who lived in the time of whirling birds.

Osihishi walked down a small pathway that served as an exit from the side of the cave. Nut trees had been planted along the path to obscure the presence of anyone walking there. He reached the tree cover of the town and turned toward the Council House. The chatter of returning women and children began to fill the pathways between the houses. The Headman chuckled when he heard some players complaining that they had to cut their chunky game short. Ahh, he thought, these boys...

Osihishi entered the darkness of the Council House. Most of the clan elders, spiritual leaders, and esteemed residents of Turtletown were already seated. But he waited until everyone was there before signaling for the council to open with a prayer. The Headman then spoke briefly to the Speaker who welcomed everyone and described the situation they had been summoned to consider: what were they going to do about the whirling bird? Today marked the third time in as many days that it had flown near or over Turtletown. And now someone had been seen.

During the afternoon, the members discussed and debated the actions that the town could possibly take. First, they conferred about ways to engage the

other Little People towns—how many towns had been harassed? Were certain towns being targeted? Had other Little People been seen? Runners had already brought news that the whirling bird had been sighted repeatedly near Turkeytown and Panthertown. The council decided to invite all the towns to a big meeting to discuss the situation. (They were sure their invitations would be accepted. All the town councils favored extensive argument and much speech-making in addressing any problem.)

Next, they decided to send a scout to the Big People's town at Taniba Springs. Perhaps he could find out what the man in the whirling bird wanted.

Lastly, they debated what to do if the whirling bird could not be stopped. Some council members favored moving the town. Previous generations of Little People had at times vacated an area when the Big People were not respecting them. It had been done before—why not now? Others said that they preferred peaceful relationships with the Big People, but they would support using their magical powers against them, if necessary.

The Headman interrupted. He said that before they took such drastic steps, they should seek the advice of the great trickster, the Two Rabbit. He lived on the mountain that bore his name—the mountain that guarded their valley. Among the animals and the

Little People, it was well-known that the Two Rabbit had defeated magicians, made fools of great-toothed predators, and bested Big People by virtue of his wits.

The council talked on these subjects until the sun began to fade. Everyone was tired. It was time for the crier to call the townsfolk together. They would have the last word on the council's decisions and proposals. The leaders of the community filed out of the Council House and waited for the people to gather.

Soon everyone had assembled. An excited murmur of expectation filled the air. The Speaker went before the people and held up his hand for quiet. In the clear and strong voice of a practiced orator, he recounted the council's discussion in great detail. The large crowd remained politely attentive, even though some parents had to leave because their children had become restless. From their nodding, it was evident that the listeners liked what they were hearing. There was a general consensus that bringing the towns together and sending a scout to the Big People's town were good ideas.

Then an elderly man stepped forward and asked a question. "Who will go to the Big People's town, and how will he get the information we need?"

One of the chunky game players called out. "Sigigi should go! He knows the trails to the town. He's been there many times."

A small group of young girls began to gab among

themselves. “Sigigi can talk like Duffy. He knows the language the talking box speaks.” One of the girls giggled. “He gave me this little earring he found at the town.” She held up her hair. “See?” The girls admired it and looked about to see where this popular young fellow could be hiding.

Overhearing them, a grandmother said to the Speaker, “I’ve seen him with the talking box. It could be useful. It may tell us something.”

The Speaker looked out over the crowd. “Sigigi! Are you here?”

The people began to crane their necks, trying to spot him in the throng. A hand went up from the middle of crowd. “I’m here!” Those around him stepped back and cleared a pathway. Sigigi made his way up to the Council House and stood respectfully.

One of the elders smiled at the handsome youth of 20 years standing before them. “Sigigi. Many here believe you would be a good scout. What would you do to find out why the whirling bird is flying over our towns?”

Sigigi was eager to go on an adventure, but he had to think about this. “Well, I, ah...I would go to places where I could hear people talking. And, ah, I could look at the papers that have pictures in them—there might be a clue there. Yes, someone might be talking about it on the radio—the talking box. But I can’t hear the radio very well right now because I need some of the power that

makes it work. It runs out after a while...”

“Do you have any other ideas?”

“Well, maybe I could talk to someone on the phone. The person I called couldn’t see me.” When he got no response, Sigigi held his hand to his ear and said, “You know, a phone?”

The elder frowned at Sigigi and said sternly. “I played pranks in the houses of the Big People’s when I was a boy, too, Sigigi. I know what a telephone is.”

Trying not to sound too ill-mannered, Sigigi quietly replied, “Well, um, they stick the phones in their ears now or talk into their hands all the time—sending their voices through the air. Maybe I could borrow one...”

The grandmother who spoke before said, “Duffy could talk on the phone. He’s one of the Big People. Not of *our* Big People, of course, but ‘big’ all the same.”

“Where is Duffy?” a council member asked.

The people looked around for the yellow-haired giant. Someone in the crowd yelled, “He isn’t here. He left when the Speaker started talking about sending someone to the Big People’s town.”

The Headman interceded. “We won’t send Duffy back if he doesn’t want to go. This is his home.”

One of the women on the council stepped forward and placed her hand on Sigigi’s shoulder. “I think you will do very well, Sigigi. But if your effort fails, we have some

other ways to deal with the situation. Just do your best and we will be proud of you.”

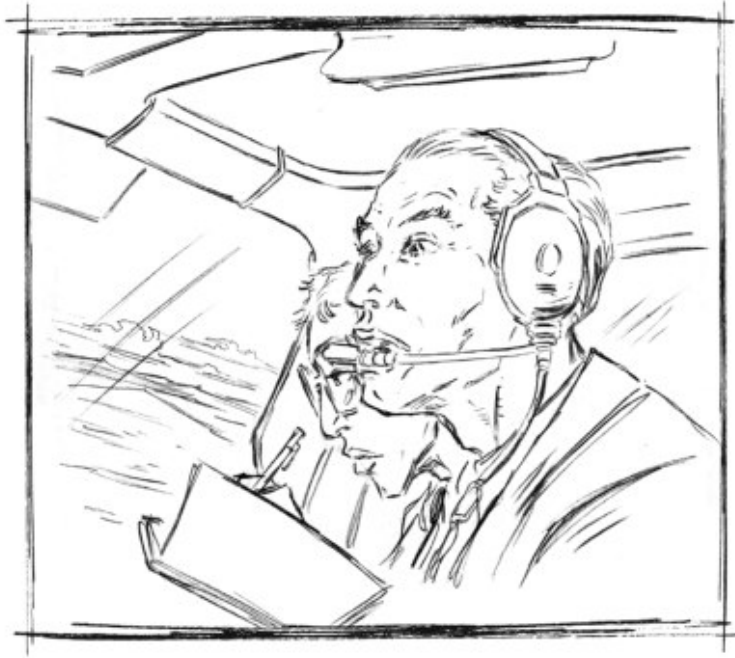
Sigigi smiled shyly. “I will get ready for the journey tomorrow.”

Sigigi’s friends whooped their approval. The townspeople congratulated him and wished him luck. Sigigi looked around at their smiling faces. He was determined not to let them down. Sigigi’s sister, Cholotka, ran up to him. “We’ll have to celebrate. Grandma will cook you something special tonight. And I will help pack your food for the trip.”

As they walked in the dusk to their family’s house, Cholotka grinned and asked her brother an interesting question. “Sigigi, *who* would you talk to on the phone?”

He laughed nervously and confided in his sister, “I don’t know. I don’t even know how to make it talk.”

Chapter 3



“Did Mr. Frimble see ’em, too?” Lennie asked. “Four-eyes? He can’t see his hand in front of his face. Besides he had his head in his laptop.”

Real-life Leprechauns

Max Bigelow looked down on the landing pad and small cluster of buildings that comprised Sky High Tours. Throttling back the engines, he began the helicopter’s descent. An excellent pilot, he expertly guided the chopper to the landing pad and gently touched down. He cut the engines, slowing the rotation of the propellers until they whooped-whooped to a stop.

His passenger, Eugene Frimble, looked at Max and grinned. “That was a very productive excursion,

Mr. Bigelow! I was able to obtain some excellent observations of the terrain.”

Distracted and eager to get rid of Frimble, Max said curtly, “Oh, good. Ah, see Lennie about the trip tomorrow. I gotta go.” Nobody could accuse Max of “service with a smile.” Opening the cabin door on the pilot’s side, he jumped out and yelled for his mechanic. Lennie Blatch, a thin, sleepy-eyed fellow in grease-stained overalls, appeared in the doorway of the barn that served as the helicopter hangar.

“You want me, Max?”

Max pushed past Lennie as he hurried into the hangar. Tall and slightly stooped, he barked over his shoulder, “Take care of Frimble.”

Figuring that Max was annoyed at something, Lennie said timidly, “The two fares for the Sunset Tour are here.”

Max yelled back, “Cancel it!” Rushing into a small office that had previously been the barn’s tack room, he reached on top of an old bookcase and started pulling down a stack of rolled maps.

Lennie followed his boss into the office. Plunking the maps on his desk, Max looked up. When he was irritated, his long face seemed to lengthen as his mouth pinched downward like an upside-down U. “I thought I told you to take care of Frimble. He wants to schedule another trip tomorrow. ”

“Oh, I will, Max, right away.” Hesitating a little, Lennie added, “Um, the mail came. Looks like there’s a letter from the bank.”

Max quickly glanced in the wire box that held an assortment of circulars and unopened junk mail. An official-looking business envelope sat on top. He reached for it reluctantly. Tearing open the flap, he pulled out the letter and read its brief communication. Frowning, he said, “Better not cancel those fares, Lennie. Just tell ’em there’s gonna be a short delay.” He added the letter to the small tower of bills that rose from the middle of his desk. “There’s plenty of time,” he growled, “to see the dang sun go down.”

Max watched Lennie turn and head for the parking lot. He sat down heavily and stared at the late notice. He’d missed three payments on the loans he’d taken out on the two helicopters that made up his “fleet.” When he’d taken over Sky High Tours (and the loans), Max thought he could grow the business. But he was struggling. Although he was a good pilot and a stickler for mechanical safety, Max was limited in his understanding of business and marketing. Now the bank was threatening to foreclose on the helicopters.

Max glanced at the maps and smiled. Well, maybe the bankers were just a little too hasty. He ruffled through the maps and pulled out one. Spreading it out on the desktop, he traced his forefinger along a meandering

blue line—the Oneota River. The finger stopped when it reached a tributary that branched off the Oneota near Black Rock Mountain. He whispered excitedly to himself: “That’s where I saw her!”

Jumping up, Max followed Lennie outside. He passed by the cabin that housed the Sky High Tours reservation counter. Two customers were waiting on the small front porch under a “Helicopter Rides” banner that hung limply in the afternoon heat. He waved and forced a smile. Seeing Lennie under one of the choppers, he hurried over and squatted down on the side opposite to the cabin.

Peering under the helicopter, he asked, “What’re you doing?”

“Taking a look at one of the skids. I checked out the air filter, too. I told ’em there’d be a delay like you said, Max. So, I thought I’d do a little maintenance. I’ll be finished in a second.”

“When does Frimble want to go out tomorrow?”

“Two o’clock.”

Glancing around, Max addressed the top of Lennie’s head in a low, but excited voice: “Okay. That’s fine. Look, I...ah, saw something pretty strange today, Lennie. Frimble wanted to go way, way out, but we were still on reservation land—near Black Rock Mountain. Around where the Oneota branches, I saw this woman in a stream. She ran, Lennie, but I saw her. I had the

binoculars. She was little—I mean *really* little. I’m not kidding you—a housecat could have taken her down!”

Lennie suddenly pulled himself from under the helicopter and stared at Max.

“Hey, don’t look at me like that...I’m not nuts!” Miffed, but not seriously, Max went on. “And that’s not all. She looked like old-timey Indians. I could see her face. She had a tattoo or some paint on her chin... and... and...this cape around her shoulders. And get this! She had a couple of kids with her. I swear one was no bigger than a chipmunk!”

Lennie stood and turned away, wiping his hands on a rag. Max jumped up and grabbed his arm. “Do you know what this means? You know those papers at the grocery store check-out? They’d pay big for pictures of real-life leprechauns—not those little Irish guys in green suits! This could be bigger than Bigfoot! I could pay off the bank!”

Lennie asked quietly, “Did Mr. Frimble see ’em, too?”

“Four-eyes? He can’t see his hand in front of his face. Besides he had his head in his laptop. I had the binoculars, not him.”

Lennie shoved his hands in his overalls and looked apologetically at Max. “You aren’t from around here. So, you don’t know the stories that Indian folks tell. Stories about the Little People.”

“You mean they know about ’em?”

“Well, sure. Hunters have seen the Little People. And there’s lots of stories about how they find kids that get lost in the woods.” Lennie paused. Max’s expression had changed. With some unease, Lennie added, “And my granddad said sometimes they’ll teach people about medicines.”

Max’s face, indeed, had changed—into an odd mixture of happiness and anxiety. He started pacing back and forth, running his hand through his hair. Laughing, he cried, “So there’s a whole ‘lost tribe’ of them out there!” Glancing at his customers (who were rapidly losing patience), Max hurriedly made his point: “Lennie, don’t you see? We could ditch this two-bit helicopter business and really make it big!”

When Lennie heard Max say “we,” a warning bell went off in his head. “Don’t get me wrong, Max. Not all the stories about the Little People have happy endings. They’ll get back at you if you mess with them.”

“What do you mean ‘get back at you’?”

“Well, if they’re not too riled up, it might just be a run of bad luck or...”

“You don’t believe that hooey, do you, Lennie?”

“Well, I...But Max, they’re not like regular people. They got powers!”

“Hey, I know you got some relatives on this

reservation and your wife's Indian. But you can't believe those little munchkins can hurt a grown man!"

Lennie shook his head. "I don't know about this, Max. Look, would you have believed that they existed at all if you hadn't seen that little woman?"

Max gave his mechanic an ugly look. "Yeah, you're right. I wouldn't have believed it. But I *have* seen 'em, Lennie. And I'm not forgetting that one little fact."

Max noticed that Lennie's attention was suddenly directed somewhere behind him. He turned around. A red-faced Mr. Ralph Batherstone of Coatesville, Idaho, (who had apparently missed his Sunset Tour due to the setting of the sun) was also not forgetting one little fact: "Mr. Bigelow, you owe me fifty dollars! My wife and I want our deposit back!"

Max reached in his pants pocket for his wallet. But he didn't bother to pull it out. He'd remembered that he paid the light bill with the money. Smiling his most ingratiating smile, Max asked, "Ah, Mr. Batherstone, you wouldn't be interested in our Moon Tour, would you?"

Chapter 4



When they returned to the table, Hailey had to comment. “Boy, you guys sure eat healthy.”

A Buffet of Introductions

Approaching Taniba Springs, Gerald and the boys drove for several miles past roadside signs inviting visitors to check out the Crystal Mountain Casino and other tourist attractions on the reservation. Most of them advertised water tubing and rafting, paintball games, children’s rides, craft shops, and restaurants.

Reading the billboards, Rain said, “Gee, Dad, Taniba Springs has a lot of tourist stuff. All we’ve got is some

fishing and horseback riding.”

“We’ve developed different kinds of businesses at home, Rain. Taniba Springs has invested in a tourist economy. Their casino brings in visitors from several states, and they have a lot of family activities, too. July 4th is one of the holidays that generates a lot of business.”

“Hey!” Boomer cried, “did you see that Steak and Pancake House sign?”

“Hold on, Boomer,” Gerald said. “We’re having dinner with the Jacksons. Right now, just watch for something that says Bear Cove Campground.”

When they drove around the next curve in the highway, a six-foot-tall cutout of a bear directed them to Bear Cove. Gerald turned at the bear and followed the unpaved road to the campground office. He checked in and followed the directions provided by the manager to campsite number 15. Pulling in, he maneuvered the trailer in front of a barbeque pit and picnic table and got out to unhitch the trailer. Rain and Boomer set up the trailer awning, while Gerald hooked up the electricity.

Before they went into town, Gerald insisted that the boys go for a quick shower and a change of clothes. When they returned, he gave them a quick inspection. Although the boys weren’t exactly “spiffy,” they were clean. Then they piled in the car and headed to the casino hotel. The traffic was heavy. Fearing that they

would be held up, Gerald called Don Jackson and told him they were on their way. Most of congestion was at the turn-off to the powwow grounds. They soon discovered, however, that the two red lights on the main road through town were backing up cars, too. Rain and Boomer had plenty of time to check out the sights.

Boomer cried, “Hey, there’s a water slide. And a freshwater aquarium! That looks like fun.”

Looking out the opposite side of the car, Rain said, “I wonder what the Mystery Spook House is? Look! Check out Wildlife Encounter!”

“The what? Where?”

“Never mind,” Rain said. “We passed it. Whoa! They’ve got a Big Brave Motel!”

Boomer yelled, “Oh, no. Maybe they got Big Chief Burgers, too!” The boys always got a kick out of what they called “corny Indian stuff.” Looking in the rear-view mirror, Gerald said, “Don’t make too much fun, guys. Your favorite store owner in Thunder Rock has just gone into the motel business. Frank Big Weasel bought the old Sleepy Time Motel and is asking for a building permit to put up a new sign.” Gerald started laughing. “He’s changing the name to the Wigwam Motor Inn!”

“Oh, no!” the boys yelled in mock terror, “Thunder Rock’s being ‘wigwammed!’ AHHH!”

Gerald thought it was time for a little chat about

stereotypes with the boys, but it would have to wait. The traffic had finally let up, and he was able to make the turn into the parking lot of the casino and the four-story hotel behind it. Getting out of the car, they headed toward the hotel entrance, making sure to avoid a bus unloading a seniors' tour group. Entering the lobby, the boys followed Gerald to the Water Fall Restaurant. A tall, slightly balding African-American man was standing outside the popular buffet waving at them. Gerald hurried forward and shook Don Jackson's hand. He quickly introduced Rain and Boomer. Don shook their hands, too.

"Come on," Don said, "I got us a table. I bet you guys are hungry." Threading their way through the crowded restaurant, he led them to a large round table where a girl and boy were holding menus. Gerald and Don sat down next to each other, and the boys took the remaining seats. Don introduced his daughter, Hailey, and son, Marcus. Hailey, sporting a critter tee-shirt and bouncy spiral curls, gave a friendly finger wave; Marcus, his round face accentuated by a buzz cut, broke into grin revealing a missing front tooth. Before the waiter appeared, their dad only had time to say that Hailey was going into the eighth grade in August, Marcus was 6 years old, and their mom couldn't come on the trip because she was taking a course to keep up her teaching certificate.

Everybody said they'd go for the buffet. Gerald went looking for the seafood and fish (he had trout in mind), while Don shepherded Marcus through the buffet choices. Hailey joined Rain and Boomer.

Starting up a conversation with Hailey, Rain said, "We didn't get to introduce ourselves. I'm Rain, but some of my friends call me RD. And this is Boomer. We just finished the seventh grade, too."

"Dad said he thought we were about the same age. We live in Charlotte, North Carolina. Where are you guys from?"

"The Medicine Cave Indian Reservation. We go to Thunder Rock Middle School," Boomer answered.

Moving down the salad line, the three kids picked up loads of various vegetables. Glancing at the boys, Hailey said, "I go to Cumberland Middle School. It's getting overcrowded. So, I may get moved to another school."

Rain smiled and said, "I don't guess we'll ever get moved. We only have one middle school."

"Is Medicine Cave a big reservation?"

"We have about 2,500 tribal members that live on the reservation. It's pretty big; it covers about 500 square miles."

Gosh, Hailey thought, Charlotte has thousands more people than that. Feeling a little smug, she thought, I don't guess much happens there. Curious, she asked,

“What do kids do for excitement?”

Boomer said, “Well, last year I had a burping contest with a coyote, and RD saved his grandma from a kidnapper and broke up a fossil poaching ring.”

Embarrassed, Rain glared at Boomer.

Thinking that he was just fooling, Hailey didn’t reply, but she had noticed the look that Rain gave his friend. Following the boys to the soups and entrees, she also observed that they chose grilled chicken, baked potatoes, and a variety of colorful vegetable dishes. At the breads and desserts, they picked up whole wheat rolls and the fruit bowls. Joining their dads and Marcus at the checkout line, both Rain and Boomer asked for water and skim milk. Hailey was amazed. They sure don’t eat like most boys I know, she thought.

When they returned to the table, Hailey had to comment. “Boy, you guys sure eat healthy.”

Cutting off a chunk of chicken, Rain replied, “Yeah, we’re eating the ‘everyday’ food tonight. That way we can go for the ‘sometime’ snacks tomorrow. “

“Yeah, we like treats as much as anybody else,” Boomer explained. “We just eat them some of the time—not every day.”

Don overheard the conversation. To Gerald he said, “How did you get these boys to eat vegetables?”

Savoring a piece of baked trout, Gerald said, “I didn’t

do anything. They taught me. Rain and Boomer have been spreading the word about nutrition since they were about 6 years old.”

“Wow. Did you hear that Marcus? My son only eats three things without protest—spaghetti, pea soup, and oatmeal. Anything else becomes a tussle.”

Marcus kept his head down, eating the spaghetti on his plate with gusto. It was apparent that he was avoiding the carrots and lima beans on his plate.

Coaxing his son, Don said, “Come on, Marcus. Just try some of the beans.”

Marcus looked up at his father. He started to pout, but resigned himself to the inevitable. He forked a couple of limas and stuffed them in his mouth. Chewing briefly, he swallowed and made a face. Then he went back to the spaghetti.

When Gerald left the table to get more water, Rain said, “My mom is a community health representative for our Tribe. She educates everybody about type 2 diabetes prevention and helps people to control it if they have either type 1 or type 2 diabetes. Where we live a lot of people have type 2. Dad learned about healthy food from mom, too.”

“I’d like to talk to your mom,” Don replied. “My doctor told me my blood sugar is higher than it should be. I’ve got to watch it. Sounds like I could get some tips

from you guys.”

Just then, Gerald returned to the table...and he had someone with him. “Don, look who I found! Eugene Frimble!”

The kids looked up to see a guy who could have been the star in every movie about a “nerd.” Eugene was the ultimate uncool guy with the biggest, most innocent smile you ever saw.

Don wiped his mouth with a napkin and jumped up. “Eugene! I’ve been looking for you. Sit down and eat with us.”

“Thanks!” Eugene gave the children a shy wave. “Hi, kids...” He set his tray on the table and took off his rumpled seersucker jacket, which he folded and laid carefully over the back of an empty chair. Tall and skinny, he slowly slid himself onto the seat, which was too low to accommodate his gangly legs. Hailey, with her recently developed fashion sensitivities, was probably the only one who had noticed that Eugene’s pants were way too short and his belt way too high. Reaching for the pepper with a spindly arm, he said, “I got here earlier this week. I figured you guys would show up sometime today since the conference starts tomorrow.”

Gerald provided a little background to the kids: “We told Eugene about the conference and how Taniba Springs was searching for new ideas to keep their local economy growing. Eugene’s been developing new kinds

of activities for tourists that are very creative. It's called eco-tourism. He's really into environmental protection."

"I've read your proposal and it's impressive, Eugene," Don said. "To be fair, I can't say any more about it because I'm advising the Tribe about which proposal to choose. All I can say is that when Gerry and I met you at that conference last year, we knew your ideas were special."

Changing the subject, Gerald asked, "Have you been taking in the sights? I was wondering what the kids might enjoy doing while we're in conference meetings."

Eugene pushed up his big horn-rimmed glasses (they had a way of slipping down on his nose). "Well, I guess you could say I've been sight-seeing. I wanted to take a close-up look at the reservation and its forested areas." He paused to spoon up some vegetable soup. "I'm looking for locations that would be good for taking people into the wilderness and giving them an authentic, meaningful experience." Smiling broadly, he added, "Of course, all without leaving a footprint—you know, anything that would endanger wild animals or disrupt the ecology." Eugene dug into a pile of trout and began to eat with relish. Swallowing a big bite, he smiled and pointed at the fish: "Brain food...lots of omega-3s, you know."

"How do you find locations like that?" Gerald asked.

"I hired a helicopter to fly me around." When he said

“helicopter,” Rain and Boomer began to listen more closely. Eugene took a sip of water and went on: “The pilot and I divided the reservation into four quarters. When we’re out, I note the locations by quarter that show the most possibilities. Believe me, it’s not all work. The rides are fun! I had a great time today.”

Rain was curious. “Were you over Highway 289 about 2:30 today?”

Eugene was surprised. “Yes, I was.”

“We saw you!” Boomer cried. “RD took a picture.”

Rain took out his cell phone and pulled up the photo. He handed it over to Eugene.

“Yeah! That’s me. Have you guys ever had a ride in a helicopter?”

Gerald answered, “We haven’t, but we might try it.”

Marcus piped up for the first time. “Daddy, can I go on a helicopter ride?”

“That depends on how much time we have,” Don replied. “We’re going fishing after the conference is over.”

Eugene reached in his back pocket and pulled out a business card. He handed it to Gerald. “I booked with Sky High Tours. They have a terrific safety record.”

Gerald read it and passed it on to Rain. “Here, keep this, Rain, I’ll lose it.” Checking his watch, he said, “Well, I’m going to have to get the boys over to the powwow to

register for the junior competition.”

Hailey got excited. She had been seeing the powwow dancers in their colorful outfits all day. “Can we go, Daddy?”

“Sure, we can go. I don’t need to hang around this buffet. Just because you pay for all you can eat, there’s no obligation to keep eating. Right?” Getting up from the table, he said, “Gerry, you want some company?”

“The more the merrier. How about you, Eugene?”

“Thanks, but not this evening. I’ve got to prepare for my last helicopter trip tomorrow. I’ll see you kids around.”

“It was nice to meet you, Mr. Frimble,” Hailey said.

“Just call me Eugene,” he replied shyly.

She nodded. “Okay, Eugene.” Her dad was right; Eugene was special. Hailey smiled to herself. He’s so *uncool* that he’s cool...in a strange way, of course.

Don drove his SUV and Gerald followed in his car. Hailey asked Rain and Boomer to ride with them. She wanted to find out more about powwows, but she was also really curious why Boomer had made the joke about Rain saving his grandmother from a kidnapper. Was he just playing or was it for real? Hailey’s reporter instincts were aroused. She wrote a monthly family newspaper she called the *Jackson Gazette*. Hailey was really eager

to share her trip to Taniba Springs with her family and friends. She loved her newspaper; it was a lot more fun than a diary. Who wants to write something that nobody reads?

Pulling out the powwow program she'd picked up in the hotel lobby, Hailey said, "I've never been to a powwow before. I was reading this stuff about the different kinds of dancers. What kind of dancing do you do?"

The boys replied that they were grass dancers. Rain offered to show her and Marcus their grass dance regalia. When traffic came to a halt on the main drag, Hailey was glad. It would give them more time to talk.

Wondering what was causing the hold-up, Don looked up ahead and saw a pile-up at the main intersection in town. "Looks like we are stuck here a while. I'm gonna pull into that parking lot--no reason to burn gas. We'll wait for the traffic to clear. I don't think Gerry will mind waiting for us." After he'd parked the SUV, Don took the opportunity to call home.

While her father was chatting to her mom, Hailey nudged Boomer a little. "So a coyote burped at you, Boomer?"

Hearing this interesting question, Marcus put down his "Car Games for Kids" book. Looking around the front passenger seat, he shouted. "Our dog burped in my face once!"

Don pulled his smart phone from his ear. “Marcus! Your mother says lower your voice. You don’t need to shout.”

Boomer waited until Don had resumed his conversation, then replied glumly, “Yeah. It was a contest. The coyote won.”

Hailey laughed at Boomer’s funny. Then she looked at Rain and said with a challenging tone, “And you saved your grandmother from a kidnapper?”

Irritated, Rain corrected Hailey. “It was my *great*-grandmother.” Hailey’s sudden stare made Rain very self-conscious. “Look, I just don’t go around bragging about it.” Glancing at his oldest friend, he added, “And just in case you haven’t noticed, Boomer’s got a really big mouth.”

Hailey looked from boy to boy. Wide-eyed, she whispered, “Wow,” and slumped in her seat. Smiling to herself, she thought, I think I just got the lead story for the August edition of the *Jackson Gazette*...

Chapter 5



"...Max said, 'Have you ever heard of net gunning?' Lennie eyed Max suspiciously. 'No, can't say I have.'"

Little Tricks and Big Schemes

Sigigi sat on a rock beside a mountain stream and took off his moccasins. He put his feet in the water and wiggled his toes. The smooth flow of tranquil water was refreshing. Stretching his arms upward, he looked westward through the trees toward the sun. It was very late in the afternoon, but he wasn't in a hurry. He was already more than halfway to Taniba Springs. His plan was to reach the town after dusk. To be undetected, he would do his initial exploration of the town under the cover of darkness. The diminutive young man pulled

from his sash the package of foods his grandmother had prepared for him. Unwrapping it, he saw she had packed beans boiled in their pods, sunflower seed crackers, and hickory nut bread. He smiled when he saw the nut bread—it was his sister’s specialty. She had pounded the remaining hickory nuts from last year’s stored harvest and mixed them with parched corn to make little dough patties. Wrapped and boiled in green corn husks, the bread was Sigigi’s favorite. She had also packed some dried fish as well.

As he snacked, he thought more carefully about his mission. A lot of responsibility rested on his shoulders, and he wanted desperately to succeed. He decided that he would first visit some of the roadside restaurants and gas stations near the town. Their trash bins were always full of newspapers, and advertisements were usually posted in their windows. Maybe he could find some information there.

Putting his moccasins back on, Sigigi stood up. Although small, he was as perfectly proportioned as any slim, well-muscled young man of “normal” size. He was, however, different in some ways. His eyes were very large and luminous—an effect created by black irises that appeared to float in white mother-of-pearl. (The eyes of Little People for this reason often disconcert Big People who see them up close.) Sigigi’s other noteworthy quality was his hair. Like all the Little People, his hair

flowed down his back almost to the middle of his thighs. Although thick, it miraculously never seemed to tangle or get in his way.

Absentmindedly tossing this long mane to one side, Sigigi reached for his radio and checked its reception. Although he was nearer to the town, the radio still crackled badly. Frowning, he said to himself, "I've got to find some new batteries." The wrinkle in his forehead, however, was quickly erased. A Carolina Chickadee had begun singing. Looking up, he spotted her in a sycamore tree shading the stream. Sigigi smiled and said to the little bird, "Are you calling me? *See-e-gi-gi! See-e-gi-gi!* Yes, I know. I'm going. No more dawdling."

Following the stream, Sigigi walked for several miles. He enjoyed the scent of blossoms growing along the stream that opened their petals when the heat of the day had passed. Soon, however, he left the stream and entered the tangled undergrowth along an obscure path that led over a series of ridges. Sigigi's progress was very fast because Little People have powers that allow them to be in one place and then in another very quickly. (That is the reason you may see them out the corner of your eye, but as soon as you look, they are not there.)

Before long, night had fallen and Sigigi could see the twinkling lights of Taniba Springs in the distance. He made his way to a road that led him to the highway that went through the town. Taking cover in the wooded

area that bordered the smooth blacktop, he walked on. When he saw car headlights pulling into a motel with a bright red and yellow neon sign, he knew he had reached a place that might give him some clues about the helicopter.

Sigigi approached the motel complex from the back. A dumpster and cluster of recycling bins told him where to look. The deep shadows around the dumpster area made him feel safe. He ran quickly to the bins and began searching through mounds of discarded paper. There were plenty of newspapers and circulars. He pulled out a pile of newsprint and retreated into the woods. A security light provided enough illumination for him to see. Sigigi laid out the sheets and began to examine them. He glanced through pages and pages of powwow dancers, powwow queen contestants, announcements for July 4th fireworks displays, casino winners holding up their checks, and a thousand ads. The last page he turned featured a ribbon-cutting to open a new grocery store. But there were no pictures of a whirling bird.

Sigigi sighed and pulled out the radio. He turned the volume button to “on,” but there wasn’t even a crackle—no voices or music at all. He thought about checking out a campground—that is where people usually left or lost small electronic mechanisms like clocks, toys, or games that used batteries. Unfortunately, the best time for finding these items was the morning after the campers had pulled out.

Sigigi decided to take a chance on going into the town. He could tell from the volume of traffic on the highway that some big event was taking place. From the pictures in the papers, he had a pretty good idea it was the summer celebration that the Big People held every year. He would have to use all his little tricks—there would be a lot of people and cars about. His first stop would be a park with a picnic area that was just inside the town limits.

Sigigi set out for the park. He crossed to the other side of the highway and took his usual precaution of moving in shadows and areas with heavy foliage. When he spotted the concrete picnic tables, he thought they would yield their usual valued items. But he was disappointed. Despite the dark, too many Big People were still in the park.

Suddenly the boom of drums reminded him that he had another opportunity—the powwow grounds! He followed a wide circular route through a wooded area near the powwow arena. When he had almost reached the tall trees that rose behind the emcee stage, he entered the maze of tubular supports that undergirded the bleachers where an enthusiastic audience was seated. Sigigi did not count on finding a dropped gadget under the bleachers. He would have to snatch the batteries from a device. This would require some of the skills he learned from playing pranks—but pranks were a Little People

specialty.

High above on the top bleachers, Rain, Boomer, Hailey and Marcus sat together watching the dancing in the arena. Their dads were seated below on the same deck. When Don turned and looked up to check on his kids, Marcus yelled, “Hey, Daddy! We’re up here!”

Hailey clapped her hands over her ears and gave an excellent impression of her mother’s “Oh, please, Marcus!”

Boomer surprised the little boy by giving him a high five. Known far and wide for his deafening voice (after all, his real name was Thunder Cloud), Boomer knew a kindred spirit when he heard one. “That’s some great yelling, Marcus. Something tells me we’re going to be good friends.”

Hailey nudged Rain and said, “So when are we going to see your powwow outfits?”

“Right now if you want to. Come on, guys.”

The kids filed down the bleachers and waited at the exit while Rain got the car keys from Gerald. When Hailey heard the emcee announce the Ladies Shawl Dance, she stood on her toes for a better view. A dozen women dressed in long fringed shawls were positioning themselves around the arena. Hailey couldn’t help but let out a little “Ohhhh...”

“Don’t worry, Hailey,” Boomer said. “You won’t miss

anything. There'll be shawl dancing tomorrow, too."

"It's just that they're so beautiful. They look like a rainbow."

Lennie Blatch, seated on the other side of the arena, would have agreed with Hailey. He thought his wife never looked so beautiful as when she was dressed in her regalia. Lennie leaned toward Max and said, "That's Gussie in the blue dress and yellow shawl."

"Uh-huh. So when do the fireworks start?" Max asked. He couldn't have cared less about the powwow, but he liked fireworks.

Glancing at his program, Lennie said, "They're gonna have fireworks every night of the powwow, but they don't start until everything else is over."

"Too bad."

When the drum started, the women began to whirl their shawls and dance on their toes in a way that was both dainty and energetic. Lennie didn't see anyone else but Gussie. In his eyes she was a blue and yellow flame that put fireworks to shame. He hoped that the judges thought she was as good as he did. Thinking out loud, Lennie said, "Gussie's a prize winner. First place is five hundred dollars this year."

Max's face suddenly brightened. "That's a nice little purse. If she wins, we could sure use that money."

Leaning toward Lennie's ear, Max said, "Have you ever heard of net gunning?"

Lennie eyed Max suspiciously. "No, can't say I have."

"Well, here's how it works," Max said slyly. "When I was working for the Montana Department of Wildlife Management, we'd capture elk by shooting a net over them from a helicopter. It was all humane and everything. I'd fly the helicopter and this other guy would launch the net from the air. I'd land and he'd hop out and secure the net around the elk. Then off we'd go—with the goods in the basket!" Max looked expectantly at Lennie. When he didn't respond, Max said hotly: "Don't you get it? That's how we can capture the Little People!"

The drum accompanying the dancers sang their final chorus, and the women halted their performance precisely on the last beat. With hands on hips, the women stood erect and motionless in the sudden silence.

Max looked around, afraid that he'd been heard. When he realized no one had been listening, he whispered, "I'm counting on you, Lennie. I can't do this by myself. Besides you'll have to build the net gun. We can't afford to buy one."

Lennie kept his eyes on Gussie who, like the other contestants, was waiting patiently for the judges' decision. Several moments went by. Finally a judge delivered an envelope to the emcee and he announced the winners. Gussie had won second place! Max clapped

and whistled loudly. “How much did she win?”

“Three hundred dollars.”

Max grinned and slapped him on the shoulder. “Hey, we’re on our way, partner!”

Lennie sighed and looked down. Max had just sucked all the joy out of Gussie’s success.

Chapter 6



Sigigi had little choice but to break for the parking lot—with the dog at his heels

A Powwow Trap

Sigigi stepped carefully around the struts that supported the terraced bleachers. Moving quickly, he made his way to the front benches. His intent was to position himself so he could instantly spot someone laying down an electronic device. He would grab it, slip out the batteries, and replace it next to its owner. He was familiar with the kinds of things that contained batteries. He could figure out what some of them were for—like a radio, portable CD player, flashlight, or mp3 player, but there

were others (like a power charger or calculator) whose purpose was unclear.

Being about 2 feet tall, Sigigi found it relatively easy to maneuver in the cramped space under the lower benches. He did not worry about being heard—the amplified music from the powwow covered any noise he might make. Thus concealed, Sigigi settled down and waited, but the waiting was no hardship. He enjoyed listening to the drums and singing (although it was a bit loud to his ears), and he could see the swirl of the dancers’ fantastic colors. His visual attention, however, was trained mainly on the benches.

Engrossed in scanning for a “battery opportunity,” he was startled when something hit his head and slid off his shoulder onto the ground. Looking down, he spied the culprit—a bag of chocolate chip cookies. He picked it up. A few years ago, when he was a teenager, Sigigi would have eaten the cookies—but not now. With a disgusted look on his face, he smashed the glossy plastic package between in his hands until the contents were pulverized. Then he tossed the bag aside.

Suddenly, Sigigi saw a hand lay down an object that he knew contained batteries. He moved quickly and thrust his hand toward it, but stopped when the person also set down a soft drink cup. He waited a few moments and then deftly snatched the power charger. He quickly removed the AA batteries (there were four) and slipped

the charger back on the bench. He let out his breath. Success!

Having done his mischief, Sigigi shifted down the row of shoes, waiting for another opportunity. Suddenly he heard a dreaded sound—a low growl. Remaining very still, he rolled his eyes upward and saw a wet black nose. Sigigi’s heart jumped. He was underneath a girl holding a white terrier. The dog was sniffing and peering down from the girl’s lap. Sigigi immediately retreated into the shadows. But not before the dog leapt under the bench, tearing her loosely held leash from the girl’s hands. Sigigi ran as fast he could through the obstacle course of crisscrossed metal bars that supported the bleacher’s framework.

Once he was in the open, he saw that he was blocked by a group of Big People unloading a truck. He had little choice but to break for the parking lot—with the dog right at his heels! Dashing between the rows of vehicles, he got enough distance between himself and the dog to make a successful leap to the roof of a car. He flattened himself against the warm metal, but the terrier knew he was there. She circled Sigigi, barking and leaping.

Peeping under his arm, he saw with great relief that the dog’s owner was headed across the tarmac toward the sound of her yapping pet. Breaking into a run when she spotted her dog, the girl yelled, “Fluffy! Fluffy! Come back here!”

His heart thumping, Sigigi muttered, “Yes. Go away, Fluffy.”

Chasing the dog’s leash around the car, she finally grabbed it and pulled the dog’s harness up short. Picking up her disobedient pooch, the girl scolded her “baby” with a “Bad dog!” and hurried back to the powwow arena.

Sigigi smiled to himself. Dogs could be bad news for Little People. Escaping one was always a coup, and he was proud of himself. Wait until Cholotka hears about this! Looking about, he made a quick assessment of his situation. He saw that he could make it to the woods by moving under the cars. There was plenty of deep shadow, even though a light pole illuminated his present location. Sigigi relaxed. His next move was to find a quiet spot in the woods where he could replace the batteries and check out the local news.

Unfortunately, Sigigi’s relaxation was premature. At the end of the aisle of cars where he was hiding, a small group of Big People was approaching. He watched warily—hoping they would pass by quickly.

“Yeah, so, I put out my newspaper once a month,” Hailey said. “I give it out to my parents, grandparents, and cousins mostly.”

Since they had agreed to be the lead story in the *Jackson Gazette*, Rain and Boomer had been curious

about who read her paper. Rain also wanted to know what she expected of them. “Do you interview us or take our picture or something?” he asked.

Nodding enthusiastically, Hailey said, “Yes! Exactly.”

“We learned how to do family interviews last year at school,” Boomer said. “We had to get our folks to tell us a story we never heard before.”

“Oh, that’s an idea! I’ll have to try that.”

Marcus ran up to Hailey. He had been jumping around waving a light stick his dad had bought at the powwow. “Tell them how I draw pictures for the paper! Nobody ever saw those before.” Then he ran on ahead, making a light show over his head.

“The *Jackson Gazette* sounds pretty cool,” Rain said.

Boomer nodded. “Yeah, I think so, too.”

Hailey stopped to show the boys a photo she had taken of a tipi that had been set up among the vendor stalls. “I thought I would include some pictures of the powwow, too. Do people on your reservation live in tipis like this one?” she asked.

Boomer looked at the photo and said with a straight face, “I live in an apartment. RD lives in a tipi.”

Rain laughed. “I do not! Our Tribe never lived in tipis. Tribes that moved around a lot lived in tents. My family lives in a house.” Pointing up ahead, he said, “There’s the car.”

Realizing that a child and three half-grown Big People would pass very close to him, Sigigi slid down the opposite side of the car and crouched behind the left front wheel. He started to scoot under a neighboring truck, but hesitated when car headlights suddenly flooded his hiding place. Thankfully, the driver pulling into a nearby parking slot shut off his lights quickly. Straining all his senses, Sigigi heard the jingle of keys. He knew what the sound meant. Looking under the car, he saw legs. They were stopping!

Rain opened the trunk. He and Boomer pulled out their suit bags and unzipped them. Boomer removed his blue cape and apron, fringed in white. Holding it up, he said, “I put on some of the fringe. It’s made of yarn and ribbon. But my mom sewed everything and made the beadwork.”

Rain took out the pants that were part of his regalia. He showed the Jacksons how the long, multicolored yarn attached at the knees moved back and forth. “The grass dancers,” he explained, “are supposed to look like grass waving in a wind.”

“My girlfriends would love these colors. Your costumes are so gorgeous.”

“Thanks. A lot of work goes into making them,” Rain replied. “But we call the outfits regalia—not costumes. They aren’t like clothes you dress up in when you pretending to be somebody in a play or something.”

Admiring the beadwork, Hailey said, “That makes sense. Regalia sounds better anyway.”

When he was putting his cape back in the bag, Boomer dislodged something and it rolled under the car. “What was that?”

Rain said, “Sounds like an ankle bell. I’ll get it.”

As Rain crawled under the car, Sigigi lifted himself up on the front bumper. Now began a strange game of musical chairs that would test all of Sigigi’s agility to avoid discovery.

Boomer walked around to the left back door and opened it. To Hailey and Marcus, he said, “Come over here and I’ll show you the headgear we wear.” They followed him. Boomer reached for the box that contained his porcupine roach, but it was closer to the other side of the back seat. He said, “Wait a minute,” and started walking around to the opposite door.

Sigigi had to respond fast. He slipped down beside the right front tire and peeked under the car. Rain wasn’t looking in his direction. He sprinted down the right side of the car toward the open trunk and jumped in. The sleeping bags bunched in one corner offered the most concealment. He burrowed under the bags and remained still.

Boomer opened the right back door and slid the top off the box. He took out the roach. Walking back around to Marcus, he asked, “Want to try this on?”

“Yeah!”

Boomer placed the roach on the little boy’s head and tied it under his chin. Wagging the upright porcupine and deer hair back and forth, Marcus cried, “This feels cool!”

Rain emerged from under the car and jingled the bell he had retrieved. “You need to sew this back on an ankle strap, Boomer.” Looking at Marcus, he cried, “Hey! Check it out! You should take a picture for the *Jackson Gazette*, Hailey.”

Hailey snapped the picture, and Boomer put the roach back in its box. The boys repacked their regalia and laid the suit bags back on top of the sleeping bags. Rain slammed the trunk and locked it. Pocketing the keys, he said, “We better hurry back. My dad said he didn’t want to stay too late tonight.”

Inside the trunk, Sigigi listened until he could no longer hear voices. Then he pushed aside one of the sleeping bags and took a deep breath. He wondered what the Turtletown council members would think if they could see him now. With nothing better to do, Sigigi reached in his sash and pulled out the radio. Maybe he could get some local news. Feeling around in the dark, he loaded in the new batteries. He had to fiddle around a bit until he got the positive and negative ends aligned correctly. Once he got the radio on, he turned the dial until he recognized the voice of Leon Firemaker, a DJ

on the local reservation station. On Friday nights he hosted a golden oldies country show. Trapped, Sigigi lay in the dark and listened to Hank Williams wail “I’m So Lonesome I Could Cry.”



Sigigi had leapt up into a crouch, ready to spring! Arms arched to the side and head jutting forward, the little man's aggressive stance had the expected effect.

Chapter 7



...the boys picked out a good place for their small tent and gathered up some sticks and wood to get the fire started.

Little Man Discovered

Calling it a night, Gerald and Don left the powwow before the fireworks started. When Marcus whined, Don told him he could watch the light show from the hotel; besides, there would be more displays during the week. On cue, Rain, Boomer and Hailey crowded around the two dads and pleaded their case for being allowed to go to the Fun Park in the morning. Rain and Boomer wanted to see water run uphill at the Mystery Spook House, and Hailey put in a good word for the aquarium. When Don said he didn't want them running around too much, Hailey pulled out her current argument for

everything: “Please, Dad! I’m almost thirteen!”

“We’ll work out the fun stuff—after breakfast.” Gerald said. “The important thing is that we know where you are and you call to check in.”

“And that you show up for lunch in the hotel lobby. Right?” Don added.

The kids agreed earnestly: “Yep.” “Right!” “No problem, Dad.”

The boys waved goodnight to the Jacksons, and Gerald headed back to the campground. He was smiling. “I’m glad you guys are getting to know each other.”

“Yeah,” Rain said, “They’re cool. Hailey even has her own newspaper.”

Boomer nodded. “Marcus is a good kid. Good and *loud*. Kinda reminds me of myself at that age.”

“Boomer was trying real hard to be nice. Weren’t you, Boom?” Rain teased.

“Huh?”

Grinning at Boomer, Rain said, “You remember Adrian Butler, Dad? He was a black student in our fifth grade class?”

“Uh-huh. I remember his father. He worked at the college.”

“Well, Boomer asked if Hailey knew him!”

Boomer gave Rain a play punch on his arm. “Hey!

Shut up. I was only trying to be friendly!”

But Rain wouldn’t let up. “And Hailey said, ‘Just because I’m black, do you think I know *all* the black kids in the whole world?’”

“Okay, okay, it was stupid! So what?” Then Boomer started laughing. “Guess what Hailey said? She asked us if we lived in tipis!” Getting even more tickled, he howled, “I told her that RD did!”

Gerald chuckled. “Well, I’m glad you’re laughing at the silly stuff. But sometimes people really don’t know a lot about each other. Not many African-Americans live near our reservation, and a lot of kids have never even met an American Indian.” Gerald reminded himself to have that talk with the boys about stereotypes. They needed to know more about how groups of people can get stuck with oversimplified or false images that don’t represent who they really are.

Pulling into the campground, Gerald followed the gravel road around to their site. Rain wanted to know if they could set up the tent instead of sleeping in the trailer. Gerald agreed and said they could build a fire, too.

Getting out of the car, Gerald unlocked the trailer and got a towel. He told the boys he would be back after a while. He was going for a shower and thought he would stop off at the camp office later to have a cup of coffee with the ranger.

After his dad left, Rain got the lantern from the trailer. He opened the fuel valve, lit the mantle with a match, and set it on the picnic table. Now the boys had enough light to pick out a good place for their small tent and to find some sticks for the fire.

Boomer went over to the car to get the tent bag. He popped the trunk. Reaching in to pull out the tent, he spotted something odd. A small moccasin was wedged in between a sack of Rain's clothes and the sleeping bags. At first he thought it might belong to one of RD's little brothers, but the moccasin style was unfamiliar—not their Tribe's design. When he bent down to pick it up, he thought he heard something—a tiny crackle from one of the plastic suit bags. Boomer stepped back and motioned for Rain to come over. He whispered, "RD, I think there's a kid in the trunk."

Rain mouthed, "What?"

"I heard a noise."

Boomer pointed to the moccasin and Rain frowned. He didn't recognize it.

In a very low voice, Rain said, "I'll pull out my suit bag real quick and you grab him if he tries to run. But not too hard—he's probably scared enough already." Boomer nodded.

The boys positioned themselves in front of the trunk. Rain said, "Go!" and jerked out the suit bag. Boomer thrust himself forward to seize the stowaway, but halted

in mid-grab. Sigigi had leapt up into a crouch, ready to spring! Arms arched to the side and head jutting forward, the little man's aggressive stance had the expected effect. The boys, their eyes wide and mouths open, stumbled backwards.

Strangely, no one moved. Paralyzed in the moment, they stared at each other. The only sound was Sigigi's ragged breathing.

Boomer, of course, could never tolerate silence for very long. Out of the corner of his mouth, he said softly, "He's a weird-looking kid, RD."

Rain instantly recognized that this was no child. In some part of his consciousness (the part that dreamed of eagles and followed coyotes), Rain knew that he and Boomer were encountering a being that should be regarded in a special way. The eagle's voice came into his mind: Be humble, Rain that Dances.

Without thinking, Rain squatted down until his eyes were on the same level as Sigigi's. He instinctively understood that standing over the little man could be threatening. Boomer lowered himself, too. Other kids may have been freaked out by Sigigi, but these boys had come to accept mysteries that could be experienced, if not explained. In his guileless way, Boomer said, "Hey, it's okay, man. We aren't gonna do nothin'."

Sensing that the boys meant him no harm, Sigigi blinked. He sank back on top of the sleeping bags. He

picked up the moccasin that had come off his foot and slipped it back on. Glancing from one boy to the other, he said in Duffy's language, "I come... from Turtletown."

Rain thought, Turtletown? "How did you get in the trunk?" he asked.

"A dog chase me."

Rain noticed something strange. Even though the little man was so small, his voice had a deep pitch...and in the darkness of the trunk his eyes were very bright. Many questions flashed through Rain's mind. How long had he been in the trunk? Where was Turtletown? Who was he? *What* was he?

"Are you in trouble or something?" Boomer said. As usual, Boomer spoke without thinking too much, but his question didn't seem to offend.

"Yes, trouble. Tell no one you see me. Tell no one!"

"Okay," Rain said calmly. "We won't tell anybody. My dad will be back after a while. Is it okay if he sees you?"

"No. I talk to you."

Rain nodded a little nervously at the little man. "Okay. So...we're going to put up our tent. Just be cool. You want some water?"

"Yes, water." The trunk had been stuffy and hot. Sigigi was parched.

When Boomer brought a bottle of water, he said, "My name is Boomer, like in Thunder? My real name is

Thunder Cloud. And this is Rain that Dances. Most of his friends call him Rain or RD. Ah, we just got here today. We're from the Medicine Cave Indian Reservation. This is the first time we've been to Taniba Springs."

Sigigi accepted the water and drank thirstily. Putting down the bottle, he said, "I am Sigigi."

Rain smiled and said, "Sigigi. Did I say it right?"

"Okay." Sigigi did not smile, but he was feeling more comfortable. He sat on the back bumper of the car and watched the boys assembling the tent. Looking around, he said, "The girl and boy?"

Rain stopped. "You saw them?"

"Yes."

"They're not here. They're staying somewhere else."

Boomer whispered, "He must have got in the trunk when we pulled out our regalia."

All of a sudden the sky erupted with a deafening *screeeeeeee...pow!* The boys jumped and looked up. Boom, boom, boom!! Even though the trees at the campground were thick, they could see colorful blasts and showers of sparks lighting up the sky.

Over the noise, Boomer yelled, "It's the fireworks!"

Sigigi was looking up, too. He finally allowed himself a smile. He'd seen this before. "The fire in the sky," he said. "We see from Turtletown."

“Where is Turtletown?” Rain asked.

Sigigi pointed to the east. “A Little People town.”

The boys glanced at each other. They both knew that the little man had told them something important. Boomer wasn’t quite sure what it was, so he just announced, “Well, the tent’s up.”

They piled the sleeping bags and some old quilts into the tent, and Rain got another cooler from the trailer. Then they watched the rest of the fireworks display—the pinwheels in the grand finale were spectacular.

In the silence after the last boom, Rain said, “Sigigi, you can stay with us tonight, if you want to.”

Sigigi was hoping they would invite him. It would be safe here. He was beginning to think that the dog chasing him was the best thing that could have happened. Maybe these boys could help him find out about the whirling bird!

Rain turned down the lantern, and Boomer got a flashlight from the car. “Do you want to make a fire?” Boomer asked.

“No. Not tonight.” Rain was thinking correctly that sitting around a fire was not what they would be doing tonight.

“Sounds like he’s in trouble,” Boomer whispered, “and we aren’t supposed to tell anybody. Does that sound familiar?”

Rain sighed. He remembered well how he and Boomer had promised their friend, Jimmy, that they wouldn't tell anyone that fossil poachers were after him. Rain still regretted the decision that had led to his Granma being kidnapped. "Yeah," he whispered back, "it seems like we're always being asked to keep secrets."

Chapter 8



"We not like for Big People make trouble with us. Or take things from forest—we can punish." "Uh...like how?" Boomer asked.

Questions and Answers

Rain closed the car trunk. It was getting late and the moon had risen. Although the lantern was turned down very low, Gerald wouldn't be stumbling about in the dark when he returned. The moonlight was bright enough to cast shadows.

Boomer and Sigigi were already in the tent. When Boomer flipped on the flashlight, Rain could clearly see their dark silhouettes against the green nylon of the tent. They would have to switch it off before Dad came back.

Rain threw back the tent flap and crawled in on

his hands and knees. He made a seat from a quilt and bunched up a sleeping bag for a back rest. Wiggling into his nest, he found it remarkably comfortable. Boomer and Sigigi were already situated. Rain reached into the cooler and got out a couple of bottles of water. He opened one and gave it to Boomer. "I saw a recycling bin when we drove into the campground. We can toss these plastic bottles in there when we leave." Looking at Sigigi, Rain added, "We've got more water and there's snacks. Are you hungry?"

Sigigi had eaten some of his dried meat when he was trapped in the car. He had no appetite then, but he did now. "Yes, hungry," he replied.

"Here, take one of these home-made granola bars my mom made. She says they'll give you a lot of energy."

Sigigi accepted the granola bar from Rain. He bit into it and chewed slowly. Then he took another bite. He smacked his lips and nodded: "This good. Top ten."

"Mom makes them from grain, nuts, and dried fruit."

Sigigi reached for his bag and pulled out some of his hickory nut bread wrapped in corn husks. He gave a packet to each boy.

"Hey, cool," Boomer said unwrapping the husk. "I ate a lot at dinner, but this smells good." He took a bite. "Hmm, I can taste nuts."

Swallowing a chunk of the nut bread, Rain said, "It

reminds me of a dumpling. I like it.” Rain was still really full from dinner. He rewrapped his bread and tucked it in a baggie with the remaining granola bars. Very politely, he asked, “Sigigi, you said you came from a Little People town. Are the Little People a tribe?”

Sigigi was very interested in getting to know these boys better. He welcomed Rain’s questions and hoped he could make them understand his situation. Answering thoughtfully, he said, “No, Little People are from many.” When the boys looked puzzled, Sigigi explained: “Little People follow Big People here. Many tribe. All people move. Sad time. Long ago.”

“I read about that today!” Boomer exclaimed. “There’s like five tribes that were forced into leaving their homelands during the Great Removal. They stopped here on the way to Oklahoma and got some land.” Better appreciating what Sigigi was telling them, he said, “So, you guys came with them.”

Sigigi responded that the old people of Turtletown told many stories about that terrible time, and how his Little People helped the Big People along the way.

As he listened, Rain was being drawn to Sigigi. It wasn’t just curiosity; he really wanted to understand about the Little People. “What language do you speak in your town?”

“Little People speak words from many towns.”

Rain didn’t quite understand what Sigigi meant. So he

asked another question: “What does ‘Sigigi’ mean?”

Sigigi pointed to the trees. “Like bug—*Si-gi-gi-gi-gi*. I sing bad. So Little People say sing only one time—in summer. No more.” Sigigi laughed. “I never make Billboard chart.”

“I got it!” Rain said excitedly. “Sigigi means ‘cicada.’”

But Boomer was more interested in something else that Sigigi had said. “How do you know about Billboard charts?”

Sigigi reached into his bag and pulled out the radio. Holding it up, he said, “I learn speak from this.” He laughed. “My sister, Cholutka, call it ‘talking box.’ Her name mean ‘cricket.’ She can sing.”

“Where did you get the radio?” Boomer asked.

“Find here.” Indicating the campground. “Camp people come. They not Taniba Springs Big People. Lose all things. Shirt, hat, food, dog. I find teeth one man leave.”

Rain laughed. The Little People, he thought, had a good sense of humor. He was really beginning to like this guy. “You learned English just from listening to the radio?”

“No, not all. Duffy help me. When he little—lost in woods. Little People find Duffy. He stay Turtletown. Not go home. He big now. Very big. We talk together.”

The mystery of Sigigi’s ability to speak English solved,

Rain asked another question. “Is there just Turtletown or more towns?”

“Six more town. Panthertown, Turkeytown, Corntown, Buzzardtown, Wolftown, and Skunktown. All town play ball game together, run foot race, have many dance.”

Boomer giggled. “Does Skunktown stink?”

“Yes! Long time ago our Big People keep get too close. So skunk come and make big stink. Big People stay away. Some say still smell skunk.” Sigigi tried to describe the joke the best way he could: “Some say it a ‘blast from the past.’”

Rain let out a “Ha! Ha!” that drowned out Boomer’s legendary vocal cords.

Sigigi smiled, but he didn’t realize how funny his “radio talk” was. Continuing, he said, “Our town like long time before—we do everything like Big People long time ago. We live in old way. We grow corn, have blowgun for hunt. We fish. Life is good.”

Sigigi went on, trying to help the boys understand more about the relationship between Big People and Little People. “We help Big People sometime. We find lost little ones. Feed lost Big People. Give medicines. Sometime do work for them.”

“Hey! My auntie told me a story like that,” Boomer said. “She said there were some spirits that helped some

old folks by drying all their corn for the winter. In just one night. But they threw rocks at people who watched them and played tricks on them, too.” Frowning, he said, “Are you a spirit, Sigigi? You don’t look like one.”

Boomer never got his answer. Rain raised his finger to his lips. He could hear footsteps crunching on the campground’s gravel road. “I think Dad’s coming. Switch off the flashlight.”

Gerald came walking up the short pathway from the road to the campsite. He noticed that the boys hadn’t built a fire, and the tent was dark. They were probably too tired, he thought. He strolled over to the tent and leaned down to the open door flap. “Rain, you guys okay?”

Rain answered, “Yeah, Dad,” in his best sleepy voice.

“Okay, good night.”

The boys remained silent until they heard the trailer door open and close. Boomer picked up where he left off, but he decided not to repeat the “spirit” question. He didn’t know what a spirit was supposed to look like anyway. In a low voice, he said, “Do Little People play tricks?”

Sigigi answered truthfully. “Some throw rock. But all play trick.”

Rain’s trickster antennae went up. Could Sigigi be a trickster? If he is, he thought, I hope he doesn’t know the

coyote.

Boomer persisted. “What kind of tricks?”

Sigigi grinned. “One time we go in house and move everything. Make noise. Big People act funny.” Sigigi had to think of other kinds of tricks. He wasn’t a big prankster himself. “Ah, we make so you see us and then not see, and we tie horse tail together.” A little more darkly, he added, “We not like for Big People make trouble with us. Or take things from forest.” He paused and said, “We can punish.”

“Uh...like how?” Boomer asked.

Sigigi didn’t answer. Anger suddenly flashed across his face. “Some Big People make trouble now! Come to towns—in whirling bird. Whirling bird all over!”

Rain was puzzled. “Whirling birds?” Then it hit him: “Oh! *Whirly Birds!* That’s what they call...”

“Helicopters!” Boomer yelled. “Yeah, like this: chop-chop-chop-chop!”

“Yes!” Sigigi nodded eagerly. “You see it?”

“We saw it today!”

Sigigi leaned forward, very alert. “What they want?” he asked anxiously. “Town send me find out.” He glanced at the radio and made a face. “Radio say nothing.” Discouraged, he thought, what would these boys know about the helicopter even if they did see it? They had been in Taniba Springs less than a day. Suddenly, he

didn't feel much like answering any more questions. Sigigi sighed and said, "That brings me to the end of my program. My name is Sigigi."

The boys glanced at each other and both yelled at the same time. Forgetting where he was, Boomer jumped up, bumping his head on the top of the tent. Rain clapped his hands on his head and shouted, "Sigigi! We know why the helicopter is flying around your towns!"

Almost immediately, the trailer door flung open. Gerald stuck his head out and did the "dad thing." "Rain! Cut out the clowning. It's late. Go to sleep. Now!"

Rain pulled in his head like a turtle. "Geez. I forgot Dad was back..."

Sigigi waited for the trailer door to close. Impatiently, he whispered, "Tell me. Why whirling bird come?"

Remembering what Eugene Frimble had said about his proposal, Rain explained (quietly), "Well, there's this guy trying to sell Taniba Springs on developing a part of the forest as a tourist attraction. I mean it's all...ah, what did he say? You know, people can enjoy the wilderness experience—and it won't pollute or run off the animals. No footprint is what he..." Rain stopped. What was he saying? That stuff wasn't what Sigigi was worried about. Backing up, he said, "The man in the helicopter wants to bring the camp people into the forest. If, that is, he can convince the Big People that it would be a good idea."

Sigigi's face froze. "You mean, he bring camp people

to our *town*?” His voice trailed off. The very picture of misery, Sigigi whispered, “Let’s take a break.”

Looking at Boomer, Rain said, “This is terrible. Eugene has no idea that his plan would disturb everything! The towns could be discovered.”

Boomer was thinking about another problem. “Sigigi, you said Little People could punish Big People who cause trouble. What did you mean?”

Sigigi put his head in his hands. “If Big People bother us or say they see us, we can make them go crazy...or die.”

Chapter 9



"I think I know where they have gone," Thistle said. Sky Heart and Coyote waited for her to continue. "They are in the highlands where I once lived. I recognized a waterfall and a place that is now called Two Rabbit Mountain."

Thistle's Dream

Thistle always took a snooze before her breakfast feed at dawn. After heavy browsing, a little rest helped her to digest. But this summer morning, she twitched and jerked in her sleep. Something was bothering the little rabbit. Finally, the fretful fidgeting awakened her. Fluttering open her eyes, Thistle sat up and looked about. She was safe in her hiding place, a clump of tall grass. She poked her head through the blades, heavy with seed heads, and looked up. The stars over Red Water

Mountain were still blinking. Dawn was at least an hour away.

Thistle took a deep breath and closed her eyes. She let her mind drift to recover the dream that had disturbed her. A visual image took shape—a green vastness from which low mountains, deep rivers, lakes, and water falls slowly emerged. She could hear morning rain tapping gently on a canopy of laurel thicket above her head, and she could smell the leafy, earthy aroma of woodland. Thistle shook herself and opened her eyes. Ah, yes, the homeland. Ordinarily, these memories would have prompted a little sigh and a smile. But instead of nestling back down into sleep, Thistle was alert—even agitated—because from the snug security of that fragrant thicket, she had seen Rain that Dances running after a very small man.

Thistle and her family were part of the ancient trickster stories that had crossed the Great River with the tribes during the Trail of Tears. She had lived in the lands of many nations in the West, but had settled in more recent times on the Medicine Cave Indian Reservation. She had taken a special liking to the children who lived there. In this generation, Rain and his friends meant a great deal to her. She would use whatever powers she had to protect them and keep them healthy.

Thistle was related to the Great Rabbit of the

southeastern nations, the mischievous trickster, whose tales were told from the southern highlands to the coasts of the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico. Although she did not have the abilities of her famous relative, Thistle knew how to play tricks and she could summon certain magical skills when necessary. She was also familiar with the powers of other spirits and beings that lived in her ancestral land and the lands of other tribes. In her dream, she had seen one of these beings—a man of the Little People.

Thistle hopped from her temporary shelter toward a nearby clump of dandelions. Nibbling would help her think. Snipping off a yellow flower head that had drawn its florets together in the darkness, Thistle chewed slowly. She was remembering that there were many kinds of Little People. Thistle frowned and started “nose blinking.” Like all rabbits, she wiggled her nose up and down when she was trying to identify a scent. In this case, she was trying to identify the story tradition of the little man in the dream. Some Little People were kind and helpful, and some could be very wicked. It was important to know who Rain was following. Very important.

When she needed help, Thistle always sought the advice of Sky Heart, the eagle, and Coyote. She knew that Sky Heart made a flight over the reservation each morning; she would make sure that he saw her. The

great bird had a special bond with Rain that Dances and would offer his help. He would fetch Coyote, too.

Sky Heart circled over the pasture where Thistle had arranged for the meeting with Coyote. Diving downward, he slowed his speed by spreading his wings and tail as he approached the clump of scrub brush where the little cottontail nestled. His strong legs, acting as air brakes, hit the ground, alerting Thistle that he had arrived.

She popped her head out of the scrub. “Is he coming?”

“Yes, as soon as he finishes his breakfast,” the eagle answered.

“Where is he dining this morning?”

“At the dumpster out back of the Trading Post Café.”

“That’s an omnivore for you.” Thistle sniffed. A strict vegetarian, the rabbit had little use for meat.

“Don’t make fun, Thistle. He’s a survivor. In a pinch, Coyote can live on anything.” While they were waiting, Sky Heart decided to take a bath in a nearby puddle that had not evaporated after a recent rain. He waded in stiff-legged until he was chest high in water. Then, he splashed about, shaking his body and fluttering his wings until he was thoroughly soaked. His bath done, he hopped out gracefully and began to preen.

Thistle followed his example. She cleaned herself by licking both paws and simultaneously swiping them

over her head. She gave her long ears a bath, too, by pushing each one down to her mouth for a good scrub. A compulsive groomer, the rabbit wasn't finished until she had dug inside her ears with a back paw to remove every bit of grass, earwax, and parasites. This operation was easy for Thistle since her ears were floppy. Although her ears would occasionally stand up straight when she pulled a trick, they would soon go lop-eared again—a sure sign of her domesticated attachment to the reservation children.

Coyote slouched over a rise in the pasture. He stopped and watched the bathers silently. Although their obsessive splashing and pawing got on his nerves, he decided to join their morning wash-up. In feeble imitation of Thistle, he licked some scrambled egg off his muzzle. Maybe he could do with a bit of parasite removal, too. Shuffling into the company of his comrades, he squatted on his haunches and began a comfortable *chuk, chuk, chuk*.

“Hey, stop that! You’re scratching your nasty all over me!” Thistle yelled.

“Cheer up,” Coyote said, ignoring her temper. “You’re just cleaning yourself so predators won’t smell you. Now you’ll stink like me.” The trickster chuckled and added: “The perfect disguise.”

“Great. Now I’ll have to start all over,” she grumbled.

Sky Heart hopped next to the rabbit and spread out his wings in the sun to dry. “So, we are here, Thistle. What is going on?”

“It’s about Rain that Dances. I’m worried.”

The mention of Rain’s name got the eagle’s attention immediately. “What’s the problem?”

“I’m not sure if there is a problem. I had a dream. In the dream, Rain was chasing a small man. He could be one of the Little People.”

Now Thistle had Coyote’s attention, too. He stopped nipping at a flea on his back. Trying not to appear too curious, he asked in a casual tone, “Where is Rain that Dances?”

Sky Heart answered. “I saw him leave the reservation with his father and Boomer day before yesterday. They were pulling a shiny trailer on the highway going east.”

“I think I know where they have gone,” Thistle said. Sky Heart and Coyote waited for her to continue. “They are in the highlands where I once lived. I recognized a waterfall and a place that is now called Two Rabbit Mountain.”

Coyote gave Thistle a sharp look, but said nothing.

“How well could you see the little man he was following?” Sky Heart asked.

“Not very well. That’s the problem. There are different kinds of Little People in my homeland. Some will play

bad tricks on people. The man Rain was following may have been one of the Little People who are helpers, but even they must be treated with respect.”

“Rain does not live there,” Sky Heart said. “He probably does not know the stories about Little People in that land.”

“No, that is why I am worried. Sometimes even the helpful Little People can fascinate a child, and he or she will follow them...until they lose themselves.”

Sky Heart said, “I do not think the dream can be ignored, Thistle. Do you have any ideas?”

“I’m not sure what to do.”

Coyote spoke up. “You said that you recognized a place called Two Rabbit Mountain. Does this place refer to *the* Two Rabbit?” She nodded. “Do you know him, Thistle?”

“Oh, yes. He lives on the mountain. I have gone home to see relatives from time to time. On one of those visits, we went to see him. He had moved to the mountain after leaving the plantation settlements where he used to live. I don’t think he lives there all the time though.” To clarify her relationship to the Two Rabbit, she added: “He is a relative of my grandfather, the Great Rabbit.”

Like all tricksters, Coyote had heard of the Two Rabbit. He was impressed that their little cottontail was related to him.

Sky Heart had heard of the Two Rabbit, too. “He has

knowledge of story traditions from other lands, does he not, Thistle?”

“Yes, he is called the Two Rabbit because he has many of the Indian stories of my grandfather, the Great Rabbit, and of Zomo, a hare from Africa.”

“His stories are widely known,” Coyote acknowledged. “The ‘cunning ones’ not just here but all over the world know him.” Coyote’s unspoken thought was that the stories of the Two Rabbit may be even more widely known than his own. Of course, his vanity did not allow him to say this out loud.

Breaking into the trickster’s thoughts, Thistle said, “My Muscogean-speaking relatives call him Chufezomo. *Chufe* or *chokfi* means ‘rabbit.’ They combined it with the name of Zomo. That is how he came to be called the Two Rabbit.”

Coyote glanced at Thistle. “I think Chufezomo is your answer. He will know if Rain is in danger.” He stood up and shook off the debris he had dislodged with his scratching. “And I’ll take you to see him if you want to go. He will know how to advise us about the Little People.”

“Take me? But it is such a long way!”

“Not for me it isn’t!” Coyote corrected her.

“No, no, of course not,” Thistle said quickly. “You can move *very* fast. I should know. You’ve given me a few

rides before.”

Sky Heart wondered why Coyote was being so nice. What he didn’t know was that the trickster had his own motives for taking the trip. Coyote had decided that it was time for him to meet the Two Rabbit.

In anticipation of the adventure, Coyote felt rather generous. “Will you come, Sky Heart?”

The eagle felt torn. He had watched over Rain since he had brought the health messages to him at the old tree stump in the meadow. That was almost 7 years ago. In that time he had worked to guide the boy and his friends through Coyote’s challenges—sometimes in Rain’s dreams and sometimes by leading them to places where Coyote’s work would be revealed. He was always there, flying above, when Rain looked to him for courage and comfort.

Sky Heart replied thoughtfully: “No, my place is here. This is the first time that Rain has left us. I think it is a good thing that you go—make sure that he and Boomer are safe. He is getting older and will be going places and doing things on his own. My teachings are in his mind and heart. I trust that this learning will guide his actions.”

“Kicking the little fledgling out of the nest so soon, Eagle?” Coyote teased.

“No, no, Coyote. I will give guidance to this special boy for many years to come. As he grows, so will the

challenges that you present to him.”

Coyote nodded to the eagle in recognition of this understanding. Quickly changing the subject, he asked Thistle, “How far is this place we are going?”

“On foot? Maybe 2 months.”

“With me driving, it should take a day,” Coyote bragged. “If we stop to sightsee along the way, that is.”

“We should leave today.”

“Then I’d better fill the gas tank. You interrupted my breakfast. I’ll meet you at the dumpster behind the trading post in an hour.” Coyote trotted off, feeling proud of his newly groomed fur.

Thistle wrinkled her nose. “Yeah, right. The gas tank.”

Sky Heart laughed and said, “Too bad you can’t install a muffler on him.”

Thistle rolled her eyes. “I’m sure Chufezomo will hear us coming.”

Chapter 10



While the trolley headed out to the Bear Cove Campground, Hailey scanned the contents of the proposal folders.

The Adventure Begins

The next morning, Sigigi and the boys were up early. After going over their options, Rain and Boomer decided that their best bet was Hailey. They explained to Sigigi that Hailey's father had more details about Eugene's plan to develop tourism in the forest. They would go into town and talk to her about helping them. Maybe she could show them a copy of Eugene's proposal. Well, maybe. Then they would come back to the campground and tell Sigigi everything they found out.

Sigigi agreed. He would wait until that evening. If they weren't back by then, or if they came back empty-handed, he would head back to Turtletown. The Little People would figure out a way to stop Eugene on their own.

The boys rode into town with Gerald and met the Jacksons at the Toast of the Town Café across from the hotel. During breakfast, Don gave Hailey and Marcus permission to go into town on the tourist trolley. They were looking forward to a ride on its upper deck. Hailey said their plan was to go to the Mystery Spook House first, then they would stop at Adventure Caverns for the log flume ride.

Gerald assumed that the boys would go with Marcus and Hailey. He looked at his watch and said, "The plenary session starts in 20 minutes."

"Yep. Let's pay up," Don said. "Now remember, Hailey. Be back at the hotel lobby by one o'clock. Okay?"

Hailey said, "I will, Daddy."

Don and Gerald picked up the checks and headed over to the cash register. Boomer turned his head and watched them walk away. When they were out of earshot, he said, "Okay, RD."

Drinking the last of his water, Rain set down the glass. "Ah...Hailey, Boomer and I have something to ask you."

Hailey thought Boomer's behavior was a little strange. She looked at Rain. "What?"

"Hailey, forget Adventure Caverns. How would you like to have a real adventure? Marcus, too."

Hailey was intrigued. Rain was the boy who broke up a fossil poaching ring. When he said "adventure" he probably wasn't kidding. Very quietly, she said, "Go on."

"Hold on a minute, RD." Boomer interrupted. Your dad's giving us the 'hurry up' sign. We better go." The kids got up and headed out to the street. Boomer pointed toward the trolley stop, and the kids headed in that direction.

As they walked up the street, Rain picked up where he left off. "Hailey, you may have a hard time believing what I'm going to tell you. I just want you to listen. Okay?" When she nodded, Rain gave a summary of everything that had happened after they opened the trunk last night and discovered Sigigi.

Hailey was as skeptical as Rain expected her to be. "You're sure he's not just a really *little* guy?"

"We'll take you to meet Sigigi. You can decide for yourself. He already knows about you."

"About me? Really?"

"Yes, really. I'm telling you the truth, Hailey. Sigigi needs your help. The Little Peoples' lives could be destroyed if that business committee picks Eugene's

proposal.”

Feeling pressured, Hailey pulled back from Rain. Suspiciously, she asked, “What do you want *me* to do?”

“Go back to the hotel and get Eugene’s proposal,” Rain replied. “We need to know as much as possible about what he’s planning.”

Boomer turned around and walked back toward Rain and Hailey. “Did you ask her if she could get the time when Eugene makes his presentation?”

Keeping his eyes on Hailey, Rain answered, “Not yet. I don’t know if she’s gonna help us.”

Hailey took a deep breath. “Oh, Rain, this is terrible. I’ll get in sooo much trouble if Daddy finds out.”

Rain softened. “Hey, it’s okay if you don’t feel right about it. We’ll figure it out somehow.”

Chewing on her lip, Hailey looked at the boys. “No, I want to help. Like you said, it’s an adventure. But we can’t take anything with us. Just copies.” Hailey looked around and cried, “Hey, where’s Marcus? I promised Daddy I wouldn’t let him out of my sight!”

“Standing over there at the trolley stop,” Boomer said. “I’ll get him.”

The kids turned and headed back to the hotel. When they entered the lobby, Hailey whispered, “I think we better park Marcus at Kid’s Alley. The less he knows the better.”

Boomer volunteered to take Marcus to the children's play center. He would watch him while they got the papers. Rain and Hailey took the elevator up to the third floor. Standing in front of Room 324, she swiped the card key in the door lock. Entering the room, she said, "Marcus and I have this room and my father is in the next room. That's where all his stuff is." Hailey opened the adjoining door and walked over to a desk. She opened one of the desk drawers and took out a set of three folders.

"I saw Dad reading over these last night." Shuffling through the folders, she pulled out one. "This looks like the proposals." Handing it off to Rain, she opened the other folders to see if they contained anything important.

Rain flipped through the proposal folder quickly. "I see Eugene's."

"Not much in this one. Just some materials from the economic development committee, but the schedule is here." Opening the third folder, she said, "This one looks like Dad's notes."

"We'll make a copy of everything. Come on. Let's go down to the business center. I wonder how much it will cost."

"Don't worry. I know how to copy double-sided. It's a good thing these proposals have been copied before. Daddy would notice that they'd been taken apart and re-stapled."

“Good idea about the double-sided thing. I’ll use my ticket money. I guess I’ll just have to pass up the Fun Park.”

Rain and Hailey went down to the business center and copied the folders—even the proposals that weren’t Eugene’s. They had it done in 15 minutes. Rain stapled the copies together, while Hailey went back upstairs and replaced everything in the desk. Then she joined Rain in the lobby, and they picked up Boomer and Marcus.

“Okay, where now?” Hailey asked.

“We’ll take the trolley out to the campground.” Rain replied. “You can help us make sense of all this stuff. Come on, let’s go.”

The adventurers hurried down the street to the trolley stop. Marcus had been disappointed that he hadn’t been able to ride the first time. When the double-decker trolley came, he yelled, “I want to ride on top!” The kids climbed up the little stairway and Hailey led them to the last seats at the rear. She wanted to go through the papers and didn’t want tourists climbing over her. While the trolley headed out to the Bear Cove Campground, Hailey scanned the contents of the proposal folders. She found out that Eugene’s presentation was scheduled for two o’clock tomorrow. She also quickly read through her dad’s notes on Eugene’s proposal and a few others.

Boomer interrupted her reading. “Come on, Hailey. We’re here. The campground is the last stop.”

Closing her dad's folder of notes, she said, "Boy, Daddy likes what Eugene wants to do. I don't understand all the money stuff, but he's scored his plan *really* high."

Hailey grabbed up all the papers and they hurried down the steps. Rain waved at the driver, signaling that they were all off. She waved back and turned the trolley around. The double-decker headed back to town. The kids started down the gravel road. They were grateful for the cool under the trees that bordered the road. The top deck of the trolley had been hot in the midmorning sun. Before long, Boomer pointed to a shady campsite with an Airstream trailer and small tent. "That's our camp."

Rain said, "Wait here." He walked on ahead and looked inside the tent. No one was there. He called out softly, "Sigigi..." When there was no answer, he turned and shrugged at Boomer. Then they heard a cicada call from a nearby clump of bushes: "*Sigigigigiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii*"

Rain gave the kids a thumb's up and a big smile. Then he walked quickly to the trailer and unlocked it. He motioned for the others to come. When they were inside, he stood by the open door and looked at the bushes where Sigigi was hidden. The young man of the Little People quickly emerged and stepped up into the trailer. Rain looked around to make sure no one had seen them and went inside. He closed the door.

Hailey and Marcus were standing by the Airstream's little dinette table. They were staring wide-eyed at Sigigi.

Sigigi smiled and said, "Welcome to our program."

Hailey was confused. She looked at Rain and said, "What does that ..." She didn't finish her sentence. Stuttering, she tried to introduce herself and Marcus. "I'm Hailey...and, ah, this is my little brother. Ah...um... Gee, you're...really real."

The little brother had to introduce himself. "I'm Marcus Jackson." Beaming at Sigigi, he suddenly shouted, "You're littler than me!"

"That because you from the Big People," Sigigi answered.

"I am?" Marcus liked the sound of that. He grinned up at his sister: "I told you I was big."

Boomer said, "Well, let's sit down. I don't know about you guys, but I'm thirsty." He invited Hailey and Marcus to take the bench behind the dinette table, and Rain pulled out a couple of collapsible camp stools. Sigigi seated himself on a wooden bar stool beside the small refrigerator. He rested his heels on an upper strut and folded his arms comfortably. Boomer took out a quart bottle of water and filled paper cups for everybody. Marcus drank his in one gulp and asked for more.

Looking up at the little man on his perch, Rain said, "Well, Sigigi. We've brought a lot of information. Hailey got it for us. She knows the most about it."

Hailey was still staring at Sigigi. "I don't want to be

rude or anything. But I have never seen hair as long as yours. And it's so shiny! Your hair is just gorgeous."

Unable to resist being a six-year-old boy, Marcus mocked his older sister in a high fluty voice: "Ohhh, your hair is *sooooo* shiny!"

Sigigi grinned. Then he laughed. It was the first time that he had laughed since he left Turtletown. "Hailey, you 'top of the chart.'" Enjoying the joking, he pulled up a long lock of his hair, examined it, and said, "Gorgeous."

Rain and Boomer really got tickled. They didn't know who was funnier—Marcus, Sigigi or Hailey.

Hailey put her hands over her face. "I'm so embarrassed. I can't believe I said that!" But Hailey was starting to relax. She smiled in spite of herself. Taking a deep breath, she said, "Okay, okay. I'm getting serious now. This is what I have found out so far. Eugene Frimble presents his proposal at two o'clock tomorrow afternoon, and my dad thinks his ideas are better than most of the other proposals. But there are two others that he says are very good. I haven't looked at them yet." Pulling out Eugene's proposal, she said, "I couldn't read all this, but there's a summary sheet that has a list of the kinds of locations he is looking for. That might be important."

Boomer whispered to Rain, "Does she remind you of anybody?"

Rain thought about Hummingbird, the girl who was

his special friend. Wouldn't she love to be here right now? This was her kind of journey. "Yeah," he whispered back to Boomer, "Hailey's smart like Bird."

Too engrossed to hear them, Hailey started reading: "The sites have to be near water (more than one source), not too isolated, moderate elevation, quick replacement vegetation, natural meadow, variety of geological features, stable ecosystem, and...."

"Hailey," Sigigi interrupted. "We have to take to Turtletown."

"You mean you want all this stuff? Sure, you'll need a couple of fold..."

Sigigi shook his head. "No, I want you, Marcus, Rain, Boomer to come. Tell our elders about Eugene. Today. Now."

"But we have to be back at the hotel to meet our dad for lunch."

Sigigi hopped off the stool. He tightened his sash and retied the straps around his leggings. Taking charge, he addressed the boys by their names for the first time.

"Rain, you got bag for paper?"

"Ah, sure. Yeah, we don't want that stuff blowing around." Rain started flipping open cabinets hunting for a shopping bag.

"Boomer, you got more granola bar?"

"Yeah, we got plenty. Should we bring some water,

too?”

“No, I know where good water.” Sigigi looked down at Boomer’s shoes and nodded. Then he checked out everybody’s footgear. He was a bit puzzled by Hailey’s pink and black high tops until he saw they were secured by hidden Velcro. Finally he said, “All good shoes for walking. We okay.”

“I’m serious,” Hailey protested. “I’m going to get in big trouble if we aren’t back in a couple of hours.”

Sigigi smiled kindly, but mysteriously. “Don’t worry.” Repeating a phrase of his favorite DJ, he said, “‘We’ve got blue skies and green lights this morning.’ You get back. You trust me?”

Hailey said to herself, Girl, this is an adventure! Stop worrying! She sighed and gave in. “Okay. Yes. Let’s go. But promise you’ll get Marcus back in one piece!”

Such were Sigigi’s powers that Hailey never knew that she was being “fascinated.” Just as Thistle said, some Little People could charm children into following them anywhere.

Chapter 11



As they traveled, Sigigi steered them safely—free of bumps and scrapes and the itch of poison ivy. He also taught them about the forest.

The Way to Turtletown

The small party set off from the campground with Sigigi in the lead. He was followed by Marcus, Hailey, and Boomer. Rain brought up the rear. Sigigi followed the same route back to Turtletown by which he had come. At first, however, he chose some alternate paths that were less challenging than the ones he usually traveled. They saw hikers at a distance on these more established trails, but once they had left the reservation, Sigigi led them on a trail only known to the Little People. As the terrain grew more rugged, Rain assumed correctly that they had crossed into the Wetumka National Forest.

The trail, framed by the dark green gloss of laurel thickets, roller-coastered up and then down, punctuated with sudden dips and ascents. Fallen trees and rocky ledges slippery with green moss presented the most challenge. They required some careful footwork. Occasionally, the travelers could also hear, but not see, the rush of streams that deeply etched the mountains. Thankfully, tall beech and maple trees stood sentry, guarding against an accidental fall into the canyons below.

As they traveled, Sigigi steered them safely—free of bumps and scrapes and the itch of poison ivy. He also taught them about the forest. He pointed out the yammering white-breasted nuthatch and stopped them to listen to the rolling song of the Carolina wren in the rhododendron ravines. Pushing aside foliage, he revealed the stems of ghostly white Indian Pipe and the delicate flower of a late-blooming Purple Trillium. On a heavily shaded part of the trail, Sigigi stooped to pick several heart-shaped leaves from a dark green clump of Wild Ginger on the forest floor. He crushed them with his fingers and held the moist pulp to their noses. A pungent aroma filled the air.

“Wow! That’s strong.” Boomer said.

Rain couldn’t place the smell. “It smells like...I don’t know...it reminds me of something.”

“Oh, I know. Ginger. It smells like ginger!” Hailey

cried.

Marcus mimicked Sigigi, picking several leaves and mashing them between his hands. Sniffing, he said, “It smells like Granddaddy’s perfume.”

Hailey sighed and corrected her brother.
“Granddaddy wears cologne, Marcus—not perfume.”

Looking up ahead, Sigigi said, “We go over that way.” He led them along a sunnier part of the trail that finally emerged out of the forest onto a large flat rock. Sigigi walked out onto a natural overlook and waved them toward him. The kids were speechless as they stepped out onto the precipice.

Rain was in awe. The last time he had felt such wonder was on his own reservation—looking out over the white-hot, dry bed of an ancient sea surrounded by the gilded, craggy canyons of Shell Ridge. But here, the vast forest was like a living sea—deep and green. Even the mountains themselves, fading into a misty horizon, transformed into blue undulating waves that seemed more ocean than land.

Hailey gasped, “Oh, it’s beautiful. I didn’t know we were up so high!”

Boomer was equally impressed. “Man, I didn’t know there could be that many trees...”

Reluctantly pulling his eyes away from the panorama, Rain asked, “Where are we?”



Sigigi pointed to the southwest. “See mountain with scar on side? Taniba Springs below.”

Rain was confused. “We’ve come that far? That’s miles away. We haven’t been gone that long, Sigigi.”

“Yeah,” Boomer said, “it’s only been about 15 minutes since we left. Right?”

Sigigi politely ignored them. “Come, everybody sit. Talk about what we say at Turtletown.” Sigigi gestured with his chin to a shaded alcove behind the outlook. A shallow depression in its stony floor collected water that trickled down from a spring above. Sigigi said, “Water here is cold. We have snack.” Looking up at the rocky wall that formed the back of the alcove, Sigigi said with a straight face: “Another block of non-stop rock.”

Trying not to laugh, Hailey said, “Sigigi, you talk so funny sometimes. You sound like a DJ.”

Sigigi smiled. He had figured out that the kids thought his “radio talk” was funny. He pulled out the radio from his sash. Pointing to it, he whispered, “I listen.”

Nodding, Hailey said, “Ohhh...a radio. I get it.”

Boomer sat down and opened the plastic bag with the proposal papers. Hailey pulled out the two proposals that her father noted were very good and gave them to Rain and Boomer. The boys began to read. They weren’t sure what they were looking for, and they certainly didn’t understand the technical language and financial charts.

But after skimming through the two proposals, they said they could be reasonably sure that the plans only included an overhaul of the Tribe's businesses in town.

Looking through Eugene's proposal more carefully, Hailey discovered that his plan included some updating of the town's economy, too. However, she did find a paragraph that stated clearly that Eugene's recommendations for developing eco-tourism potentially included all of the reservation lands up to the border of the Wetumka National Forest. Hailey asked Sigigi how many of the Little People's towns were located on the reservation.

"Maybe three," he answered. "Turtletown, Skunktown, Panthertown. Others far away."

Hailey, sighed. "Well, in that case, I guess Eugene's plan has to be stopped." Sigigi and the boys agreed.

"Maybe we could get the committee interested in one of these others," Rain said hopefully.

Boomer was still reading his proposal. Suddenly, he looked up. "Well, I got bad news. There's a letter here that says that the guy who sent this in won't be able to make a presentation. He can't be here this week. I guess we can forget this one."

"Which one was that?" Hailey asked.

Looking at the signature on the letter, Boomer said, "The one from Thomas Wang."

Marcus interrupted, saying that he was hungry. Sigigi looked through his bag and pulled out the sunflower seed crackers and his last package of hickory nut bread. Marcus accepted a couple of crackers, but said he'd rather have some potato chips or a candy bar.

Sigigi shook his head. He said that he no longer ate the food that the Big People ate at the campgrounds.

Rain reached for the snacks that Boomer had packed. "But, Sigigi, you liked my mom's granola bar that we gave you."

"Yes. Give Marcus granola bar. That like food we eat at Turtletown. Food at campground make Little People sick."

Rain handed one of the granola bars to Marcus. Almost immediately he asked, "What kind of sickness, Sigigi?"

Sigigi said it was a long story. He explained that more Little People used to go to the Big People's town, but now only a few ventured there. "Young men used to go. I like to go. We like find things. Like skin you see through..."

"What's that?" Boomer said frowning.

"Oh, you mean plastic!" Rain said.

"Yes, make easy catch fish on hook. Make fish bite." Sigigi explained. "We bring stuff back to Turtletown. Glass, paper, bottle cap. We make things. Elders not like.

But that make more fun.”

“My dad says when you tell kids not to do something, they want to do it more,” Hailey said.

“Yes, true. Then we find sweet food, sweet grease food. Soon, many friend go to Big People camp just find this food.” Sigigi went on to describe how many young men wanted to do nothing but go to Taniba Springs and make raids on the campgrounds for bags of snacks and soda. “Soon, Little People food no good. Just want new food. No play ball, no hunt, no dance—do nothing. Just go find sweet grease food. But I never like that much. My friend, Oostaway, get sick; then many. Face lose fat, arm like stick. They make water all time. One healer see bee, ant and wasp come around water. She say honey in it. She call sickness, ‘Sting by Bee.’ Oostaway die. Then many die. All sad. Elders say ‘no’ to new food. Now we never eat.”

Rain had known that Sigigi was talking about type 2 diabetes as soon as he described how the young men started losing weight. But he waited until Sigigi finished talking before he spoke. Rain stood up and walked to where the small young man was sitting. “Sigigi, um... Boomer and I know what the sickness is.”

Sigigi was startled. Did these boys know everything?

Rain continued. “The sickness is called type 2 diabetes. It usually comes from eating unhealthy food and not moving your body. Big People get it, too.”

Hailey was alarmed. “My father has prediabetes. Does that mean he is going to get it and die like Sigigi’s friends?”

“No, no. Hailey,” Boomer said quickly. “It doesn’t mean that at all. People with prediabetes have a very good chance of preventing type 2 diabetes if they eat nutritious food and get active—like walking, swimming, or playing sports.” Boomer grinned. “You know, work off the old spare tire.”

“Elders teach you about this diabetes?” Sigigi asked.

“I guess you could say we learned about diabetes from very wise elders—the ones that stories are told about.” Glancing at Hailey, he added, “But they weren’t people.” Hoping that she could understand (he had no doubt that Sigigi would), Rain explained as best he could: “The eagle told me about how to help prevent type 2 diabetes when I was 6 years old. I brought Boomer and my other friends, Hummingbird and Simon, to meet him. He taught us about following the traditions of our ancestors—how they were always active, working and playing, and how they ate foods that weren’t....well, to use Sigigi’s words—full of ‘sweet grease.’ Hailey, you said you never met boys that eat like we do. Well, the eagle is the reason.”

“There was also a rabbit who taught us about fruits and vegetables. And a coyote tried to trick us into eating cookies. We learned what not to eat from him,” Boomer

added.

“Wait a minute, please. Animals talked to you?” Hailey had a “give me a break” expression on her face. To Boomer she wisecracked, “I guess that was the coyote you burped at?”

“I know it may be hard to believe,” Rain replied quietly. He peeked at Sigigi to see his reaction to Hailey’s skepticism. Suddenly, the outline of the little man’s body seemed to merge into the striations of rocky layers that glistened with spring water flowing down the cliff face. All that Rain could see were the young man’s eyes. Then, just as abruptly, Sigigi moved and his form rematerialized. Rain quickly shifted his gaze—wondering what magic of light had created the illusion. But why should it be an illusion? he thought.

Hailey saw that Rain was having a difficult moment—and she wasn’t doing too well herself. “I’m sorry, guys. I’m just new to all this stuff. It sounds like you learned a lot—from the eagle. What you said makes me feel better about my dad, Boomer.”

“Rain, Boomer,” Sigigi said. “You tell Little People what eagle say about diabetes.” He laughed a little: “This stuff new to me, too. I’m a first-time caller.”

“Yes, we’ll tell them everything the eagle told us,” Rain said, smiling. He was always happy when he could share the wisdom of the great bird.

“Sigigi,” Boomer said excitedly, “we’ll tell the elders

they were right to stop the guys from eating junk food!”

Sigigi chuckled and said, “Good idea.” It never hurt to tell the council they’d made a good decision. Standing up, he pointed to the northeast. “See there? Next to three cloud in sky. That Two Rabbit Mountain.”

“Yeah! I can see two rabbit ears on it!” Marcus yelled.

“Where?” Hailey said, straining her eyes. When she heard her little brother giggle, she huffed, “Oh, Marcus, you’re just being silly.”

“That’s where we go. Turtletown there,” Sigigi said.

Just as Sigigi identified the location of Turtletown, a strange dust cloud appeared. Everyone watched as it moved rapidly up the side of the mountain, like a stream flowing uphill.

Marcus piped, “What’s that?”

Sigigi walked further out onto the overlook. He stared for several moments. Mystified, he turned to the kids and said, “No clue. Never see this thing before.”



Chufe launched into “Old Joe Clark” and Coyote and Thistle locked arms in a do-se-do. The rabbit paddled his feet in time with the music and the dance partners sashayed and promenaded.

Chapter 12



“...the Rabbit declared, “Coyote, I’m mighty, mighty glad to know you!”

Coyote Meets Chufezomo

Thistle coughed and cried, “Coyote, slow down! Stop! I can’t breathe!” The little rabbit buried her head in the back of the trickster’s neck, trying to avoid the choking dust that enveloped them. Coyote heard her. He gradually motored down and came to a stop. Shaking his head, he cleared the road dirt from his nose and sneezed. Thistle squinted through the debris that floated down behind them. It looked like a tornado had blazed a coyote-wide track up the side of the mountain.

“Are we here?” Coyote coughed.

“Yes, and I’m sure everybody knows it.”

Thistle slid off Coyote’s back. Her legs were stiff and she needed to stretch. Since they left Thunder Rock yesterday, they had only made a few stops. Most of the trip had been a blur. Coyote had slowed only once—when she asked to see the bridge that crossed the Great River. They had arrived at the bridge just as night eased into the gray of dawn. At her insistence, Coyote reduced his speed once his paws hit the lofty arched span. Miraculously, the context of their location came into sharp focus. To Thistle’s delight, the bridge and city across the river still wore their nighttime twinkles. Even the river flickered and glowed as barges plowed their way through the black water below. The Great River was more spectacular than anything she could have imagined.

Reducing speed had its consequences. The driver of a car crossing the bridge suddenly saw something in the corner of his eye—a rabbit riding on a coyote’s back. When the startled motorist turned his head to see what he thought he saw—they vanished. Coyote and Thistle laughed. It was always a good trick!

Now that they had reached their destination, the only trick Coyote was interested in was a power nap. He plopped down on his haunches and yawned. “So what do we do now?” he asked.

“We listen.”

“For what?”

“Chufezomo always plays his fiddle in the morning. We’ll follow the tune.”

“Sounds like a plan,” Coyote said, curling up in some pine needles. Thistle followed his example. Conserving energy was always a good strategy. She slipped into a lovely doze that unfortunately was interrupted by something sticky and wet.

“Stop! Yuk! What are you doing?”

Coyote was standing over her. “I’m licking your face,” he said. “Wake up. Don’t you hear it?”

Thistle shook herself and sat up. “Yes, yes. It’s the fiddle!” Listening more carefully, she started softly singing, “*The breeze is sighing, the night bird’s crying...*” Elated, she cried, “He’s playing ‘Red Wing!’”

“It’s coming from that ridge over there. Hop on.” With Thistle clutching the scruff of his neck, Coyote bounded over a low rise and up a steep slope toward the fiddle music. When he reached the top, he stopped and Thistle dismounted. Through a stand of trees she could see a little glade dappled with sunshine.

Thistle placed her paw on Coyote’s back. “Wait here, Coyote.” Hopping forward slowly, she called out, “Helloooo? Chufe...Chufezomo...”

The music stopped. Thistle parted a clump of ox-eye daisies and peered through the flowers. A grayish-brown

male rabbit was staring intently toward the daisies. He was much taller and thicker through the chest than most members of his species—the eastern cottontail. His front legs, drawn close to his body, were holding a fiddle in one paw and a bow in the other. Thistle watched as he reared up slowly on his back legs and cautiously leaned forward. Thistle poked her head into the clearing and said his name again, “Chufezomo?”

The old buck began twitching the spray of white whiskers on his muzzle excitedly. His mouth opened, revealing two large incisors that were the heart of the most jubilant grin Thistle had ever seen.

“Thistle?”

“Yes, it’s me, Uncle.”

“Oh, my sweet little rab,” he cried. “You come to see me!” He hopped to his niece and nuzzled her nose in greeting. She responded affectionately by giving one of his ears a little grooming.

Standing back to look at her, the old rabbit said, “My, my, ain’t you the prettiest little bunny! A little dusty, honey, but pretty.”

Wiping a paw across her face, she smiled shyly. “Oh, sorry, I’ve been on the road for 2 days.” Glancing over her shoulder, she added, “Ah, I’ve brought someone with me who wants to meet you.”

The large protuberant eyes on the side of the rabbit’s

head gleamed with intelligence. “Oh? And who might that be?”

Thistle turned and called, “Coyote, come and meet my uncle.” The trickster padded quietly into the clearing and sat down.

The old rabbit was immediately on his guard. He leaned down to Thistle and whispered, “Uh, what’s his name?”

“It’s *the* Coyote, Uncle,” Thistle whispered back.

Chufezomo, the Two Rabbit, approached Coyote warily. One trickster was predator and the other was prey. But opposition was the way of being for those of their kind—each had been the victor and victim, the creator and destroyer, and the deceiver as well as truth-teller. Each was proud, but also fearful of the powers of the other. When great tricksters encountered one another, the outcome could be unpredictable.

As the host, Chufezomo spoke first. “Welcome to my ol’ Laughin’ Place, Coyote. I heard ’bout you.”

Looking around, Coyote replied, “You come to laugh here? What a good idea.” Remembering to be pleasant, he added with a toothy smile: “I have heard of you, too. It is well known that you make many laugh.”

Chufezomo lowered his head in thanks for the compliment. However, he skipped the other niceties of hospitality and asked a critical question: “Coyote, how

many rabbits been your meat?”

Coyote was somewhat taken aback. “Why, I...ah. Well, let’s see.” Coyote was in a tough spot. If he told Chufe that he didn’t eat rabbits, it would be an obvious lie. He would have to provide a response that limited the damage, but was truthful. Fortunately, Coyote’s craftiness was never in short supply. Smiling, he replied, “Ah, let’s just say that I never ate a rabbit who I knew *personally*.”

The old rabbit laughed out loud. “Ha, ha, hee, heeee! Well, well, I can see how eating a friend might stick in your craw. Yes, sir, that’d make for a sour stomach.” Nevertheless, he wanted a little more assurance of Coyote’s good will. Turning to Thistle, he said, “Will you vouch for this fella?”

“Oh, yes, Uncle. Ever since I’ve known him, he’s never stalked me. But,” she said, wagging a paw at her scruffy companion, “you did devour your wife once, Coyote—and you knew *her*.”

Coyote was aghast at Thistle’s betrayal of certain unsavory episodes in his domestic life. “But that’s different!” he protested. “And don’t forget—I brought her back to life!”

Chufezomo smiled and said, “Well, now, that’s a trick I admire. You can’t do better than that.” Suddenly, he reached out and grabbed Coyote’s paw. Pumping his front leg up and down until his head bobbed like a cork,

the rabbit declared, “Coyote, I’m mighty, mighty glad to know you!” He hoped that was personal enough.

With introductions over, Chufezomo invited Thistle and Coyote to sit down with him. Thistle said that she had been telling Coyote about their trickster family. “I told him that you are called the Two Rabbit because your stories come from two different worlds—the world of the Great Rabbit and the world of Zomo.”

“You got it right, little rab. That ol’ Zomo the Hare—he’s not from here. He live in the lands of Africa...far and far away. His stories come with the people stole from their homes and made to work the cotton fields and sugar plantations.”

This is what Coyote had come to learn about. Excitedly, he asked, “What kind of stories did they bring about Zomo?”

“Some African people called him Kalulu or Sungura, but the stories are mostly the same. Zomo was a tricky little fella—he use his wits to get what he want. One time, he make fools of the leopard, the big fish, and wild cow so bad that the Sky give him wisdom to go along with his courage.” Chufezomo looked at Coyote and chuckled. “I don’t think he ever run into any coyotes, but I bet he’d outsmart them, too.”

Coyote let the teasing pass. “How did Zomo meet the Great Rabbit of this land?”

“Well, from what I recollect some black folks run off

from the plantations and join up with the Indians, and some Indians was captured and made slaves, too. The Indian folks hear the rabbit stories the African folks are tellin', and the Africans hear the Indians' stories about their old rascal rabbit, and before you know it, the stories all stirred up together—and I was born!" Reflecting on the wholeness of his own being, Chufezomo chuckled and said, "I guess I am the smartest, peskiest, funniest, and sneakiest critter that ever was."

"You left out most foolish, Uncle," Thistle said, gently correcting her famous relative.

Chufezomo laughed out loud. "Oh, ain't that the truth! When my tricks blow up in my face—it sure make folks happy..."

Coyote smiled. He'd been the butt of many jokes—mostly as a result of his own folly. "I guess we've both done our part to help people. Laughing is a good thing."

Thistle agreed. "Oh, yes. Laughing heals."

Chufe nodded his head. "That it do. That it do. In my way of thinkin', if folks can laugh, they can think, too. Them ol' hare stories from Africa was all about how little critters can use their heads to make sure the big critters don't eat 'em up." Looking knowingly at Coyote and Thistle, the rabbit grinned. "Bein' clever is right useful since the bears and wolves don't seem to be going nowhere..." Then giving Coyote an impish look, he said, "But the hare ain't all, Coyote. I got more..."

“More of what?”

“More stories.” Coyly, he added, “I got spider stories from Africa, too.”

“The spider?”

“Uh-huh. I got Ananzi the Spider-Boy. Oh, he’s a tricky one. He’s an eight-legged shape-shiftin’ rascal. His stories got added in my stew, too.”

“The storytellers must have been busy,” Coyote said wryly.

The rabbit smiled and sighed wistfully. “Oh, yes. *Sooo* many stories was told.” Leaning back and looking at Coyote more directly, he said, “Then big changes come. Some was happy and some was downright woeful. A sad time was when most of the Indian folks was all moved out West—except for a few places like this. That’s when Thistle’s family left, too.” He shook his head sadly. “I sure did miss ’em.”

Continuing, his face suddenly brightened. “But the changes wasn’t all bad, Coyote. No sirree! The black folks got free and they left the plantations behind ’em. That was a happier time. After that I left the ol’ settlements and started stayin’ up here a lot of the time. I still go round visitin’ though. For some reason, I just can’t stay away from Mr. Man’s garden.” Then the rabbit looked down and went silent.

Thistle sensed that something was bothering Chufe.

She prompted him to go on talking. “Uncle, tell Coyote about how your stories were told in books.”

He looked up. “Oh, yeah. I heard they got told all over the world. Them days I was feelin’ *real* good. I kept playin’ my tricks on the fox and bear, and I was really givin’ the hawk and buzzard a hard time. But then, something happened and I started feelin’ a little puny.” Frowning, he explained, “I didn’t hear my stories bein’ told no more. I declare, Thistle, the rheumatiz in my hips got so bad, I could barely hop. I even stopped playin’ my fiddle for a while there. I figured that folks had forgot me. And you know what happens to us when the stories ain’t told.”

“We get old and die in the people’s memories.” Coyote said bluntly. “The people forget the stories of their ancestors and lose who they are.”

The rabbit was surprised at Coyote’s brusque assessment, but he had to agree. “You got that right, Coyote. You can be a straight talker for a tricky fella. Why do you think my stories fell off that way?”

Coyote took this question very seriously. He began to scratch where there was no itch. It helped him to think. Then he rolled over on his back and thought some more. Coyote was pondering how Chufezomo drew much of his power from that place where his two worlds came together. He had the knowledge of his African and Native American origins, but also an additional and very

special kind of knowing that came from the place where the two worlds crossed over. He was more than the sum of his parts. In other words, a part of Chufezomo was a new being—different from either of his parents.

Coyote had to admit he had been surprised at just how complex Chufe really was. He had rabbit *and* spider knowledge! What's more, people from many places and lands were telling his stories. Suddenly, Coyote pawed at his ear. Hmm, he thought, maybe the source of his power is a strength *and* a weakness. Where things come together can also be the place where things come apart. This, of course, was Trickster 101.

Coyote got up and trotted over to the old rabbit. He lay down on his stomach beside him. Clearing his throat, he began slowly: "Stories have to be told in the right way and at the right time. If the storytellers don't understand the story, or if they tell the story with the wrong purpose and in a way that changes its meaning, something will go amiss. Listeners must hear the story the right way, too—so it can be a part of their own learning. I think that some of your stories may have been told or heard in the wrong way, and this caused trouble. That is what I think."

"But you seem to be feeling all right now, Uncle," Thistle said. "Your whiskers are awfully gray, but your eyes are just as bright as I remember them."

"Oh, I been doing a whole lot better lately.

Sometimes, I can hear storytellers tellin' the stories—just like I remember them, and there's children listening. I'm fiddling and coming up to my Laughin' Place right regular now." Looking over at his fellow trickster, Chufezomo said, "There's a whole lotta sense in what you said, Coyote. I shoulda figured it out myself. Maybe I'll get young again now that more stories are being told with the right meanin'." Somewhat embarrassed, the rabbit said, "I'm forgettin' my manners, Thistle. I been doin' nothin' but talkin' 'bout myself. You might like to nibble a bit."

"I am a little hungry," she admitted. "The daisies look tasty."

While Thistle foraged nearby, Coyote and Chufezomo got a drink from a small pool of rain water. Chufe told a joke he'd heard from a skunk, and soon they were trading gags and their favorite pranks. The sound of their belly laughs made Thistle happy. Occasionally, their voices lowered and she knew they were discussing more weighty matters about their creative powers. They were obviously enjoying each other's company, but she mustn't forget why they had come. She had to ask Chufe about the Little People.

The sudden squeal of Chufezomo's bow pulled across his fiddle made Thistle look up. "How about a little dance, Thistle?" Coyote yelled.

"Yes, if Uncle will dance, too."

Chufe launched into “Old Joe Clark” and Coyote and Thistle locked arms in a do-se-do. The rabbit paddled his feet in time with the music and the dance partners sashayed and promenaded. Coyote, as usual, got a bit over-animated. He soon boogied off on his own, leaving Thistle to frolic solo. Soon he was twirling in a “fancy dancing” fever.

Fearing he would miss out on the fun, Chufe thrust the fiddle at Coyote and joined Thistle in a lively stomp. Coyote accepted the challenge. He pushed the “wood that sings” under his chin and started sawing away. Reaching for his power, he smoothly shifted his inept squalling into the “Hohokam Polka,” followed by a Nakota version of “Turkey in the Straw.” The two rabbits shuffled to a stop and applauded Coyote.

Gasping for breath, Thistle said, “I didn’t know you could play.”

“I can’t play. I cheated. How about another round?”

“No, Coyote. We must leave for home soon. We have to talk about why we came.” Thistle turned to her uncle and said, “Coyote and I have come to ask you for your help and advice.”

“Well, let me sit down first.” He was winded, but it was obvious that he was excited about being asked for his guidance. “How can I help my favorite relative?”

Thistle told Chufezomo about her dream of Rain that Dances chasing the little man. She said she was afraid

for the boy because some Little People could cast spells.

Chufezomo immediately assured Thistle that the Little People in the towns near Taniba Springs did not harm children. “I know them well, Thistle. One of their settlements, Turtletown, is near here.”

“His friend, Boomer, is with him, too.” Coyote said.

“I’ll watch out for them both. Now, don’t you worry, honey. They sound mighty special to you.”

“They are, Uncle.” Thistle went on to describe how she and Sky Heart, the eagle, had been trying to help Rain, his friends, and their community to eat healthy, be active, and live long lives.

Suddenly very interested, Chufe asked, “You been helpin’ them to eat what?”

“Food from the garden, of course!” She explained that Rain’s welfare and that of his friend, Boomer, was very important. The eagle had given them and their friends, Simon and Hummingbird, knowledge that would help their community to prevent a disease called type 2 diabetes. Describing Coyote’s special role, she said, “You wouldn’t believe the tricks Coyote has pulled on Rain and his friends. Sky Heart and I usually have to help them through the ‘trouble’ that he’s started.” Eager to impress her uncle with their accomplishments, she described how the kids had learned so much from Coyote’s tricks—like the meaning of water and its power, the gifts of fruits and vegetables that their ancestors had

given to them, and why being respectful of relatives is so important to the health and harmony of the whole community.

Coyote basked in Thistle's praise. "Now they tell new stories that come from my mischief. New stories will help us stay young and the traditions of the people strong."

Concerned about how Chufezomo had aged, Thistle said, "New stories would help you to stay young, too, Uncle."

The old rabbit turned away and hopped to the rim of his Laughing Place. He looked out over the valley below Two Rabbit Mountain. Hmm, maybe I've been up here too long, he mused. Maybe I could help some young folks to be healthy, too. After all, who knows more about fruits and vegetables than I do? His face lit up. Yes, I could be like Sky Heart, Thistle, and Coyote! Turning back to his niece, he said, "Before you and Coyote head back home, tell me more 'bout them healthy stories, honey."

Chapter 13



Myrtle suddenly heard the voice of her granny in her head: “The Little People...have great powers and must be respected.”

Big Myrt’s Warning

Lennie drove along Highway 667 to his sister-in-law’s farm. He usually enjoyed the short drive, but today he was too distracted to appreciate anything. Lennie was worried. Were the old warnings about the Little People true? Or was Max right—he was just a superstitious fool? Lennie’s uncertainty was rooted in the fact that his family came from two different backgrounds. Some were enrolled members of the Taniba Springs Tribes, but the

rest were non-Native. Unlike Chufezomo, he often felt lost between his ancestries. He just didn't know enough.

When Gussie asked him to drive out to Myrtle's to get some beans from her garden, he had quickly obliged. Myrtle Owl would be just the person to confide in about Max's scheme to capture one of the Little People. If anybody could help him, it would be Big Myrt.

A woman in baggy overalls and dirt-caked boots stood in the doorway of an old shed, watching Lennie park the car. To even the most casual observer it would be obvious why she was called Big Myrt. Lennie's sister-in-law was almost six feet tall. More concerned with practicality than fashion, the overalls suited her just fine. The truth was she hadn't cared much about the way she looked ever since her husband, Wesley, had died 3 years ago. But even though she lived alone, no one would have described her as lonely. Myrtle found meaning and satisfaction in her grandkids, her garden, and the roadside stand she called "Big Myrt's Fruits and Vegetables."

She had been waiting for Lennie. Reaching up, she grabbed an old battered tin pan that hung from a nail on the shed wall. He can pick his own beans, she thought. Myrtle Owl was not particularly fond of her brother-in-law, even though she had nothing against him. She just believed that her sister could have done better. In her book, he was too unsure of himself and had little notion

of making a better life with Gussie. She knew that her sister saw positive things in Lennie, but for the life of her she couldn't figure out what they were.

Heading toward the bean patch, Myrtle motioned for Lennie to join her. He waved back and trotted down the well-worn path that bordered her prize-winning garden. He was always impressed by the size and beauty of Myrtle's enterprise. She was a firm believer in companion planting and always arranged vegetables so that they complemented each other's needs. The companions (corn, squash, and pole beans) were joined by rows of cucumbers, tomatoes, and peppers. In between the rows she grew marigolds, dwarf zinnias, nasturtiums, and dill and fennel—flowers and herbs that drove off pests, but attracted friendly insects, too. Truly, the garden was a banquet of red, yellow, and orange set on a table of green.

Myrtle was waiting for Lennie under one of the peach trees that shaded the trail leading to her patch of limas and bush beans. "Hey, Myrt!" Lennie called out. "Looks like your garden appreciated that spell of rain we got."

Myrtle wasn't one for small talk. Handing Lennie the pan, she said, "Pick all you want, Lennie. And go on down to the strawberry patch if you want. Get Gussie a watermelon, too. I planted the little ones this year."

"Thanks, Myrt. I will. Um, look, I know you're busy, but there's something I want to ask you. You know,

something you'd know about...ah, well. See, the guy I work for? Max? Well, he, ah...."

Myrtle waited. She had a lot of patience. But when Lennie kept stumbling around, she began to get annoyed. "What do you want to ask me, Lennie? Just say it."

"Okay, I will." Standing up a little straighter, he said, "Myrt, what happens to folks who mess with the Little People?"

Myrtle glanced warily at Lennie. "Why are you asking me?"

"Gussie told me that you had seen 'em."

Shocked, she cried, "Gussie? I never told her that!"

"Oh, no. You didn't. It was Wesley," Lennie explained. "He told Gussie that he thought you'd had a run-in with 'em."

Without saying another word, Myrtle turned abruptly and stomped toward the house. Her mind was racing. What did Wesley know and when did he find out? Suddenly that summer day, 7 years before, flooded back into her memory. She had been in the kitchen, and Wesley was up on the hill behind the house with that backhoe. Its engine had stubbornly growled away all morning. Wesley was determined to divert the water from a spring that upwelled from the limestone foundation of the hill. The spring fed a small stream that

flowed into the forest, away from the pipe he had laid down to feed water to their gardens.

Myrtle had just finished rinsing a pile of squash when she heard a noise on the front porch. Libby had sprung up and run to the screen door, barking. Thinking it was squirrels raiding her flower pots, Myrtle peered out the kitchen window that opened onto the porch. What she saw made her heart jump. An old man, no bigger than two feet tall, stood on the front steps. Dressed in a long shirt with a red sash, he was fearfully looking about, obviously unsettled by the growling dog.

Myrtle suddenly heard the voice of her granny in her head: “The Little People have long hair almost down to their feet. They speak in an old way that only a few people can understand anymore. If you ever see one, Myrtle, you mustn’t tell. They have great powers and must be respected.”

Shaken, Myrtle stumbled back from the window and knocked over the pail of blackberries she had gathered that morning. The clang of the pail hitting the floor made the old man turn toward the window. He saw Myrtle staring at him. Ignoring his fear of the dog, he rushed at the window so fast that his long gray hair streamed out behind him in misty tendrils. He seemed to have no bodily shape until his face was thrust against the bottom of the window screen. Angrily, he began to yell at Myrtle, pointing toward the sound of the backhoe.

Suddenly, he stopped yelling. His wrinkled face contorting in distress, the little man grabbed the window sill and began to speak rapidly. Myrtle recognized that he was trying desperately to communicate with her. She strained to understand him, drawing on every word of Native language she knew. Suddenly, one understandable word bobbed by in the flood of incomprehension. She snatched it—and spoke the word for water. The old man nodded excitedly and pointed again toward the hill. Then he jumped off the porch and ran away.

Myrtle knew exactly what she had to do. She banged through the screen door and ran through the chicken yard toward the hill. Rounding the corner of the hen houses, she came to a sudden halt. There in the shadows on the edge of the woods was the little old man. A boy stood beside him. She and the boy held each other's gaze for a few fleeting seconds. But it was an experience she could never forget. Then, in an instant, the sun broke through a tier of clouds and scattered the shadows. The Little People vanished in the sun's golden glare.

Myrtle raced to stop the digging. Wesley saw her coming and shut down the backhoe before she reached him. He knew something was wrong. She remembered how he looked at her when she pleaded with him not to reroute the spring. Myrtle was convinced that something bad would happen if the water no longer followed its

natural course into the forest. Wesley later told her he'd never seen her in a panic before—it just wasn't in her nature. He dumped the project that day, never asking why. But obviously, she thought, he'd figured out the reason—and had told her sister. (Myrtle didn't know it, but Wesley had discovered some Little People literature from the Tribal museum that she had later hidden at the bottom of a box in the shed. It wasn't hard for him to put two and two together.)

Lennie ran after Myrtle. “Myrt! Please stop. Talk to me.” But she wouldn't stop. She was angry at Wesley and Gussie—and Lennie, too. She had almost made it to her front porch when Lennie caught up with her. “You've got to help me, Myrt. Max Bigelow, my boss, has seen the Little People. He wants me to help him capture them!”

Myrtle turned around so quickly that Lennie almost ran into her. Her anger had been replaced by shock. Appalled that he would even say such a thing, she cried, “I can't believe my sister married you, Lennie!”

“I'm not saying I'd do it, Myrt. I just want to know what would happen if Max did try to take one of them.”

Myrtle was totally frustrated. “Lennie, the question you should be asking is what will happen to the Little People you steal away from their home—not what would happen to Max.”

“Yeah. I guess. It's just that I always heard you weren't supposed to tell if you saw them. I was just wondering why...”

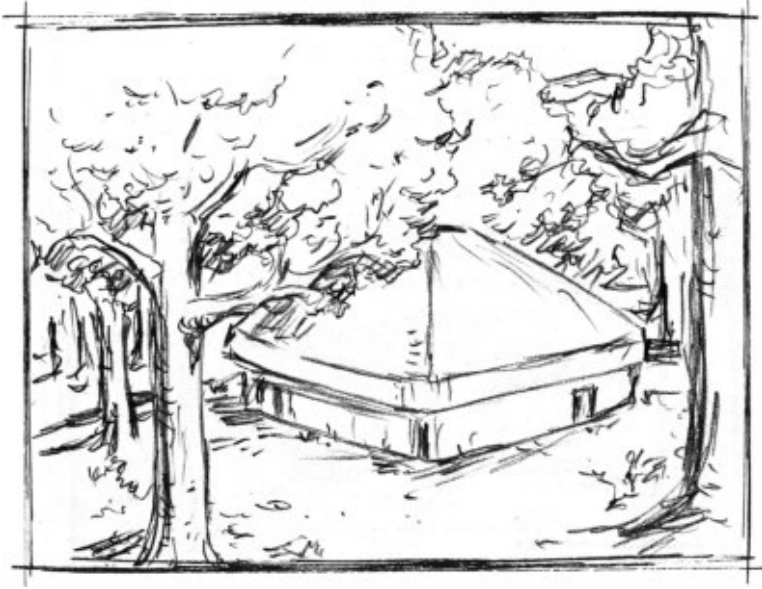
The big woman took a deep breath and tried again. “Look, Lennie, I don’t have all the answers. My grandmother said the Little People are spirits who will punish people who tell others they’ve seen them—because it makes people curious. She said they’ll go snooping around in the forest looking for the Little People and disturbing things that they shouldn’t.” She put her hand out to Lennie and placed it on his arm. “The Little People will share with us the knowledge they want us to know. They will even use their power to help people who call upon them. But they don’t want us interfering with them—or the places where they live.”

Myrtle took the pan from Lennie’s hand. “Come on up to the house and I’ll give you some beans.” Lennie dutifully followed Myrt. She trudged up the porch steps and pulled open the screen door to the kitchen. He waited on the porch. A few moments later, she emerged with a sack of limas and two quarts of strawberries. “Take these. They’re good this year.”

“Thanks, Myrt. We’ll cook up these beans tonight.”

Big Myrt gave her brother-in-law a dead level look. “If you have any sense at all, you won’t have anything to do with Max. Leave it alone, Lennie—before it’s too late.” Then she went inside the house, pulling the door shut—much louder than she had intended.

Chapter 14



Finally, they arrived at a large public square and the stomp ground where the Little People danced. Near the square was a large, round Council House with a thatched conical roof.

The Little People's Council

Sigigi paused by the trail, waiting for the kids to catch up. When they had gathered around him, he said, “We are here. At Turtletown.”

Rain tried to spot the town through the trees. But all he could see was thick deciduous forest. Frowning, he said, “Where?”

Sigigi smiled and whispered, “Follow me.” He stepped up into a large hollow in the side of an ancient oak—and disappeared. Rain did as Sigigi instructed and he, too,

was swallowed up by the tree.

His voice echoing from the interior of the oak, Rain called out, “There’s some steps in here, Boom. Bring Hailey and Marcus on down.” Boomer held out his hand and assisted Hailey into the hollow; then he gave Marcus a boost. Hefting himself through the hole, Boomer found his footing on a spiral of large roots that formed a stairway. There was just enough light to see in the dimness. Making a last turn on the twisting roots, he saw sunshine. He heard Rain say, “We’re almost there!”

Sigigi was waiting for them as the kids emerged one by one. They were standing on the edge of a number of small gardens that were scattered in patches where the trees grew more thinly. In one of the gardens, two women and a little boy were picking a dwarf variety of squash and corn. They stopped their harvesting and waved at Sigigi.

Sigigi waved back and said, “Come meet my sister.”

Sigigi led them to a path beside the garden where they were soon joined by his sister, her friend, Niska, and Niska’s son. Sigigi introduced everyone by name, calling his sister by her translated name, “Cricket.” When she frowned and objected to something he had said, Sigigi grinned and explained: “She say her name Cholotka, not Cricket. She ask is that how her name sound on talking box? I say ‘yes.’” The kids laughed, and Cricket giggled, too. As they walked quickly toward the town, Sigigi

gave Cricket and Niska a rapid-fire description of his adventures since the day before.

Boomer murmured to Hailey, “Gee, I didn’t know he could talk so fast.”

Rolling her eyes, Hailey replied, “That’s because he’s talking in his own language, Boomer.”

However, they soon lost interest in the speed of Sigigi’s speech as Turtletown came into view. Passing through more gardens as well as orchards of nut trees and tended blackberry thickets, they emerged into an area of square-shaped and round thatched houses, granaries, pottery kilns, and sweathouses—all hidden from above by a protective canopy of trees. Little People were everywhere! They began to call to each other that Sigigi was back, and he had brought children of the Big People with him. Spilling out of their houses and running in from the fields, men, women, and children abandoned their work and play. Soon, a large, lively crowd began to form behind Sigigi and his little band. Several of his friends ran up to greet him—full of questions about what he had found out in Taniba Springs. When Sigigi told them that these children had information about the whirling birds that could help them, they graciously nodded and smiled at their young visitors.

Continuing into Turtletown, Sigigi pointed out the town’s ball fields and courts. There was a ball ground

where they held contests with teams from other towns, a chunky game yard, and a court with a tall pole. Some kids were playing around the pole.

“Are those goal posts?” Hailey asked, looking at the large ball ground.

“Yeah,” Rain replied. “They must play a stickball game like our Tribe plays.”

“It’s like lacrosse,” Boomer added. “You know, you throw the ball with a big stick that has a net on one end?”

Marcus stopped and watched the boys and girls trying to lob a ball at a fish that perched atop the tall pole. “Hey, that looks like fun!”

Finally, they arrived at a large public square and the stomp ground where the Little People danced. Near the square was a large, round Council House with a beautifully thatched conical roof. Colorful banners fluttered from tall poles erected in front of the doorway. Beyond the square were more houses and the mouth of a gigantic cave.

Sigigi halted and the crowd that had been following them grew quiet. The kids watched as a procession of Little People, led by an elderly man wearing a crown of feathers, emerged from the cave and the houses near its mouth. The kids, especially Hailey, were impressed by their splendid garments decorated with vibrantly colored feathers, iridescent mother-of-pearl, and multi-hued fur.

Sigigi whispered to them that they were members of the town council.

As the elders slowly made their way toward the Council House, they were accompanied by the thump of a low-volume drum. The townsfolk started to sing. Their voices, which rose and fell melodiously, were high-pitched and clear. They sounded the way a mountain stream looks and feels—silvery and cool. When all the elders had arrived at the doorway of the Council House, the singing stopped. The man wearing the feathered crown held up a staff and spoke briefly. The drummer boomed out four beats in conclusion, and the people began returning to their usual activities.

The man motioned to Sigigi to come forward. He spoke a few words to the young man. Then he and the other elders filed into the round structure.

Sigigi returned to his young friends and gathered them around him. “What did he say, Sigigi? Rain asked.

“He is Osihishi, the Headman of our town. He say for you to tell about helicopter to the elders. He say for town to ‘stay tuned’ for whole story later.” Looking at their concerned faces, he added: “Each of you talk some. Then, I talk for you. Don’t worry.”

“Yes, but how are we supposed to act? What if we do something wrong?” Hailey said.

Sigigi chuckled a little. “You be fine. Little People like kids.”

Taking Marcus's hand, the young man of the Little People led them through the small entrance into the Council House. Rain had to bend way over so his head wouldn't hit the wooden beam at the top of the opening. Inside, the Council House's high ceiling created an open, airy feeling, and the smoke hole at the top allowed rays of bright sunshine to softly illuminate the interior. He could see elders sitting on benches against the exterior wall, facing a small fire that burned at the center of the room. Following Sigigi's direction, he sat down on the bench next to the doorway. The other kids sat down beside him. The bench was small and very low, causing Rain's knees to almost touch his chin. Boomer and Hailey had to scrunch up their legs, too. A woman with white hair sat on the bench next to them. She leaned forward a little and smiled at the children of the Big People.

Marcus whispered to his sister, "She looks nice."

Sigigi stepped into the light at the center of the Council House and began to give an account of everything he had experienced since the day before. He quickly went through the story up to the point where the dog chased him, and he saw for the first time the four young people who he had brought with him today. He introduced the kids. Then he described how he had hidden in the trunk of the car, and the boys had discovered him. Glancing at Rain and Boomer, he told the council how they had spent much of the night

talking. Turning in a circle so that he could address all the council members, Sigigi jubilantly gave them the good news: “They know why the whirling bird has been flying over our towns!”

The council members burst out with exclamations. “Ho! Ho! Yes! We knew Sigigi would be the one to find out!” A chubby little elder, who was even shorter than most of the Little People, struggled to his feet. Breathlessly, he cried, “Please, Sigigi, don’t make us wait much longer. Tell us!”

Switching to English, Sigigi called up the boys. “Tell what you know.” Rain pulled up the photo he had made of the helicopter on his cell phone the afternoon before. He gave it to Sigigi who walked around the circle, showing it to each council member. The boys then told how they had come to know about Eugene Frimble and his plans for developing tourism in the forest. When Sigigi translated, the council members cried out in alarm. “Bring Big People to where we live? This must be stopped! We must do something about this man!”

Boomer came to Eugene’s defense. He said, “Sigigi, tell them that Eugene is a good man. He tries to teach people about the forest without harming it. He just doesn’t know that the Little People live here.” Sigigi did as Boomer asked. Then, he added that there were other plans that the Big People in Taniba Springs could adopt. Eugene’s plan was not the only one. He turned and

motioned for Hailey to come forward.

Lugging the bag of proposal materials, Hailey joined the boys. Sigigi gave her an assuring smile. She nodded, but was nervous. Starting off hesitantly, Hailey said, “Um, my father is helping the people at Taniba Springs to choose a plan that will help them develop new jobs. This bag here is full of ideas from other people about how to do that. My dad says there are two other plans besides Eugene’s that are very good. These plans help to develop jobs only in town.” Sigigi translated. When he finished, Hailey added, “I’m sorry, but my dad likes Eugene’s plan. He doesn’t know about the Little People, either.” Feeling more confident, she went on: “Maybe, somehow, we could get the business committee to vote for one of the other plans, instead of Eugene’s.”

Rain conveyed the urgency of the situation. “The proposal presentations will be made tomorrow. We’ll have to figure out what to do pretty fast.”

A murmur went up among the elders. A man wearing a short cape of iridescent feathers and insect wings spoke in a strong voice: “Perhaps Eugene is no threat. Maybe none of the Big People in Taniba Springs would vote for his plan. After all, they know we live here in the forest.”

Another council member disputed this belief. “But, can we trust that enough of them will remember us? There are some people today who don’t know our stories very well—and some do not always recognize that it is

Little People who play tricks on them.”

“No, we cannot take a chance,” Osihishi the Headman said. “Eugene must be stopped.”

The white-haired woman spoke up. “I agree. But he should not be harmed. I believe that Eugene is an intelligent man. He may also be a good man because he tries to teach people about the forest—like we do. But he doesn’t have enough wisdom to understand all that he will disturb.”

“Yes, being smart is not enough,” the chubby elder said.

The woman continued. “I think we should make Eugene follow one of us into the forest. Then he cannot give the speech about his plan.” The members nodded. Then she made a statement that would later cause a hot debate. “We select very carefully the Big People to whom we give our knowledge. I think this man may be very special. Perhaps we can use the time he is in the forest to give him some of our wisdom.”

The council members looked very surprised. “Should we give knowledge to one who is not one of *our* Big People?” Everyone started talking at once.

The Headman held up his hand. “Yes, that is an important question. We have much to consider.” To cool down the discussion a bit, he said, “One of the children of the Big People has not spoken. Does he have anything to say?”

Sigigi took Marcus by the hand and led him forward. He suggested that the boy say something nice like “I’m glad to be here.” Marcus was not a shy kid and he said what was on his mind. “I want to play with those kids throwing the ball at the pole!”

Sigigi translated and the council burst into laughter. Then Marcus leaned down and said something else. Sigigi grinned and translated again. “He says he is hungry, too!”

The elders laughed once more. Chuckling, Osihishi said, “We are all hungry. Let’s thank these young people with some good food. We will come back later to continue our discussion.”

Chapter 15



Duffy waved and hurried over. The kids just stared. Rain murmured, “You said he was tall, Sigigi, but...”

Hospitality and Kindness

The elders pulled their cloaks around their shoulders and began to file out of the Council House. As they went, each of them thanked the kids for coming to help them. The woman with the white hair stopped in front of Hailey and spoke to her briefly. Then she patted the young girl on the arm and followed her fellow council members outside. Sigigi said, “Our Beloved Woman say you speak well.”

Hailey blushed. “She did? Oh, man, I was a wreck.”

“Is she someone who everybody loves?” Boomer

asked.

“Something like that. Her name is Sumpuhke. She is very brave and wise. Little People trust her and love her. She say not punish Eugene. Come. Meet Duffy. We get some food.”

Emerging into the sunshine, Sigigi glanced around, looking for his friend. Duffy was working nearby. He had been waiting for the council to take a break and was using the time to stow baskets of dried corn into an elevated storage bin.

Sigigi cried, “Duffy! Come see my friends!”

Duffy waved and hurried over. The kids just stared. Rain murmured, “You said he was tall, Sigigi, but...” What Sigigi hadn’t said was that Duffy was a titan by anyone’s standard—or that he had the biggest blue eyes anybody ever saw.

Wading through a crowd of young people and children that had gathered to gawk at their visitors, the blonde giant yelled, “Way to go! You did it!” Duffy knelt down on one knee and executed a perfect fist bump with Sigigi. He was dressed in breech cloth and leggings like the men of Turtletown, but unlike them, he didn’t have long hair. Most of Duffy’s hair was plucked out, except for a circle of braided yellow hair at the back of his head. Sigigi introduced everybody.

Duffy greeted them and shook their hands. “I hear you guys know why the helicopter has been flying over

the towns. It's been freaking out everybody. You wanna come up to the cave? We can get some lunch."

"You got any spaghetti?" Marcus asked.

Duffy laughed. "Uh, no. Not today."

Rain noticed that Sigigi was watching an elderly man struggling with a section of his porch roof that had collapsed. He was one of the council members. Turning to Duffy, Sigigi spoke quickly and hurried across the square.

"Is Sigigi leaving?" asked Marcus.

"No, he said go on up to the cave. He'll be back. He's 'doing a kindness.'"

"Sigigi told us about you, Duffy," said Boomer. "How long have you lived here?"

"Since I was 9 years old. The Little People found me in the woods. I am 18 now."

"Did they keep you here?" Hailey asked.

"No, I didn't want to go back. I ran away from my family. My father died and my mother remarried. Her new husband didn't want me around."

"Oh. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to pry."

"That's okay. This is my home now. I have a place here. I can help because I'm so big. Last year when there were big storms, I went around to all the towns and helped clean up. I can lift tree branches and clear rock slides. The Little People have helped the Big People lots

of times. It's only fair."

Rain had been thinking about something Duffy said earlier. "What did you mean by Sigigi 'doing a kindness'?"

"Come on. I'll show you around the cave. We'll get some food first, and then I'll tell you."

When they entered the cave, the kids were astounded by how big it was—and delightfully cool. Everyone called out a welcome to their visitors. Many women stood up and cheerfully invited them to eat from their clay pots. With all the cooking, Rain wondered why the cave was not smoky. He would have to ask Duffy about that.

Duffy went to a corner of the cave where he kept his belongings. He retrieved some of his larger bowls and spoons that would be a better fit for the kids than those used by the Little People. He handed them out to his guests and helped them to fill their bowls from the fires of the best cooks. Accepting small amounts from each cook, the kids soon had full bowls. Lunch that day was an assortment of grilled fish, corn soup, green beans, corn bread, and pudding made from dried pumpkin. After they sat down with their meal, Duffy answered Rain's question.

"Well, Sigigi can tell you more about 'doing a kindness.' But I know the story pretty well. It goes way back—to when many groups of Little People followed their tribes here. They had as many different ways of

doing things as the Big People. Some of the tribes that came here had even fought each other in the past. This caused quarreling among the different towns. But the elders put an end to it. They said that the Little People had to make harmony among themselves. One way to do that was to perform a kindness for someone each day—especially someone who has different beliefs from yourself.”

Rain was listening very carefully. “What do you mean by different beliefs?”

“You saw the man who Sigigi went to help? That is Chukmena. He doesn’t like the Little People to go to the Big People’s towns. He thinks it does them harm. He really doesn’t like Sigigi learning English from me or listening to the radio. But Sigigi respects him and tries to understand the way he thinks. Sigigi would do anything to help him.” Duffy paused to eat some fish and a chunk of cornbread.

“Anyway, ‘doing a kindness’ helped to stop the trouble among the Little People. Since then the towns have intermarried, and the language they speak shares words from their different languages. They have come together like the Tribes in Taniba Springs.”

Boomer looked up from his bowl of corn soup. “Here comes Sigigi.” The young man made his way to where they were sitting. He spoke to Duffy and then went to dish up some soup for himself.

Duffy got up. “He says Chukmena has invited us to come eat a special treat made from wild grapes.”

This is what Marcus wanted to hear. “Oh, boy. Dessert!”

“Sounds like something my Granma makes,” Rain said.

Sigigi rejoined them. “Come on. I take soup with me. Chukmena and his wife, Toloowa, want to hear about diabetes. His wife is healer that say young men get ‘sting by bee.’ Come Duffy. The bee sting Big People, too.”

They all tramped out of the cave and followed the path to Chukmena’s summer house. The council member welcomed them and they sat down under the newly mended porch roof. Hailey and the boys ducked carefully under the thatched covering—they didn’t want to damage the new repairs. Chukmena and Toloowa served up the grapes that had been boiled until they had formed their own syrup. Their tartness had been cut very lightly with a small amount of honey. Sprinkled with a variety of crushed nuts, the grapes were delicious.

Sigigi said, “Rain and Boomer can tell us about the sickness that came upon our young men. Rain says that the eagle gave them this knowledge.”

Rain had talked about type 2 diabetes many times, but today he was a bit nervous. He wanted to make a good impression. Choosing his words carefully, he said, “The eagle told us to respect the healthy ways of our

ancestors. We should be very active—always moving our bodies. He brought a rabbit to teach us that we should eat nutritious vegetables and fruits. When we don't follow these healthy ways, like eating too much of the sweet, greasy foods at the campground, the body may get out of balance. This imbalance caused the young men that Sigigi told us about to become thin. It also caused the sweetness in their urine, um...water, that made the bees swarm around it." Rain tried to explain about glucose and insulin, but Sigigi had difficulty translating these terms. Duffy didn't have the words in his vocabulary, either. But they did their best.

Finally, Sigigi said, "You were right, Chukmena, to make us stop eating the food at the campground. And, you were wise, Toloowa, to believe it had something to do with the bees finding sweetness in the water."

Chukmena was impressed by the eagle's wisdom. He certainly understood the concept of imbalance in the body. He thought that it was probably not by accident that Sigigi had the great fortune to find these two boys. "I am glad to hear this. We will continue to advise our young people to only eat the food that we hunt and grow here."

Toloowa had been most attentive to what Rain had told them. To Sigigi, she said, "Tell this young man I have many questions to ask about diabetes. I want to learn more about this glucose and how the unused sugar

affects the body. Why did the young men make water so much, and why did their bodies starve?” Sigigi translated her words.

“You must be a very good doctor,” Rain said. “Um... those are good questions. I’ll ask my mother to explain more about it to me. She works with people who have diabetes.” Rain didn’t know how he could get the information to Toloowa, but her smile assured him that she liked his answer.

Changing the subject, Chukmena said to Rain, “You said we have to figure out a way to get the people in Taniba Springs to choose a plan that makes work in the town—not in the forest. Who can tell me more about the other plans?”

After Sigigi translated, Rain replied, “Well, actually, there is only one plan left. The man who wrote one of them is named Thomas Wang. But he can’t come to present it.”

Hailey spoke up. “Without a presentation, Mr. Wang’s plan probably doesn’t have a chance. But I am worried that the business committee likes Eugene’s plan so much that—even if he *doesn’t* present it—they will choose his plan anyway.”

Chukmena took a bite of his grapes and chewed slowly. Then he asked Hailey, “Can someone else speak for this Thomas Wang?”

Hailey looked at Rain and Boomer. “I don’t think so—

do you?” The boys agreed that it was unlikely.

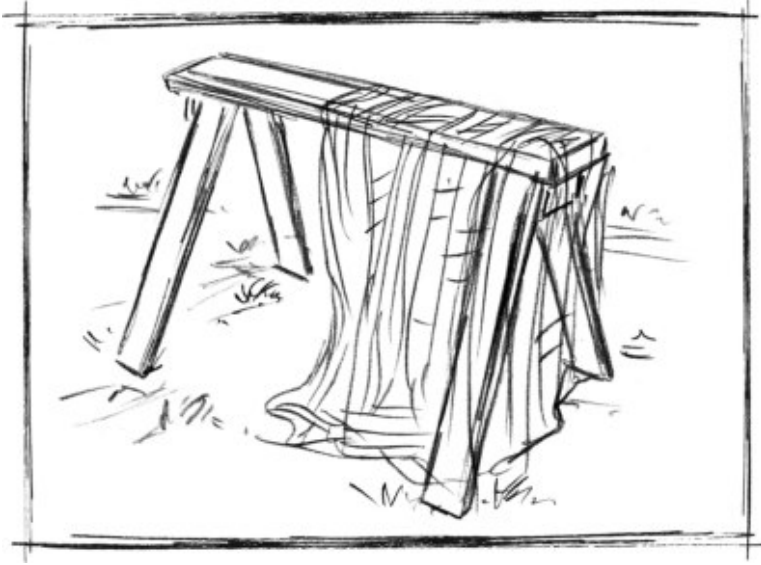
“Do the people in Taniba Springs know him?”

Hailey conferred with Rain and Boomer again, then answered, “He lives very far away. I doubt it.”

Chukmena smiled mysteriously. He leaned over to Sigigi and spoke very quietly.

Sigigi looked at the elder with surprise. “Of course, why didn’t I think it? The Two Rabbit!”

Chapter 16



The home-made gun fired and the net splayed out, falling upon the unsuspecting sawhorse...

Lennie in the Net

Lennie looked at the clock. It was getting late. He had assembled a recognizable net gun from forty dollars' worth of PVC pipe, couplers and joiners, wood screws, and various other small parts that Max had bought at the hardware store. The online instructions were pretty simple, but he wasn't sure it would work until he tested it. Lennie had been anxiously keeping an eye on Max through the glass partition that separated his "office" from the rest of the old barn that served as a hangar and mechanics shop. His boss had been hunched over the phone all morning. What was he doing in there?

Lennie glanced at the smaller of their two helicopters. He wanted to get the net gun assembled as quickly as he could. He had to get moving on some scheduled maintenance for the four-seater before it could fly another tour. Max was a real stickler about safety. He'd never failed an FAA inspection.

Lennie finished attaching the weights on a large circle of netting, then bent his head to study the instructions for inserting the CO₂ cartridge in the net gun. Because of his training in the military, Lennie was a certified aircraft mechanic, and he could build and repair anything. But he had no ambition to move on to a better paying job. He didn't want to leave home. Unfortunately, Max was the only guy with a need for an aircraft mechanic at Taniba Springs. What if he wouldn't help Max capture one of the Little People? Would he get fired? Lennie wiped some sweat off his forehead. All he could hear was Myrtle's warning: "Leave it alone, Lennie—before it's too late."

Lennie picked up some scraps from the net gun materials and pulled out the large drawer where he kept his personal things. He collected all kinds of odd-and-ends—bits of metal, plastic, nuts and bolts—just any object that might be used to construct one of his "tinkers." That is what Lennie called the small sculptures he made—most of them no more than four inches tall. A cardboard box in the drawer held several of his recent creations: a water bird with a bobbing head, a futuristic-

looking motorcycle, and a running dog with a cone-shaped hat on his head. Lennie didn't know it, but any folk museum would have felt privileged to display his sculptures. He was that good. Lennie sometimes thought that the tinkers he made for Gussie were why she married him. Instead of flowers and candy, he gave her tinkers. She had loved his bears playing stickball and the dancing dragonfly. Lennie smiled at the dog in the party hat. Gussie would like that one.

Lennie heard Max slam down the phone. He quickly shut the drawer. Glancing up, he thought, Uh-oh, he's in a bad mood. Better try to keep him happy.

Max came storming out of the office. "Nobody gets it! I've found Munchkinville and they don't get it! I called all these stupid @%!!8?* and they ain't interested!" He thumped a notepad in Lennie's face that listed the phone numbers for every news outlet he could find on the Web. "Nobody at a newspaper would talk to me. And TV was just 'call your local affiliate, sir.'" Disgusted, he slumped in an old office chair and growled, "What a bunch of clowns..."

"Yeah, clowns," Lennie said, pretending to be disappointed.

Still whining, Max said, "Look at this list, Lennie. I called all these supermarket tabloids. Only five would talk to me."

Lennie kept his eyes on the net gun's CO2 cartridge.

“Which ones were those?”

Max flipped up a page and squinted at his notes. “Ah... *National Chatter*, *Tattle-Tale*, *Dish&News*, *Cosmos Celebrity*, and *Weekly Planet*. They said they’d get back to me if I sent video.” Max got up and began to pace. “Man, what’s the matter with these guys? *Weekly Planet* ran a front page story last month called ‘I Had a Date with Bigfoot!’ I read it online! And the Pioneer Channel did a whole special on mermaids and centaurs. But, nooooo...they’re not interested in Little People!”

“They probably get a lot of cranks, Max. You know, calling about UFOs and stuff.”

“Yeah, well, I ain’t no crank. I’m not talking Bat Boy and Elvis. We’re gonna show ’em, Lennie. We’ll get our hands on the big money. You and Gussie will be living high on the hog. And I can pay off the debt on these dang helicopters!” Max suddenly stopped pacing. He was staring at the net gun. “Hey, that’s looking good. When can we try it out?”

Lennie clicked the trigger several times and picked up the cartridge. Looking up, he said, “Right now.”

Max headed toward the open barn door. “Come on. Let’s play Spiderman.” He put up the “Closed” sign and went around to the side of the barn that faced away from the road. Lennie followed, looking for a suitable target. He spotted the old sawhorse sagging against the water pipe and hose used to wash down the helicopters.

Lennie loaded in the CO₂ cartridge and pointed the net gun. He hollered, “Here goes!” and pulled the trigger. The homemade gun fired and the net splayed out, falling upon the unsuspecting sawhorse like a hungry octopus. Max whooped.

Lennie just stood staring at the sawhorse. He was imagining the net falling over *him*.

“Hey! What’s wrong with you? Max yelled. “It worked great!”

Lennie’s face was glum. “Max? What are you gonna do with the Little People? Are you bringing them back here?”

“You mean, what are *we* gonna do. We won’t come back here. We’ll take ’em out to this shack way out on Reservation Road. I took some crates out there we can use for cages. I don’t want anybody poking around when we’re unloading them. Then, we’ll put ’em on the truck and come back here.”

The word “cages” made Lennie cringe. Mustering all his nerve, he said, “I don’t know. I don’t think I can do this, Max. Can’t you get somebody else?”

“Hey...we’re not kidnapping people. We aren’t gonna get arrested. This is like trapping a fairy tale. We’re just gonna prove the Little People are real.”

“It’s not getting arrested that I’m worried about—it’s what the Little People will do to us!”

“Man, you and these stupid superstitions. Look, all we gotta do is make a video like they said. Then we can let ’em go.”

Lennie’s expression lightened a little. “For real?”

Seeing that Lennie was wavering, but still not completely convinced, Max threw his bomb. “You know, Lennie, if I have to find somebody else to be my partner, you just might have to look for another job.”

The bullying got Max the leverage he wanted. Losing his job was Lennie’s worst fear. He convinced himself to believe Max’s lies. “Okay, okay, Max. I’m in if we let ’em go. You promise?”

“Sure. You can trust me....”

The rest of afternoon they spent testing the net gun. Max even took up one of the helicopters and had Lennie practice on the sawhorse at different altitudes. He wanted to make sure that Lennie could catch their prey. In the barn, Lennie also practiced firing the net gun at Max, tying him up in the net, rolling him in a tarp, and fixing it to the helicopter. The only mishap was when one of the net weights hit Max on the forehead. It left a bump—but it didn’t knock any sense into him. For the last test, Max put some rocks in the net and practiced lifting and flying with it. By late afternoon, they had the drill down pat.

Lennie wasn’t surprised when their activities attracted attention. A car had turned off the main road and

was pulling up in front of the barn. He recognized the driver—Agnes Bird, a sociable old gal who occasionally nudged “friendly” over into “nosy.” Lennie waved a greeting. “How are you, Agnes?”

“Just fine. What are y’all doin’?”

Max winked at Lennie. “Ah, I’m thinking of contracting with the feds—you know, moving nuisance animals like bears or deer back into the national park.”

“Oh, yeah? I didn’t know you could catch ’em from a helicopter. Makes sense though. I heard bears have been bad this year—breakin’ into cabins, tearing up cars...”

“Yeah, bears are pesky that way,” Max smirked. “Always prying into things.”

“Uh-huh. Well, it looks like you fellas got it under control.” She turned the car around and headed back into town.

Lennie sighed. “This is gonna be all over the rez by suppertime.”

Max watched her go. “Big deal.”

“When are we going to do this, Max?” Lennie asked tensely.

Patting the homemade net gun, the pilot laughed and said, “Operation Leprechaun’ takes off day after tomorrow.”

Chapter 17



*"Hee! Hee! I don't have to introduce myself to you. You already know me...
'cause I'm the rabbit in that story!"*

The Laughing Place

With the council's blessing, Sigigi and the kids were on their way to seek the help of the Two Rabbit. As they started up the mountain that bore the trickster's name, Sigigi made a strange discovery. A deep groove suddenly appeared in the center of the trail. Examining it carefully, Sigigi said, "This must be where dust come from we see before." Unable to identify its source, Sigigi merely avoided the places where the trail had been churned to powder. As they climbed higher, Sigigi would occasionally stop and listen before going on. Finally, he turned to his young followers and asked, "Do you hear?"

The kids strained their ears. It was Marcus who heard it first. “Somebody’s laughing.”

Sigigi smiled and said, “Yes. This way.”

Boomer whispered to Rain, “Do you think it’s the Two Rabbit?”

Rain just shrugged his shoulders; he didn’t know what he sounded like. As they followed Sigigi, the “hee-hee’s” and “haw-haws” got louder until they arrived at an overhang that jutted out over the valley below. Suddenly, the laughter stopped.

Sigigi said, “Wait here.” He found his footing on a slope that provided an approach to the source of the merriment. Scrambling halfway up, he paused and made the whirring call of the cicada. The kids looked up, waiting. In the silence, all they could hear was a slow trickle of water that seeped from the rock formation above. A bush rustled. Hailey drew in her breath and whispered, “Look!”

Above them, two long rabbit ears, illuminated by the late morning sun, were slowly rising from behind a clump of ox-eye daisies. Thin-skinned and tracked with delicate veins, the ears blazed like a pair of pink glow sticks. The head, to which this neon vision was attached, suddenly thrust through the flowers and yelled, “Well, Howdy-do! Is that you, Sigigi?”

“Yes! It’s me.”

“What brings you to my Laughin’ Place?”

“I bring these young ones. We come to ask for help.”

The Two Rabbit looked down upon his four young visitors. He immediately knew who the two boys were—Rain that Dances and Boomer. Thistle had described them well. So, he thought, it was Sigigi who Rain had been chasing in her dream. He would have to find out more about that. But who, he wondered, are the girl and little boy?

The rabbit focused his large brown eyes forward at Marcus. Coyote and Thistle had urged him to tell new stories to children—stories about garden foods that would help them to be healthy. Like all the animals of stories, he knew that young children heard their voices more clearly than older ones or grown-ups. The Two Rabbit smiled his long-toothed smile. The little boy looked like his best opportunity. Excitedly, he called out to Sigigi, “Bring that little ’un up to see me” and bounded back into the bushes.

Sigigi made his way back down the slope. He told the kids that the Two Rabbit wanted to meet Marcus. The little boy looked to his sister for assurance. “It’s okay, Marcus. Sigigi will be with you,” Hailey said.

“Yes, you go first, Marcus,” Sigigi said. “Then Hailey, Rain, Boomer come up.”

Marcus climbed up the slope behind Sigigi. He was a little scared, but mostly excited. When they reached the

overhang, he didn't see the Two Rabbit at first. Then he heard a high-pitched voice that sounded old and young at the same time.

"Welcome to my Laughin' Place. What might your name be, young fella?" The rabbit was sitting on a stump with one knee crossed over the other. He'd been rosining his fiddle bow.

"My name is Marcus."

The rabbit laid down the bow. "Well, I'm mighty happy to meet you, Marcus. Come over here and set down. Tell me now, do you like stories and fiddle music?"

"Uh-huh."

"That's good. 'Cause I'm gonna play you a tune sometime. Now tell me, you ever heard any rabbit stories?"

Marcus's face brightened. "We saw a puppet show about a rabbit and a turtle that were in a race. And there's this book in my room at school that Mrs. Davis read to us. It's got a story about a rabbit who asked a cow for some milk and she wouldn't let him have any. So he tricked her into running at a tree and her horns got stuck. Then he got his children—all these little rabbits—to bring buckets and they milked the cow and they got all they wanted."

The rabbit slapped his knee and laughed. "Hee! Hee! I

don't have to introduce myself to you. You already know me!"

Marcus widened his eyes. "I do?"

"I know you do—'cause *I'm* the rabbit in that story!"

Marcus was puzzled. The animals in the book were cartoons. How could this rabbit be that rabbit? Pushing that thought aside, he said, "How come you can talk? I didn't know rabbits could really talk."

The Two Rabbit reached down in the grass for his corn cob pipe. He'd given up smoking years before, but he liked to chew on the old pipe when he told a story. "I can talk 'cause I got stories to tell. How'd you like to hear some of 'em?"

Marcus was hooked. "Yeah!" He sat down on the ground in front of the rabbit. Then he remembered. "Oh, I can't stay long. My sister said our dad wants us back at the hotel in time for lunch."

The rabbit dismissed Marcus's worry with the wave of his paw. "Don't you fret. You'll be eatin' a sammich with your daddy before you can say 'Impty-Umpty.'" The trickster's eyes began to twinkle. "Time is a real interestin' thing, Marcus. There's all kinds of time. Why there's sometime, anytime, daytime, nighttime, downtime, halftime, and the same time. Then there's supper time, bed time, summer time, winter time, meantime, overtime, and ah, let's see, which ones did I leave out?"

“You didn’t say play time.”

The rabbit slapped his knee again and shook his head in disbelief. “Why, how could I forget play time? I declare! I must be losing my wits.” The trickster hadn’t entertained a child in a long time, and he was enjoying himself enormously. “Oh, indeedy, there’s all kinds of time...but there’s *nothin’* like story time. Story time is real special—mostly ’cause it ain’t got no time at all!” Getting ready to commence his first tale, the rabbit thought to ask, “Oh, by the way, you got any brothers, Marcus?”

“No, just my sister, Hailey.”

“Well, then. I can be the brother you ain’t got. Why don’t you call me...Brother Rabbit?”

“I thought your name was the Two Rabbit.”

“Oh, it is, and for good reason,” the rabbit said. “But I got lots and lots of names.” Looking around as if it were a big secret, he whispered, “You wanna hear my favorite name?”

Marcus nodded. “What is it?”

“Ol’ Hoppum-Skippum Run and Jumpum.”

The boy laughed. “That’s funny!” Then he asked shyly, “Will you call me Brother Marcus?”

“Why, I surely will! When you come passing by, I’ll tip my hat and say, ‘How you doin’ this mornin’, Brother Marcus?’ And you’ll say, ‘Mighty fine, Brother Rabbit,

and you?”

Marcus jumped up and pretended to tip a hat at the rabbit. “Like this?”

The rabbit was pleased. “You’re a smart boy. After you hear my stories, you’ll be even smarter. Now, let’s see. How ’bout we get started with ‘Brother Rabbit Falls Down the Well,’ and then maybe ‘The Rabbit and the Hawk.’ Oh, I almost forgot—I got to tell a story ’bout one of my garden raids, too.” Looking over his shoulder, the rabbit called out to Sigigi, “You ain’t noddin’ off over there?”

Sigigi was sitting on the ground, leaning up against a stump. He’d been repairing a tear in a moccasin. He looked up. “No, I listen. I like stories.” Flattering the rabbit a little, he added, “Ones you tell top of playlist.”

Brother Rabbit began by telling about the time that he’d fallen in a well with two buckets. When Brother Fox discovered him, he told the fox that he was fishing in the well and had caught a big mess of fish. Brother Fox wanted some fish, too. The rabbit said he got in the bucket at the bottom of the well, and told the fox to get in the bucket at the top of the well. The fox’s weight pushed his bucket down, and pulled the rabbit’s bucket up. As they passed each other in the well, Brother Rabbit said he hollered, ‘Fill your belly with fish, Brother Fox!’ Finishing the story, he hooted, “When I got to the top, I just jumped out and ran off!”

“How did Brother Fox get out of the well?” Marcus wanted to know.

“Oh, that wasn’t my problem. But, he was back chasin’ me the next day. Maybe he pulled the same trick on somebody else. But that ain’t hard.” Cocking an eye at Marcus, the rabbit chuckled wisely. “Plenty of folks will jump in the bucket and get pulled down by their own hunger and greed.”

Without even clearing his throat, Brother Rabbit hopped right into the next story. “Now this next one is about the time the hawk caught me. See, he had his claws in the back of my neck, but he was even greedier than Brother Fox.” Brother Rabbit went on to describe how he tempted the hawk by promising him a poke of partridges—if the bird would release him just long enough for him to flush them out of his briar patch. “See, I had to stop struggling long enough to think how to get out of a tough spot.”

“Did you get him some partridges?” Marcus asked.

“Oh, no, Brother Marcus, that’s not what us tricksters do! When he let me go, I run off. There were plenty of partridges in my briar patch. But they wouldn’t be the hawk’s meat—not that day.”

Fully warmed up, the rabbit didn’t even take a breath before launching his garden tale. “Now this one run like this...I was mighty hungry one mornin’ and I spied a garden full of greens, peas, tomatoes and...” He went on

to tell how a little girl sat beside the garden gate. He told her a fib, saying her daddy had said to let him in. She did and he ate his fill. He repeated this trick for several days until her daddy realized the garden was being raided. Then the man set a box trap filled with peanuts. The little girl let the rabbit in the next day, and he got caught in the trap.

“How did you get away?”

“Well, let’s just say that I have a way of gettin’ folks attention. I told her I’d dance for her if she let me out. She opened up that box and out I danced. I frolicked right smart that day. She couldn’t take her eyes off me. I danced right through the garden gate and all the way home!”

Marcus could just see Brother Rabbit hip-hopping out the gate. “That was a good one. What’s the next story about?”

The rabbit saw his opening. “Well, just hold on now. I’m glad you liked that story, Brother Marcus. Cause there’s a real big lesson in it. The lesson is that people would be a whole lot better off if they raided a few gardens now and then.”

“You mean we should steal like you do?” Marcus said innocently.

“What? No, no! That’s not what I meant.” The rabbit frowned and pulled at one of his whiskers. Hmm, this wasn’t going exactly as he’d planned. There might be

a few things about this “helping” business he needed to learn. Shaking his head, he said, “I ain’t saying you should be doin’ like me—just *eatin’* like me. You need... ah, greens, cabbage, corn, peas—not to mention carrots ’n turnips—and tomatoes, squash, and beans. And fruit, too!”

The rabbit stopped talking and swallowed hard. “Oh, Lordy, Brother Marcus, I’m makin’ my own mouth water just thinkin’ about them carrots and peas!” Trying again, he said, “Now listen here. I had to stay healthy so I could run fast and think fast. And you need to stay healthy, too. Friends of mine been tellin’ me that folks need to get smart ’bout what they eat. And that’s no joke!”

Marcus was always suspicious when anybody started talking about vegetables. He informed the rabbit that he only liked to eat spaghetti, pea soup, and oatmeal. Skillfully changing the subject, he asked, “Brother Rabbit, how did you think up all the tricks in those stories?”

The rabbit needed time to reconsider his “garden” approach. With tricking he was on safer ground. “Why, Brother Marcus, those tricks been around a long, long time. Some of ’em come from stories Indian folks told about their tricky ol’ rabbit. He’s one troublesome joker. He can poke a hole in some critter’s puffed up pride faster than you can say ‘split lip, pop eye, big ear, and bob-tail.’” Stopping just long enough to give his stomach

a good scratch, the rabbit went on. “My other stories come from Africa. That story you told me about the cow? Why, that story was told about a little African hare named Zomo. Tell me, you ever heard ’bout Ananzi the Spider-Boy?”

“Yes! Mrs. Davis read us a story called Ananzi and the Bean Pot. She said Ananzi was a trickster.”

Brother Rabbit took the empty pipe from his mouth and nodded with a wink: “Well, ain’t that a coincidence—I just happen to be a trickster myself! And I know lots of Ananzi’s tricks. One of ’em was that he could turn himself into a boy when he wanted to. Now, one of my favorite tricks is the time I changed myself into the Willa-the-Wust. I sure did scare Brother Bear that time...”

Sigigi cleared his throat. He hated to interrupt because he liked stories, too. But the Two Rabbit sure did like to talk! “Excuse me, but, ah...that why we come to see you. Little People in big trouble. We need you play big trick.”

This got the rabbit’s attention immediately. “Tricks? Well, you just said the magic word!”

Sigigi described the trouble with the helicopter and how the Little People were threatened by the possible discovery of their towns. To avoid this disaster, the Little People were proposing a strategy that involved a shape-shift. Sigigi gave the rabbit some details about Eugene’s

proposal to bring tourists into the forest and Thomas Wang's plan that would keep them in Taniba Springs. Concluding, Sigigi said, "You change into Thomas Wang and give his talk. When Big People see and hear you, they forget Eugene."

The Two Rabbit, aka Brother Rabbit, aka Chufezomo, looked at Sigigi skeptically. "Whoo-wee. That's a tad complicated!" Scratching his head, he said, "My trickiness ain't what it used to be, Sigigi. I got to build up my strength for a shape-shift. I'll need some big-time storytellin' to power up."

"The young people I bring can help tell stories!" Sigigi offered happily.

Thinking this a grand idea, the rabbit called out, "Hey! You fine young folks! Come on up here!"

Hailey groaned, "At last."

Rain stood up and yelled back, "We're coming! We've just got to get these papers back together." While they had been waiting (apparently the rabbit was in no more hurry than Sigigi), Rain, Boomer, and Hailey had followed Sigigi's suggestion that they read Thomas Wang's proposal *very* carefully. They didn't know why Sigigi was so interested in a proposal that would have no one to present it, but they would find out soon enough.

Hailey and the boys climbed up the slope to the overhang where the Two Rabbit was waiting for them. Needing no introductions, he said, "Well, howdy-do,

Miss Hailey. Welcome to my Laughin' Place. I hear you got lots to tell me about some fella name of Mr. Wang."

"Mr. Wang? Oh, sure. Uh, I'd be glad to."

Then turning to the boys he said, "And looky here, we got Rain that Dances and Boomer. How you doin'? The Little People been treatin' you right?" The boys nodded, assuming that Sigigi had told the Two Rabbit about them. To make certain of their safety, the rabbit hopped up on a rock and thrust his muzzle into Rain's face. "You sure now? You wouldn't tell me no tale?" Staring cross-eyed at the rabbit's split lip, Rain stuttered, "I'm fine.... we're fine!" Geez, he thought, what was that about?

Marcus ran around Sigigi to his sister. "Brother Rabbit's been telling me stories. About how he tricked a fox and fooled a hawk into not eating him, and he scared a bear, too! He said he'd play his fiddle for me."

Hailey's looked puzzled. Then her eyes grew wide. Turning to the rabbit, she cried, "I know who you are. You're *Brer* Rabbit!

"No, he's not!" Marcus protested. "His name is Brother Rabbit."

Nodding at her brother, Hailey said, "Yes, that's right, Marcus. 'Brer' means 'brother.'" Looking around at the rabbit's mountain retreat, Hailey was amazed. "So, this is your Laughing Place. We saw a play at school in the fifth grade about you. And a griot visited our class last year and told us Brer Rabbit stories and stories from

Africa.”

It didn’t take much for the rabbit’s ego to begin inflating. Swaggering a bit, he said, “Well, naturally you’d be hearin’ a lot ’bout a famous fella like me!” However, he lost some of his buoyancy when he confessed, “But, ah, I might need some help pullin’ off this shape-shift that Sigigi’s talkin’ about...I ain’t *quite* as popular as I used to be.”

Rain and Boomer were startled. “Shape-shift? What shape-shift?”

Sigigi explained. “Chukmena solve problem. He say Two Rabbit turn into Thomas Wang and give talk. Now you got to figure out how we do this.”

Rain stared at Sigigi. “We have to figure it out?”

“Yes, we need much storytelling...then Two Rabbit have ‘battery’ to make shift. Stories make him grow strong. I tell Little People to tell rabbit story, too.”

“By the way, just when do I have to pull off this little ol’ ‘transmogrification’—hee, hee—as us tricky fellas call it.”

“If that means a shape-shift—by tomorrow,” Rain answered gloomily.

“Oh, my, my! That’s mighty quick!” Figuring that the speedy timeline gave him some leverage, the rabbit decided to extract a perk in exchange for his services. Drawing himself up, he addressed the kids in silky multi-

syllables of the most refined nature. “Well...in that case, I have certain requirements of a personal nature that must be met before a deception of this momentousness can be successfully achieved.”

“Are you saying you want something?” Boomer asked.

“Uh-huh. A Cobb salad. But hold the bacon, of course.”

Chapter 18



There must have been a million stories on the Internet about rabbits. Rain pulled up some of the sites and started printing. Before long he had a tidy pile of rabbit stories.

Wabbit Power

Sigigi accompanied the kids back to Bear Cove Campground. They got back so quickly that they didn't have much time to think about—much less discuss—the huge task they lay before them. Marcus ran on ahead to the campsite, but Rain, Boomer, and Hailey lingered in the woods with Sigigi.

“So, Sigigi, I just want to make sure we understand what we're supposed to do,” Rain said. “We have to get our friends to help us tell as many rabbit stories as we can. That's so the Two Rabbit, um, Brother Rabbit,

that is, will have enough power to change himself into Thomas Wang.”

Boomer added, “And he said *any* kind of rabbit story would be okay, not just stories about him. Right?”

Sigigi said to both of them, “Yes. You right.”

“But,” Hailey pointed out, “we have to make sure that the most storytelling is happening during the presentation at two o’clock tomorrow afternoon.”

Understanding the challenge, Rain said, “This is going to take a storytelling network. And we’ve got to do it fast. Hailey, you’ll have to call your friends. And I’ll call our friends in Thunder Rock.”

Rain ran his fingers through his hair, thinking about another problem they had to solve. Groaning, he said, “Oh, great....so how do we get Brother Rabbit into the hotel?”

Hailey glanced at Boomer and joked, “Haven’t you figured that out yet, Boom?”

Boomer looked surprised: “Uhhh, no...not really.”

“Well, better hurry up, Boomer,” Sigigi teased. “I bring Two Rabbit to hotel in morning. In woods—behind picnic table.” The little man smiled at his young friends and faded silently back into the forest.

Hailey and the boys turned and pushed their way through the bushes that bordered the campsite. Not seeing her brother, Hailey called, “Marcus, where are

you?”

Marcus poked his head out the tent flaps. “I’m in here! Are we going to the hotel now?”

“Yes, we’re going. What time is it anyway?” She pulled out her cell phone, which hadn’t been working earlier. Staring incredulously at the screen, Hailey yelled, “12:30? That can’t be right!”

Boomer was confused, too. “Yeah, I don’t feel like we’ve been anywhere. Haven’t we been hiking for hours? I’m not even sweating.”

“Me neither,” Rain said. “Yeah, this is weird. Turtletown was miles away, but we got back here in no time.’

Crawling out of the tent, Marcus shouted, “That’s because it’s story time. There’s no time in story time! Brother Rabbit told me about it.”

Rain looked intently at Marcus for several seconds. Finally, he said, “You know, Marcus, you may be right. Maybe we’re in a *story*.”

“Okay, so we’re in a story,” Hailey said, throwing up her arms. “That’s as good an explanation as any. Why not? Little People...storybook rabbits? I’m gonna worry about all that later. We’ve got work to do now.”

Following Marcus, who had charged up the road to the trolley stop, Hailey and the boys began to devise a plan for transporting Brother Rabbit into the hotel.

Waiting for the trolley, they began to work out how and where they could stage the shape-shift. And, once boarded and seated, they strategized how to provide Brother Rabbit with the suit and shoes he would require. However, getting off the trolley at the hotel, Marcus reminded them that they had forgotten one little thing.

Rain laughed. “What’s that, Mr. Smarty?”

“Brother Rabbit’s salad!” Marcus hooted triumphantly.

“Well,” his sister said, patting him on the back. “You can order it at dinner tonight. Daddy will think it’s a miracle.”

Entering the hotel, Hailey ran upstairs to her room and dumped the bag of proposal papers in her closet. Then she joined the boys at precisely 1:00 p.m. in the lobby. She sat down next to Rain and they called their friends. Hailey had to leave messages, but Simon answered. Rain gave him a brief description of what was going on and asked him to get Hummingbird and Arianna together for a Skype session. He closed the cell phone just as Don and Gerald showed up.

The little party decided to get lunch on the patio of one of the hotel’s grills. Although they’d eaten lunch at Turtletown, it was in another “time zone.” The adventurers were famished. After placing their orders, Gerald asked if they’d enjoyed the morning. Choosing his words carefully, Rain replied that it had been

“action-packed”—an assessment that the others did not contradict.

“What do you think you’ll do this afternoon?” Don asked.

“Well, Daddy,” Hailey said, “we thought we’d Skype with some of our friends at home. Show ’em some of the pictures we’ve taken.”

“Yeah, Boomer and I are gonna chill out, too. We have to save our energy for the powwow tonight,” Rain explained.

When the food arrived, Marcus surprised everyone by sucking on his lower lip with his incisors and announcing in a folksy voice: “I’m mighty hongry. My mouth’s just a-waterin’!” Don gave Marcus a funny look—where did that come from?

Hailey whispered to Rain “Oh, no. He’s doing Brother Rabbit. He’s going to tell everything...”

“Don’t worry. If he does, they’ll just think he’s playing. Believe me, I’ve been there.”

The waitress set a spaghetti salad and pea soup in front of Marcus. He dug in, twisting some noodles around a bit of chopped tomato and cucumber. When he popped a forkful in his mouth, Don almost fell off his chair.

“I thought you ordered spaghetti, Marcus. That’s a salad with vegetables.”

“I know. I’m on a little garden raid. That’s all.”

To head off any further conversation about gardens (and potentially, rabbits) Hailey quickly changed the subject. “Daddy, would you let us use your computer this afternoon?”

Switching his attention to Hailey, Don said, “Sure.” Luckily, he distracted himself further by reminding her that she hadn’t called in during the morning as she’d promised. Replying truthfully, Hailey said, “Sorry, I tried, but it just wouldn’t connect. I’ll do better tomorrow.”

Eager to get on with the tasks that lay ahead, the kids passed up dessert. Don had been tempted, but he said he’d follow his children’s good example and forego the brownie. Before heading back to the conference center, Gerald told Rain and Boomer that he would meet them back at the campground after his last session was over at 5:00 p.m. He would pick up something for burgers and they could do a camp supper before going over to the powwow grounds. Naturally, Rain reminded him to buy low-fat ground beef and whole wheat buns.

After the dads left, the kids remained sitting on the patio. Hailey said to Marcus, “We’re going to go up to the room and get on the computer. What do you want to do?”

“There’s a magic show at Kid’s Alley. Can I go?” Marcus replied.

“It’ll cost us,” Boomer interjected. “If we leave him there, we’ll have to pay.”

Rain reached in his pocket and pulled out his spending money. Boomer did the same. They chipped in and bought a couple of hours of supervision for Marcus. Rain glanced at his disappearing ticket money. “Gee, the Mystery Spook House seems like a thousand years ago.”

“Yeah, but who cares about our eyes playing tricks on us when we’ve got the real thing, RD.”

After parking Marcus at Kid’s Alley, Hailey led Rain and Boomer to their rooms upstairs. She headed directly to her father’s room and opened the closet. Inside was a large luggage bag. She wheeled it out and pulled the zipper. The bag’s cover flopped open, revealing a sizable compartment.

“Do you think he’ll fit in there?” Hailey asked.

“Yeah, he should,” Boomer replied.

Thinking ahead, Rain said, “Will your dad come up to his room during the lunch break tomorrow?”

“Maybe. If he does, we’ll have to wait until he leaves to get the bag and bring Brother Rabbit up here.”

She reached up to the clothes bar and slid over a dark suit on its hanger. “I think Daddy’s wearing this to a talk he’s giving tomorrow. We could use the blue blazer he’s got on today for Brother Rabbit.” Looking at the pair of pressed khaki pants that hung next to the suit, she said,

“I guess he could wear those.”

“What about shoes?” Rain asked.

A pair of dress shoes and sneakers were on the floor of the closet. “The rabbit will have to wear the loafers Daddy’s got on now. My father has more sense than to wear loafers with a suit.” Hailey walked over to the dresser and opened a drawer. “There’s several shirts and a couple of ties in here. We can definitely put together an outfit for ‘Mr. Wang.’”

“How do you know all this stuff about what goes with what?” Boomer asked.

Pretending to stick her nose in the air, Hailey giggled and replied, “My girlfriends and I are fashionistas, my dear. We even put on a fashion show that’s on YouTube.”

Boomer suddenly remembered something important. “Hey, what does Thomas Wang look like anyway? Won’t the rabbit have to know?”

“Oh, man!” Rain said. “I forgot about that! Let’s go online and see if there’s a picture of him.”

Hailey went next door and got her bag of proposals. She chucked it on the desk and pulled Don’s computer out of its bag. Rain shuffled through the proposals and located Thomas Wang’s. He found the page with his company name, Transnational Development Corporation. The address was for the company’s U.S. office in San Francisco. After Hailey pulled up a search

engine, she typed in the company name and “Thomas Wang.” The search produced a Web site and a profile, but there was no photo.

Toggling back to his profile, she quickly read through it. Turning to the boys, she said, “It says Thomas Wang has lived in California for 8 years, and he studied economic development at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. His specialty is tourism.”

“So who do we know from Hong Kong?” Rain joked.

“Nobody, I guess,” Boomer replied. Suddenly inspired, he shouted, “Oh, I know! How about Jackie Chan? He’s from Hong Kong.”

Rain was impressed. “Yeah, that’s cool, Boom! Brother Rabbit can turn into somebody famous!” Jackie Chan was the boys’ favorite movie star. They watched all his old movies on TV.

Hailey turned back to the computer. There was no lack of photos of the well-known actor. She printed one. Giggling, she handed the sheet to Boomer. “One Thomas Wang, coming up.”

Rain’s cell phone rang. He spoke briefly. Hanging up, he said, “That was Hummingbird. She said they’ll be on Skype at Simon’s house at four o’clock our time.”

“Was she very surprised by what’s going on?” Hailey asked.

“Well, she doesn’t know the details yet. But Bird won’t

be blown away. She's been through some pretty tricky..."

Boomer interrupted. "She's already been blown away. You know that burping contest with the coyote that I told you about? Well, he did a burp so big it blew off Hummingbird's shoes. We have a new friend, Arianna—she moved to our rez from New Mexico. Her family's Hispanic. Anyway, she got her shoes blown off, too. I don't guess much could surprise them after that."

Hailey looked shocked. "No, I guess not. But my friends haven't met any coyotes. What am I going to tell Natalie and Makayla and my cousins when they call? They'll think I'm crazy."

The boys didn't answer. Sitting down on the bed, Rain thought it best to move on to the next problem. "What kinds of rabbit stories are we going to read? I guess we can print off some from the Internet."

"We can watch videos—videos are storytelling, too. And there's Bugs Bunny comics online," Boomer said.

Hailey said, "Marcus has the *Bugs Bunny: Lost in Time* game on his Play Station®." Then she started free-listing rabbits: "Let's see. There's Peter Rabbit and his sisters Flopsy, Mopsy, and Cottontail, Uncle Wiggly, Peter Cottontail, the Velveteen Rabbit, um...Benjamin Bunny. Mom used to read Marcus Pat the Bunny, but that's for babies. Oh, we have a book called *Tops and Bottoms*—the rabbit in that one is like Brother Rabbit, I think. Who else?"

“You left out the Energizer Bunny and the Easter Bunny,” Boomer said.

“Boomer, the Energizer Bunny is a commercial.... we’ve gotta be serious.”

Rain went to the computer and typed in “Tops and Bottoms.” The book came up on YouTube. Then he typed in “Brother Rabbit stories,” “American Indian rabbit stories,” “African rabbit stories,” and “trickster rabbit.” Pages and pages of sites popped up. There must have been a million stories on the Internet about rabbits. Rain pulled up some of the sites and started printing. Before long he had a tidy pile of rabbit stories.

Boomer wasn’t finished with the rabbit list. “Okay, so what about Jessica Rabbit? She’s pretty cool.”

“Oh yeah, that cartoon movie—*Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*” responded Hailey. “She was in that. She didn’t look like any rabbit I ever saw.”

Boomer started to object, but Rain interrupted. He had found some Nanabozho stories. “The Ojibwe trickster rabbit can shape-shift. We ought to read those. Hey, you guys ever heard of a pooka?”

“A what?” Hailey asked.

“It’s an Irish spirit—a shape-shifter. There’s a free online movie called *Harvey*. It’s about a pooka named Harvey who’s a giant invisible rabbit.”

“Gee, that should charge up Brother Rabbit’s battery

if somebody watches that movie,” Boomer said.

Rain’s phone rang again. He answered. “Yeah, you’re on? We’ll call you. Okay, bye.”

Hailey and Boomer pulled up chairs next to Rain. He clicked on the Skype icon, added Simon as a contact, and hit the video call button. A few seconds lapsed, and the image of Hummingbird, Arianna, and Simon filled the screen.

Everybody yelled and waved at each other. Rain jumped right in. “Hey, you guys. This is Hailey Jackson. We’re going to tell you more about everything that’s going on, but I just want you to meet Hailey first.”

Hailey smiled and waved. “Hi, everybody!”

Hummingbird cried, “Hi! I’m Hummingbird. Oh, I wish I was there!” Bird put her hand over her mouth, “Oops, sorry, we said we’d take turns and not try to talk all at once. So, ah, this is Arianna.”

“Buenas dias!” Arianna said. “Hi, guys. I just got back from New Mexico last night. We were visiting my grandmother. I’m glad I got back in time to meet you, Hailey. Here’s Simon.”

“Hi, Hailey. RD said you had a brother. Where is he?”

“Downstairs at a magic show. He’s only 6 years old.”

“He’s a great little guy,” Boomer said. “He went with us to Turtletown and to see Brother Rabbit.”

The blank looks from the three kids in Thunder Rock

told Rain that it was time to fill them in on the whole story. He summarized the events since yesterday as best he could. Simon and the two girls asked lots of questions about the Little People and Sigigi, and they were enthralled by the description of Turtletown. Then Hailey provided more details about Eugene Frimble and Thomas Wang, and Boomer took over when they got to Brother Rabbit and the shape-shift.

Simon was amazed. “All this happened just since yesterday?”

“Yeah. We think it’s got something to do with ‘story time.’” Rain said. “That’s what the rabbit told Marcus.”

Hummingbird cut to the critical question. “So Brother Rabbit is a trickster?”

Rain nodded. “Every inch of him.”

Hummingbird looked at Arianna and Simon. “I guess it’s a rabbit this time instead of a coyote.”

Simon laughed. “Sounds good to me. What do we have to do?”

“Recruit kids to tell rabbit stories,” Rain said. We have to build a network that will generate the ‘juice’ that Brother Rabbit needs to transform himself into Thomas Wang.”

Arianna was the first to make a suggestion. “I could get my type 1 diabetes support group to help out. We call ourselves ‘Type 1 Tweenies.’” She explained to Hailey

that she had a kind of diabetes believed to be caused by the immune system attacking the pancreas where insulin is made. Her online friends were good at sending advice and best wishes. Convincing them to read some stories for a good cause would be easy.

Hummingbird jumped right in, offering to do some local organizing. “I’ll get Sammie, Little Deb, Star, and Walter and Larry...and my mom and auntie would join in. RD, I know your Granma would tell stories to your little brothers.”

But Simon, inspired by that well-known hunter of rabbits, Elmer Fudd, was thinking big. Squinting into the camera, he uttered just two words: “Wabbit Power.” Pulling out a notebook, Simon started making a list. “I’ll send out e-blasts, tweets, post links to free videos and movies, and share YouTube sites and music, too.” Looking up, Simon said in his most serious voice, “Hailey, have you ever seen Kung Fu Bunny in *Paws of Fury*?”

Giggling, she replied, “No, I’ve never even heard of it.” Hailey whispered to Rain and Boomer, “Simon is a trip!” Playing along, she asked, “What music would you share?”

“‘Fourteen Carrot Love,’ of course.”

Rain and Boomer cracked up. Who but Simon would remember that old Benny Rabbit song on the Muppets? “Yeah, *Wabbit Power*!” Boomer yelled. “This is gonna



work!”

“Okay, okay,” Rain said. “Let’s get started. But before we go, you should know that Boomer and I have told Hailey about the eagle, our rabbit, and the coyote. She and her brother are part of the gang now. We’re all in this together.”

“That makes seven of us,” Hummingbird said. “We’re growing!”

“Welcome to the Veggie Crowd!” Arianna cried.

Simon was liking the sound of the storytelling network. “Yeah, all in it together. This is going to be a fun. No fossil poachers or bullies to give us a hard time.”

“Right, Simon. No bad guys.”

Chapter 19



Eugene abruptly put down his coffee cup...then he stood up and stared in Cricket's direction.

Rabbit Comes and Eugene Goes

The next morning, Max Bigelow turned the helicopter slightly and headed toward the tallest landmark in Taniba Springs—the Crystal Mountain Casino and Hotel. He flew confidently over the reservation, the noontday sun beaming brilliantly overhead. The smile on his face told the story. Max was a happy man. He had been worried that “Operation Leprechaun” was being planned with one detail missing—the exact location of the place where the Little People lived. But now he could locate the hidden town precisely as four miles due east of Black

Rock Mountain. The thermal imaging camera had been a great idea!

A volunteer with the local fire department, it had been simple enough for Max to borrow one of their hand-held cameras. The screen had revealed the cooking fires, warm earth of cleared garden patches, and other heat-related evidence of the Little People's activity that glowed yellow and red against the cooler blue of the surrounding forest. Max had even been able to identify several open areas that would be perfect for a helicopter landing.

Whistling a cheerful tune, Max lined up the helicopter with Reservation Road as he flew over the hotel. He anticipated clear skies ahead for Sky High Tours.

Rain stood under the canopy roof at the hotel's back entrance. He was watching Boomer pull the luggage bag across the red and brown patterned carpet of the hotel's rear foyer. Hailey had called and given them the "all clear" that her dad had left his hotel room. Everything was going according to plan.

The automatic door slid open and Boomer emerged. He set the bag upright. Before Rain could ask, he said, "She's got the salad in the refrigerator."

They glanced over at the picnic tables. Eugene sat at one, eating a sandwich and flipping through a folder. Rain said, "Sigigi said that he eats lunch out here every

day; I guess he was right.”

Boomer suddenly pointed above the trees that separated the picnic area from the parking lots. “Hey, there goes that helicopter.”

“Yeah, but without Eugene this time,” Rain said. He reached down and closed the zipper on the luggage bag’s side compartment. It was an unnecessary, nervous gesture. “I hope Eugene doesn’t see us drag the bag into the woods.”

Calmly, Boomer said, “Come on. If he looks up, we’ll just wait until he looks down again.”

Boomer grabbed the handle of the bag, and they began walking along a flagstone path that curved to the left of the picnic area.

As they passed Eugene, Rain said, “Look at him, Boomer. He’s working so hard.”

“Yeah, I know. Makes me feel guilty. But we gotta do this.”

The path dropped slightly and veered left, paralleling a thickly wooded area. The boys continued on to a stone water fountain and then abruptly turned off behind a screen of dogwoods. With the bag bumping over roots and pine cones, they moved forward until the trees had closed behind them.

Rain stopped and looked around. “This looks okay.” The boys sat down on a large tree root. It didn’t take long

before the woods around them erupted into a vocal array of chirps, tweets, and caws. Little People were there and in greater numbers than the boys expected.

Sigigi emerged from behind a hedge of wild rhododendrons. Cricket was with him. She waved at the boys and then reached back to hold up a low branch heavy with white blossoms. Brother Rabbit bounded forth. “Well, howdy-do!” he called out. “If it ain’t Thistle’s favorite young’uns.”

The boys stood up and greeted the rabbit. Sounding more confident than he felt, Rain said, “We think we’ve got everything worked out.”

“Yeah, we got kids readin’ rabbit stories like crazy,” Boomer said proudly.

Brother Rabbit shuffled his feet back and forth and pumped his front paws in the air. “Oh, I can feel it! Yessiree! I’m feeling mighty fine!”

Rain noticed that the white hair on the rabbit’s muzzle had darkened. To Sigigi he said, “You know, he does look younger...”

Sigigi agreed. “He hop fast.” Looking at the bag, he added, “So, show us what you got.”

Boomer wheeled around the luggage bag. As Rain leaned down and unzipped it, Boomer whispered, “Who’s Thistle?” Rain gave Boomer a glance and shrugged. As little kids, they had referred to her only as Miss Rabbit.

They had no clue that “their” rabbit and eagle even had names.

Pointing to the interior of the bag, Rain said, “Uh, I hope you’ll be comfortable in here. You won’t be inside very long. We’ll be taking you to Hailey and Marcus’s hotel room.”

At the mention of Marcus’s name, the rabbit brightened even more. “Well, I’ll be real happy to see Brother Marcus again.”

The rabbit hopped over to the bag and began to sniff it. While he examined his transport, Rain told Sigigi that Eugene was sitting at one of the picnic tables. He could hear some sadness in Rain’s voice.

“Yes, we watching now.” He turned to his sister and told her that Rain and Boomer were feeling bad about Eugene. Cricket walked over to the boys and spoke briefly to them. She smiled reassuringly at Rain.

Sigigi translated. “She say, ‘Don’t worry. She take good care of Eugene. He get lost a little bit. Then come back later.’ He be okay.”

Brother Rabbit finished his inspection. He nodded at the bag and said, “Let’s try this thing on for size.” He got in and looked up at the boys. “Well, anybody gonna zip me up?”

“Ah, sure.” Boomer pulled the two zippers together from each side of the bag. From inside, the muffled voice

of the rabbit cautioned, “Better leave me a teeny-tiny air hole!”

Boomer left a three-inch opening at the top. “How does it feel in there?”

“I ain’t no hutch rabbit—so I’m a little squeezed and squozed. But, it’ll do.”

“Okay,” Rain said, “we better get going before Eugene finishes lunch.”

Sigigi said, “Good luck. We catch you on the flip-side.” Cricket waved good-bye and they were gone.

Boomer pulled and Rain pushed the bag with its trickster cargo out of the woods and back onto the stone path. Once they got on the flat surface, the bag moved along quite easily. Brother Rabbit only weighed about 8 pounds, big for an eastern cottontail.

When they passed Eugene, he looked up and raised his hand in a friendly greeting. The boys grinned and waved back. They felt crummier than ever.

Sigigi and Cricket joined several young men from Turtletown. They had been scouting out Sky High Tours and the hotel since they found out that Eugene was responsible for the flights over the Little People towns. Sigigi told them they could go home. Now everything was up to Cricket.

With Sigigi following, Cricket moved quietly through

the woods until she was directly behind the table where Eugene was sitting. She looked about and saw that he was the only person remaining at the picnic tables. She turned and smiled at her brother. Cricket knew why she had been chosen.

To prepare herself, she stood up to her full 23 inches and took four deep breaths. Then she began to sing. Indeed, Cricket (Cholotka) was well-named. Her first notes were like the thrumming chirps of a cricket's song. The song itself was not unusual; only its midday recital was a little odd. However, as she continued singing, Cricket performed a mental trick that was truly miraculous. She began to think of snowflakes. The more she thought about them, the cooler and slower her singing became—until finally, Cricket's voice was a swaying, soothing “forest song” of the greatest peace, harmony, and serenity.

Eugene abruptly put down his coffee cup, knocking his folder off the table. The irresistible charm of her melody had reached his ears. Ignoring his notes that began to blow about in the grass, he stood up and stared in Cricket's direction. He stepped over the table's bench and began to walk slowly toward the trees.

Inexplicably, Eugene's gangly, uncoordinated body began to stride forward with a new balance that propelled him out of the sun and into the forest's shade. With great agility he ran between the trees—running,

running until the green gloom closed in and he, for a time, remembered nothing.



Brother Rabbit got a funny look on his face...the troublesome incisor had suddenly dropped down and stuck on his lip. At the same time, one of his ears commenced to sprout, and an itchy whisker started working its way out of his cheek!

Chapter 20



*Rain joined the others in the reception area outside the conference room.
Hailey was already reading her rabbit book.*

Mr. Wang Tells a Story

Hailey opened the door and Boomer pulled the luggage bag into the room. Laying down the Peter Rabbit story he'd been reading, Marcus ran over to the bag. "Is he in there?"

The rabbit put his mouth to the air hole. "That sounds like Brother Marcus! You gonna bust me loose from this croker sack?"

Rain unzipped the bag and Brother Rabbit skipped out. He looked around the room. "Hmm, this is right nice." Wasting no time, he asked, "You got my salad?"

Hailey hurried to the refrigerator. “I’ll get it.” The rabbit followed her. She took out the plastic container and removed the lid. He sniffed at the tender varieties of lettuce and delicately pulled out a slice of avocado. He closed his eyes and slurped in the creamy treat. The rabbit smacked his lips. “Mmm, yummy. You like avocado, Brother Marcus?”

“I don’t know what it is.”

“Well, I’ll give you a taste later.” He handed the plastic bowl back to Hailey and said, “So, what we doin’ first?”

Hailey answered, “I thought you might want to look at these key talking points I pulled out of Thomas Wang’s proposal.” The rabbit did not accept the folder she offered to him. “Well, ah...if you can’t read, I’d be glad to read it to...”

Brother Rabbit was indignant. “Girl, what you talkin’ ’bout? I’m a literary tradition. Of course I can read!” Smiling, he added, “It’s just that I already know what I’m gonna say.”

Rain murmured, “Uh-oh.” What did the trickster have up his sleeve?

Boomer got the photo of Jackie Chan and handed it to the rabbit. “We thought this picture would help you with the shape-shift. It’s not Mr. Wang, but we thought it might look like him.”

“Oh, yeah? Good thinkin’. My transmogrifyin’ gets a whole lot better when I got me a picture.”

Hailey slid open the closet door. “We’ve got some clothes that you can wear.”

Brother Rabbit hopped excitedly to the closet. “From what you told me, Mr. Wang must be a mighty bright fella. I bet he’s a snappy dresser, too. You got a silk suit and tie in there?”

“Ahh, no, just this blazer, blue shirt and khaki pants. They belong to my father. Sorry, but he’s more preppy than snappy.”

The rabbit was a bit disappointed, but he didn’t let on. Pointing to the bottom of the closet, he cried, “Now, looky there, that’s a pair of brown loafers if my eyes don’t lie! I love a comfortable shoe.”

“It’s getting late,” Rain said. “How long will it take you to turn into Thomas Wang?”

As if he had all the time in the world, the rabbit replied, “Just as long as it takes.” He picked up the picture and asked Hailey for the coat, shirt, and pants. Then he hopped into the bathroom and put the photo of Jackie Chan on the rim of the tub. Picking up the pants, he daintily put one foot at a time into the legs and pulled them up. Looking down at the khaki-colored puddle that covered the lower half of his body, he laughed and said, “I think I’m gonna need a belt.”

Hailey handed him one of her father's belts. Brother Rabbit took it and looked at her expectantly. "Well?"

"Well what?"

"I need my privacy."

Embarrassed, Hailey exclaimed, "Oh!" and closed the door.

From behind the bathroom door, the rabbit called out sweetly, "When I come out, I'll be a new man! Hee-hee-ha!"

The kids sat on the bed and waited. Several minutes went by. Finally Boomer broke the silence. "You didn't miss anything at the powwow last night. RD and I danced like we had rocks in our moccasins."

"Sorry, we wanted to go," Hailey replied. "But Marcus went to sleep."

Rain laughed. "So did we."

"Yeah, we should have practiced," Boomer admitted, "but, man, I was tired. We even missed the fireworks. But it was fun meeting some of the kids from around here."

Looking at the clock, Rain said, "I guess we should be reading rabbit stories."

Hailey cried, "I can't believe it! I'm just sitting here like a goof." She jumped up and dashed into the next room to get the excerpts from *Watership Down*, a story about English rabbits, which she had printed from the

Internet. She also grabbed a collection of stories she had found online about the African hare, Zomo. Marcus retrieved his Peter Rabbit story, and Boomer finished reading a story about Brother Rabbit outsmarting a lion.

Instead of reading, Rain kicked back on the bed and started checking out the Wabbit Power traffic on his cell phone. “Man, Simon’s been busy. The tweetosphere is going crazy! Your friends are doing great, Hailey.”

Suddenly, they heard the crash of breaking glass and an explosive sneeze accompanied by a peculiar, squishy, sucking sound.

“What was that?” Boomer yelled.

Hailey ran to the bathroom door. “Are you all right?”

“Yeth. I jus’ got dizzy for a second. Having some trouble with the nosth. Thorry about the water glath!”

“Sounds like he’s having trouble with his tongue too,” Rain said.

The seconds ticked by. Then Brother Rabbit called out: “Okay, I got mosth of it. Come on in...”

The boys crowded around Hailey as she opened the door. Jackie Chan was standing at the sink looking in the mirror. But something was terribly wrong. He couldn’t close his mouth. A long incisor was caught on his lower lip. In obvious distress, the rabbit said, “I’m tryin’ to suck up this big toof. Can one a’ you hep me, pleesh. It needth a push.”

Rain went to the sink and put his thumb against the bottom of the incisor. He pushed gently and the tooth slid right up into the bone. Brother Rabbit turned and looked in the mirror again. He grinned from ear to ear. “Well, hello there, Mr. Wang!”

At 1:45 p.m., the kids and the transformed Brother Rabbit made their way to the third floor elevators—with laptop and rabbit stories in tow. Marcus pressed the lobby button and they waited for a down arrow. Finally the elevator doors opened on a small group headed to the casino. With Hailey and Marcus on one side and Rain and Boomer on the other, “Mr. Thomas Wang” stepped into the confined space and turned around, facing the doors. The kids quickly crowded around him, but not before a couple at the back began whispering, “Did you see that guy? He looks like Jackie Chan.” Heads began to turn.

Rain watched the floor number change (agonizingly slow) from 3 to 2. The elevator stopped. A guy got on and immediately started gawking. “Hey, mister, uh, did you know you look just like Jackie Chan?”

Rain kicked himself. How could we have been so dumb? Why did we pick Jackie Chan?

Drawing himself up to his full height, Brother Rabbit turned to the gawker and dismissed him with a disdainful sniff: “Jackie who? My name is Mr. Thomas

Wang.” Nobody said a word.

The doors opened on the lobby, and the five scurried out, turning immediately toward the conference center. Boomer had been stifling a laugh that exploded as soon as they got past the bank of elevators. Hailey looked over her shoulder. No autograph seekers were following them.

Rain cried, “Oh man, ‘Jackie who?’ That was funny! Okay. Here goes our last trick. Everything is up to Brother Rabbit after this.”

He walked quickly over to the front desk, carrying an envelope addressed to Bill Owens, Chairman, Taniba Springs Economic Committee, Conference Room B. Inside was a note from Thomas Wang (written by Hailey) stating that he had arrived that morning in Taniba Springs and would like to present his proposal if time allowed. Rain gave it to one of the clerks and hurried away.

He joined the others in the reception area outside the conference room. The large open area was furnished with a couple of couches, benches, and scattered groups of lounge chairs. Boomer and Marcus had put their stuff on a bench and were getting some ice from a table that offered complimentary coffee and bottled water. “Thomas Wang” was settled in a lounge chair opposite one occupied by Hailey. She was already reading her rabbit book. Except for them, the reception area was empty.

Rain walked over to the closed double doors of the room where the proposals were being presented. He glanced through the windows. Committee members were sitting at a long dais, listening to a presenter who was wrapping up a slide show. Rain could see the back of Don's head in the audience. Gerald was sitting in a chair on a side aisle.

Just then Rain heard someone behind him. He stepped aside and a hotel messenger pushed quietly through the double doors. He watched the messenger deliver an envelope to the committee chairman. The chairman opened it, read the contents, and passed it to the committee member beside him. The audience broke into polite applause as the last presenter thanked everyone for their attention.

After a few minutes, the chairman announced that their next presenter was Eugene Frimble. When Eugene didn't come forward, the chairman called out his name. But there was no Eugene. One of the committee members walked to the back of the room and pushed open the doors. He called, "Is Eugene Frimble out here?" When no one answered, he went back to the dais and conferred with the other committee members. One of them gave him the envelope. He returned to the reception area and called out, "Mr. Wang? Mr. Thomas Wang?"

Brother Rabbit answered, "Over here!"



The committee member approached and held out his hand. “Welcome, Mr. Wang, We’re glad you could make it.” Brother Rabbit got up. He shook the man’s hand and said, “I’m glad to be here.” Then he followed the committee member into Conference Room B. As he passed Rain, the rabbit whispered, “Showtime!”

The chairman announced the change in agenda to the audience. “It seems that Mr. Frimble isn’t here at present, but one of the other companies that submitted a proposal has been able to send their representative. So, we might as well use the time slot. Hopefully, Mr. Frimble will be able to join us later.” The committee chairman (who thought that Thomas Wang looked like Jackie Chan) leaned back in this chair and said, “Mr. Wang, we’re all ears.”

The rabbit chuckled to himself, “Hee-hee! You think you got ears!”

Starting off in a serious tone, Brother Rabbit thanked the committee for hearing “his” proposal. He then made some general statements about the importance of revitalizing successful tourism models to keep pace with new trends in the industry. Walking back and forth in front of the dais, the trickster droned on in this manner for a few minutes, lowering his voice with each pass before the audience. Pumped up by the power in the Wabbit energy grid (and a couple of charms he was working), his listeners soon were under his spell.

Sticking his hands in his pockets, the rabbit stopped and fixed a gleaming, rascally eye on the committee members. He grinned and announced: “Now this all leads me to the point I want to make and that is—*that we all go down to the millpond for a little fishin’!*” The rabbit slapped his knee and hee-hawed like a donkey. “Oh yeah! I remember the last time I went to the millpond it was late at night. I was with Brother Bear, Brother Fox, and Brother Wolf, and we had one “wang-dang-doodle” good time!”

Rain, who had been keeping watch, yelped, “Oh, no! What’s he doing?”

Hailey, Marcus, and Boomer leaped up and ran to the doors. They crowded next to Rain, trying to get a glimpse through the windows. Marcus jumped up and down, but he was too short. He pulled at Hailey’s arm, shouting, “I can’t see!”

Hailey ignored him. She was so amazed by Brother Rabbit’s performance that she failed to notice when Marcus stomped off in a huff. Holding forth as if he were sitting in his rocking chair, corn cob pipe in hand, the rabbit had everybody laughing. “Well, when I told Brother Fox that we couldn’t do any fishin’ that night ’cause the moon fell in the pond, he was mighty disappointed. Of course, Brother Terrapin was in on the joke, and he told Brother Bear and Brother Wolf they might want to jump in and catch the moon ’cause she

was hidin' a big pot of money." The committee members and audience were leaning forward in their chairs, their faces beaming, eager to hear more about the profitability of moon-fishing.

Pulling the committee further into the millpond, the rabbit continued the story: "Well, ol' Bruvver Foxth thaid leth's get uth a net and wade in and fith out the moon..." Brother Rabbit got a funny look on his face and stopped in mid-sentence. The troublesome incisor had suddenly dropped down and stuck on his lip. At the same time, one of his ears commenced to sprout, and an itchy whisker started working its way out of his cheek! "Thomas Wang" began to look a lot more like Bugs Bunny than Jackie Chan.

The rabbit quickly clapped his hand over his mouth and scurried to the back of the conference room. He had to escape before he melted into a pile of haberdashery! The kids immediately saw that the rabbit was in trouble.

Rain yelled, "The Wabbit Power is failing!"

Boomer recognized the problem right away. "We stopped reading!" Looking around, he hollered, "Where's Marcus?" Hailey ran for *Watership Down*, but Boomer headed toward the nearest book, *Peter Rabbit*. It was on the floor where Marcus had dropped it. Boomer picked up the book and flipped it open to a page at random. In his well-known thunderous voice, he bellowed out, "His coat was pulled off, and he was rolled up in a bundle,

and tied with string in very hard knots!”

Just as he reached the doors, Brother Rabbit heard Boomer. His ear immediately curled back on itself and the whiskers reabsorbed. More critically, the rabbit was able to nudge the tooth back into place with his tongue. Miraculously, Boomer’s ear-shattering recitation had made up in volume for what was missing in quantity.

With his shape-shift re-energized, Brother Rabbit returned to his audience. “Now as I was sayin’...”

Boomer was able to lower his voice when Rain chimed in with an oral reading of “Nanabozho and the Spirit Bride.” He got further relief when Marcus returned from the bathroom. Hailey prompted him to keep reading. The little boy immediately started “Brother Rabbit and the Hawk,” one of the stories the rabbit had told him. The kids almost stopped reading when they heard a burst of applause. Rain looked up and said, “I guess it’s over.”

“Yeah, but we got to keep going until he’s back in the hotel room,” Boomer cautioned.

Suddenly, the double doors opened and the attendees came spilling out for the break. Everybody was talking about how Mr. Wang’s unique approach to creating community investment in the moon-fishing enterprise. Brother Rabbit slowly disengaged himself from the cluster of committee members that surrounded him, nodding and smiling to comments of “Excellent

presentation!” and “Wonderful proposal!”

When he finally made his way over to the kids, the exhausted (but happy) rabbit looked at Rain and asked, “What’s up, doc?”

“Let’s get out of here while we’re ahead. You can change in the room, and then we’ll meet Sigigi out back.”

Boomer volunteered, “I’ll stay here and find out when they’re going to pick the best proposal. Then I’ll come up.”

Everyone except Boomer headed upstairs. Brother Rabbit went into the bathroom and transformed back, without difficulty, into his normal shape. Hailey picked up her dad’s clothes from the bathroom floor, brushed them off, and hung them neatly in the closet. She couldn’t get all the little grayish-brown hairs off the blue blazer, but she hoped Daddy wouldn’t notice.

Brother Rabbit hopped to the refrigerator and got his salad. He waited while Hailey laid down a white paper napkin on the room’s office desk; then he hoisted himself into the chair. He wanted to enjoy a proper meal. He had almost finished it when there was knocking at the door.

Hailey let Boomer in. His face was flushed with excitement. “They’re gonna vote before they adjourn at six o’clock. They’ll wait until five o’clock for Eugene, but if he doesn’t show up, they’ll go ahead with the vote.”

Brother Rabbit wiped his mouth daintily with a

napkin and pronounced the salad, “Scrumptious.” “Well, young folks,” he said, “I’m ready to get in my wagon. That was a bunch of fun. I haven’t felt this good in years.”

Boomer rolled out the bag and the rabbit got in. The kids looked at him in awe. “You were just fabulous!” Hailey gushed.

Rain said it all. “You’re a genius. What a trick! If they choose Mr. Wang’s proposal and the Little People’s towns are safe—it will all be because of you.”

With uncharacteristic modesty, the rabbit cautioned, “You better watch out. You keep talking like that and I’ll swell up so big, you won’t be able to zip up this bag.”

Hailey said, “I’ll stay here and wait to hear which proposal they choose.”

“Right, okay,” said Rain. “When you find out, go to the picnic area and give us the signal. We’ll be watching.”

Boomer zipped up the bag. Followed by Rain and Marcus, he pulled it to the rear foyer and out onto the pathway behind the hotel. When no one was looking, they hauled the rabbit into the trees. Sigigi was waiting for them. Rain explained to him that Hailey had stayed behind to find out how the committee would vote.

For once, Brother Rabbit was quiet. Tuckered out, he found a niche between two tree roots and was soon snoozing. Marcus pulled out his PlayStation® and started

to play *Bugs Bunny: Lost in Time*. Following his lead, Boomer retrieved a copy of *Bunnicula: The Vampire Rabbit* he had stuck in the luggage bag's side pocket. It would help pass the time—besides, it was funny. Who could resist a vampire rabbit who sucked the juices out of vegetables?

Rain, however, started pacing. Sigigi tried to distract him with a chat about his favorite recording artists, but he was only partly successful. Rain kept checking the picnic area every couple of minutes for Hailey's appearance.

Luckily, they didn't have to wait until 6:00 p.m. Shortly before 5:30, Hailey came running out of the hotel. She dashed down the stone pathway, hollering "The vote's in!" Rain quickly emerged from the trees and pulled her into their hideaway.

"Tell us what happened!" Rain demanded.

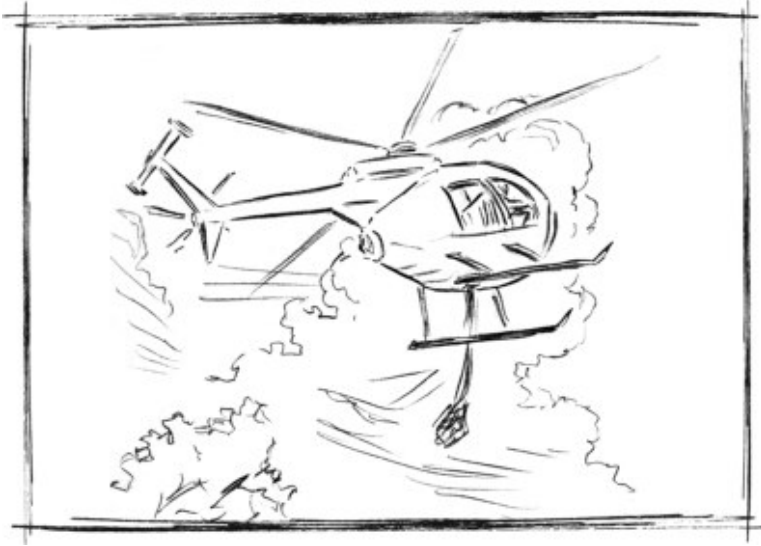
Hailey was jumping up and down. "Mr. Wang won! The vote was unanimous!" Everyone broke into a yell of celebration.

Startled awake, Brother Rabbit held up his paw for Marcus to pull him up. Chortling a well-earned, "Hee-hee-hee," the rabbit said, "That's mighty good news. You happy now, Sigigi?"

Sigigi had plopped on the ground in total relief. He was laughing. Struggling to stand up, he said, "Best Two Rabbit trick ever!" After everyone finished

congratulating each other, Sigigi invited them to Turtletown the next day, “We bring all town together. We eat, dance, play ball. Have ‘open house party’ like nobody see before!”

Chapter 21



Max leveled off and headed directly over Turtletown—his stolen treasure spinning slowly at the end of a long cable attached to the fearsome whirling bird.

Max Crashes the Party

The next morning, Max Bigelow headed out the door of the reservation newspaper office and joined a line of tourists in front of a breakfast truck in the parking lot next door. He had just arranged for a reporter and photographer from the *Taniba Springs Herald* to show up at Sky High Tours that afternoon for a big news story. When the newspaper manager asked Max what the story was about, he only gave a hint about “leprechauns,” and that it would put Taniba Springs on the map. Although the “tip” sounded like some phony promotion, the newspaper manager said she would send out somebody.

It would be a slow news day until the powwow competitions that night.

Slurping his coffee, Max congratulated himself on getting the free publicity. Where now? he thought. Oh, yeah, gotta buy some rope. Without looking, he dashed across the street to the town's hardware store. The driver of the tourist trolley who had just turned the corner slammed on the brakes. Hailey and Marcus, who were riding on top, lurched forward, but luckily didn't fall out of their seats.

"What happened? Marcus cried.

"Oh, nothing," Hailey said, "just some guy not looking where he was going."

She settled back into her seat as the trolley made its stops in town. Hailey used the time to text her friends, Natalie and Makayla. She told them that the storytelling network had been awesome, and they had been a big part of it. On last count, over 300 kids had told, read, or watched a rabbit story. She promised to tell them all about it (well, some of it) when she got home.

Boomer was waiting for them beside the road when the trolley arrived at Bear Cove. As they clumped down the steps from the upper deck, he yelled, "Come on, slowpokes! We're ready to go." Hailey and Marcus were as just as eager as Boomer.

"Gosh, Boomer," Hailey exclaimed, "this is going to be some party. Little People from all the towns are coming."

“I wanna learn that ball game those kids were playing,” Marcus said.

When they arrived at the campsite, Hailey asked where Sigigi was. Rain replied that he was taking a nap in the tent. Although Sigigi had told him that Eugene was fine, he couldn’t wait to ask Hailey if she had seen him.

“No, but Daddy talked to him. He said that Eugene didn’t know what happened. He was thinking about his presentation, and the next thing he knew he was wading in this little creek behind a school. Some kids playing on the playground saw him. The last thing he remembered was some crickets chirping. Daddy said he looked really sleepy. He told Eugene that he was probably working too hard.”

“How did he feel about missing his presentation?”

“He was really disappointed. But he understood that a decision had to be made.”

“He miss out this time, but go away more wise,” Sigigi said. “Little People show him some things he remember one day.” Rain began to feel better about the situation. He understood that Eugene had not really lost—he would go home with knowledge that would benefit his work in the future.

Rain and Hailey checked in with their dads by phone and then prepared to accompany Sigigi to Turtletown. The young man of the Little People told them that they

would be the honored guests for today's celebrations. The town was also preparing a feast for the Two Rabbit that a delegation from the council would deliver to his Laughing Place.

Having once made the trip to Turtletown, the kids knew what to expect. This time they were more sure-footed and more curious about places they had only briefly glimpsed the first time. Sigigi took them to two remarkable sites that blew them away: the "Hummingbird's Tail," a fan-shaped waterfall that reflected and refracted light into a rainbow of colors, and "Elder Rock," a limestone outcrop that wind and rainwater had carved into a wrinkled, smiling old man.

As they headed into the valley below Two Rabbit Mountain, the kids began to see and hear the signs of many Little People. They could look down and see dozens of tiny trails threading through the forest—all filled with little folk in single file trekking toward Turtletown. In the distance, they could hear the thrumming of drums and scores of high-pitched voices trilling a welcome to their relatives.

Finally they arrived at the tree entrance to the town that they had used before. Following Sigigi down its roots, the kids burst upon a celebration in full swing. From the stomp ground came the sound of drums, the calls of dancers, and the rattling of river stones in tiny turtle shells. Cooking fires glowed everywhere and from

inside the great cave came the delicious aroma of turkey, fresh trout, delicately spiced bird's eggs, boiled corn and beans, squash dumplings, and more.

When they spotted Marcus, a crowd of children pulled him to their outdoor fire where they were popping popcorn. Duffy was supervising. He handed Marcus his own popcorn popper and showed him how to put hot sand in a lower compartment of the clay pot. Then he added popcorn cobs and told Marcus to pull off the pot lid when he couldn't hear popping anymore. Marcus served up several pots of fluffy white kernels as an appetizer. When it was time to eat, Duffy led the children to the cave where they were given generous helpings. Marcus ate fewer choices than the other kids, but he discovered that he really liked turkey stew with corn.

But food wasn't the only item on the menu. When he had barely finished eating, Duffy invited him to play ball with the children. Marcus followed the boys and girls to the tall pole with the fish on top. Duffy gave him an adult-sized hickory stick with a net on one end. He told Marcus to try to get the little ball away from the other players and hit the fish with it. Marcus watched the boys play the girls for a few minutes and then joined the game. Although he lacked skill (his additional height was no advantage), Marcus played with enthusiasm. He managed to hit the pole once, but not the fish.

Back at the stomp ground, Rain, Boomer, and

Hailey had joined the merrymakers in their social dancing. When they came to a temporary halt, Sigigi told the crowd that Rain and Boomer had come to Taniba Springs to do a dance that looked like grass. Everyone called for the boys to dance for them. With the accompaniment of a drummer who followed their movements, they gave a graceful presentation that wowed their audience. Even though they did not have their regalia to mimic the swaying of grasses, the Little People said they could see the wind blowing grass in the movement of their bodies.

Out of breath, but happy with their performance, they followed Sigigi to Chukmena's house. Once again, he and Toloowa had invited Hailey and the boys to share food with them. This time it was a feast. Everyone helped themselves to wildfowl and fish, fresh and cooked vegetables, and whole-grain breads made from a variety of seeds.

They ate in silence for several minutes. Then Chukmena invited some lively mealtime conversation. With Sigigi translating, he said that he wanted to hear more about the Two Rabbit's shape-shift. Rain, Boomer, and Hailey were only too happy to entertain the old couple with Brother Rabbit's masterful telling of "The Moon in the Millpond." But before they could describe how the rabbit's "transmogrifying" suddenly shifted into reverse, Sigigi interrupted them. "Hold that thought,

guys. We have to pause for a word from our sponsor.”

Osihishi the Headman was hurrying to join them. His face beaming, he called out, “Welcome! Welcome!” Sitting down, he accepted a bowl of corn and beans from Toloowa (she knew his tastes were simple and that the dish was his favorite). “Chukmena, your idea to have the Two Rabbit perform a shape-shift was brilliant. But it would never have succeeded without the help of these young people. Sigigi, tell them that they will always have a home in our towns!”

Chukmena said, “Boomer was just about to tell us how everything almost went wrong with the Two Rabbit’s talk.”

“Oh, please, go on,” Osihishi said jovially.

Boomer pulled out the stops, imitating the rabbit’s panic when his teeth and ears threatened to burst through his magical disguise. The esteemed elders of Turtletown laughed until they hurt. As they wiped away tears, Rain said, “It was Boomer who saved the day. He started reading a rabbit story so loud that the Wabbit Power came back!”

Sigigi had a hard time translating “Wabbit Power,” but Chukmena understood. He stood up and patted Boomer on the shoulder. “You’re a fast thinker!”

Still chuckling, Osihishi said, “That is the way it is with the great tricksters. Something always goes wrong. All of a sudden, he said, pretending to pitch a fist of

something over his head, “Everything is up in the air, but in the end, it all comes down where it ought to be.”

Just then, one of Sigigi’s friends called out to him as he ran to the ball ground. Sigigi stood up and thanked Chukmena, Toloowa, and the Headman for their hospitality. Motioning for the kids to get up, he said, “Come. We play ball!”

The kids thanked the elders, too, and followed Sigigi. A huge crowd of Little People had gathered at the ball ground, waiting for the game to begin. Many were placing wagers and singing songs to encourage their players. The teams from Turtletown and Panthertown were milling on the side lines, and drummers for each team were beating out a steady rhythm. Boomer had said the game was like lacrosse, but Hailey wasn’t familiar with that sport. Wanting to know more, she said, “You said your Tribe plays this game?”

Rain answered. “Yes. Different tribes play by different rules. But each team usually tries to touch the goal posts by hitting them with the ball or carrying the ball through the posts.”

Sigigi explained that most of the Little People’s towns had their own style of play. “Some town play with two stick and some play with one stick. We play with two stick today.”

“Hailey,” Boomer said, “just think football, basketball, and wrestling plus a stick.”

Looking around, Rain asked, “Where’s Marcus?”

“He went down to the creek with Cricket and some kids,” Hailey replied. “They were going swimming. I hope he doesn’t miss this.”

Rain smiled “Don’t worry. He’ll see it. They’ll play all afternoon.”

“Here they come!” yelled Boomer.

The two teams began to advance on the field—each from the direction of the goal they would defend. As they approached each other, the Turtletown and Panthertown players raised their sticks and challenged each other by shouting four times. When the teams arrived at the center of the ball ground, they clustered around an official who tossed a skin ball up into the air. The players leaped up with their arms and sticks stretched toward the ball. A Panthertown team member captured it, and the game was on. He tried to break free and make a dash for the opposing goal, but was tackled by a Turtletown player. The ball rolled free and was instantly snatched up by one of Panthertown’s fastest runners. He ran—chased by a howling pack. Deftly avoiding the defenders, he slowed 15 feet short of the goal and flung the ball, hitting the crossbar on the goal post. A high-pitched yell went up from the Panthertown fans.

Taunts and jokes from the opposition (Turtletown players were always teased with names like “Swifty” or “Speedy”) just boosted the home team’s determination,

and they had soon tackled, body-checked, wrestled, and lobbed their way to their first score. Turtletown responded with its own cheer of triumph.

The ball went back into play. Out of the ensuing melee of waving sticks came the crash of hickory on hickory and the grunts and exultant cries of the contenders. The game never let up. When the ball went out of bounds, a referee just threw a new ball onto the field, and the competition thundered on.

Down at the creek, Marcus, who had been paddling with his new friends in the shallow water, waded over to Cricket. He pointed in the direction of the cheering and asked her if he could go see the game. She didn't know what Marcus was saying exactly, but she knew what he wanted to do. Turning to the other children, she said, "Come on, let's go watch the ball game." She picked up Niska's little girl, Foosi, and took her brother, Nikkami, by the hand.

She was watching Marcus and the other children sloshing toward the creek's pebbled beach when a hammering wind struck them from behind, pushing them down into the water. Cricket thrust her arm up over her head and fearfully looked up to see an ominous black shadow descending over her. She screamed for the children to run. Marcus picked himself up and struggled to the beach, dragging two other kids with him.

Max Bigelow expertly maneuvered the helicopter from the concealed glade where he had set it down earlier in the day. He had taken full advantage of the town celebrations to cover the sound of the helicopter's rotary blades. Unfortunately, Turtletown had let down its guard, believing that they had prevailed over the whirling bird.

Lennie was scared stiff. "Max! Not so close! You're right on top of them!"

Max tensely clutched the stick, controlling the helicopter's back and forth sway over his targets. "Let me fly the chopper, Lennie. You just shoot the net gun! Now!"

Lennie leaned out the left door and aimed the net gun. He fired! With a dull boom, the net ejected. Its giant, weighted fingers spread out and grabbed Cricket, Niska's children—and Marcus.

Max lowered the helicopter onto the beach and cut back the power. With the blades still turning, he screamed at Lennie, "Get out! Secure the net!"

Hunched over, Lennie stumbled out the door with his equipment and ran to tie up the victims of Max's scheme. Marcus tried to stand up, but his feet tangled in the net. He fell down heavily on Cricket, unintentionally trapping her. Just as rehearsed, Lennie whipped the net together and rolled the captives into a heavy tarpaulin which he attached by a steel cord underneath the helicopter.

He jumped back in the helicopter and Max lifted off, swirling gently into the air. He leveled off and headed directly over Turtletown—his stolen treasure spinning slowly at the end of a long cable attached to the fearsome whirling bird.

Chapter 22



Marcus whined, "I was scared when I got lost, Mister! If you promise not to leave me in the woods, I'll show you where you can capture plenty of Little People."

Marcus's Briar Patch

A young man playing in his first big game was looking up, ready to deflect a ball soaring toward the Turtletown goal. To the dismay of the home crowd, he suddenly dropped his stick. Pointing above the trees, he yelled, "The whirling bird!" The ball players and spectators tumbled over each other as they scattered into the forest. Once under cover of the trees, they watched to see what the helicopter would do. To everyone's relief, it flew on and soon the drone of its engine could no longer be heard.

Rain, Boomer and Hailey had retreated to a nearby thicket with Sigigi. They, like many others, emerged when the helicopter was gone. Sigigi immediately ran to his house to comfort his grandmother. Looking about them, the kids could see that Turtletown was in a total state of confusion. What had happened? Why had the helicopter returned?

Amid the commotion, mothers and fathers anxiously rounded up their children. But several were still missing. When they were found hiding near the creek, they ran to their parents crying that two men in the whirling bird had taken Cricket and the children playing in the water. Among them was Marcus.

Word of the kidnapping spread quickly through the town. Rain knew that something bad had happened. He ran with Boomer and Hailey to Sigigi's house. They found him talking to Chukmena and two other members of the council. They looked sympathetically at Hailey. Rain cried, "What's happened?"

"They take Marcus and Cricket," Sigigi replied anxiously. "Niska's children, too."

Hailey was terrified. "Oh, no! I was supposed to look after him. What will I tell my father?" Turning to Rain and Boomer, she cried, "Ohhh, this is all my fault. Eugene found out what we did and he's kidnapped Marcus!"

"No, Hailey," Rain protested, "that's impossible.

Eugene would never do that.”

“Wait, wait, I got it!” Boomer yelled. “It’s the pilot! Don’t you see? He spotted the town when he was flying Eugene!”

“But why would he take my brother?”

Boomer scratched his head. “Hmm, that’s a good question.”

Rain started fumbling in his back pocket. “Wait a minute.” He pulled out and read the business card for Sky High Tours that Eugene had given his dad. “A guy named Max Bigelow was flying that helicopter.”

“We’ve got to tell somebody in Taniba Springs! Please, Sigigi, take us back,” Hailey begged.

“Leave soon. But have to make sure town safe first. Don’t worry, Hailey. Cricket know how make escape.”

Not consoled, Hailey cried out, “But Marcus won’t know how to escape! Where is he taking him?”

Marcus was being whisked away to a remote shack south of Taniba Springs. The noise from the helicopter’s engine was deafening and he could barely breathe. Although he couldn’t see, he was aware that Cricket and the children were laying on top of him. The tiny young woman was dead weight. When the net had hit them, she had fallen and hit her head on a rock. Cricket was knocked out.

After about 40 minutes, Max sighted the shack and cleared field where he would set down the helicopter. During the flight from Turtletown Lennie had said nothing. Glancing at Lennie, Max growled, “Hey! Wake up. You better get ready to unhook the tarp.”

“When are you gonna let ’em go, Max? After they take the pictures?”

“What? Oh, yeah. Sure.”

Max lowered the helicopter slowly until the tarpaulin bag touched the ground and was low enough for Lennie to jump out and unhook the cable. After Lennie gave the signal, he regained altitude and then landed a short distance away. Jumping out of the helicopter, Max raced across the small field to inspect his catch. Lennie had already pulled the cord that laced the grommets on the tarp. Unable to contain his excitement, Max grabbed one end of the canvas and jerked it. Marcus and the Little People rolled out, trapped in their net cocoon. Cricket began to regain consciousness. When Max pulled out a pocket knife and slit the net, her first impulse was to protect Foosi and Nikkami. She held onto them tightly. Groggily, she tried to think of her next move, but her brain just wasn’t working. She lay in the net, waiting to be seized. To her surprise, Max went after Marcus instead.

Snatching up the boy, Max yelled angrily, “Where’d this kid come from, Lennie? I thought we were capturing

Little People. Does he look like one of them to you?”

“I just fired the net. It was all so fast...I don’t...”

Max could feel the panic start to rise. This wasn’t part of the plan. “Do you know what this means, Lennie? We just took somebody’s kid. Hey! Come on everybody—take a picture!”

Max pushed Marcus away. He started rubbing his jaw and the back of his neck. Suddenly he turned and stared at the little boy. Icily, he said, “We gotta get rid of him.”

“What are you gonna do, Max? Take him back?”

“No, dump him in the woods.” Max grabbed Marcus by the arm, and despite the boy’s hollering and kicking, began hauling him toward the helicopter.

Lennie ran after Max. “You don’t mean push him out?”

“I mean leave him in the forest where nobody will find him! This is somebody’s kid, Lennie—you wanna go to prison for kidnapping?”

Cricket was helpless. Her head was clearing, but she still couldn’t think straight, much less work a spell. The bright, flashing lights in her eyes were driving her crazy. She squeezed her eyes shut, trying to get rid of the fireworks. She couldn’t understand what the men were saying, but she could hear that the bigger, more dangerous one was leaving. They were dividing their forces. That would make it easier to deal with the other

man. Cricket's eyes flew open when she heard Marcus yelling. The man was dragging him away! Pulling herself up on one arm, she cried, "Marcus...!"

Max heard her. He turned on Lennie. "Help me get this kid in the chopper. Then get her and those little mice in the crates and load 'em in the truck. Tie 'em up if you have to. Then get back to the barn. We got company coming." Lennie ran ahead and opened the door on the passenger side of the helicopter. Then he held Marcus down while Max strapped him in the seat.

Max jumped in the pilot seat and revved up the engine. In minutes they were flying at 3,000 feet, headed toward the national park. Marcus's heart was hammering in his chest. With tears streaming down his face, Marcus thought, He's gonna leave me in the woods! I'll be lost! Glancing fearfully at Max, he thought, he came down from the sky and got me—just like the hawk got Brother Rabbit. Marcus took in several shuddering gulps of air. The thought of Brother Rabbit seemed to calm him. He tried to stop crying. Then he heard the rabbit's voice in his head: "When you in trouble, Marcus, don't struggle. Think!"

"Hey! What were you doing with those Little People?" Max's sudden question made Marcus jump. He tried to think. Not wanting to reveal anything about why he and his sister were at Turtletown, Marcus told Duffy's story instead. "Um, well, uh...they found me in the woods."

Max snickered and said, “Well, they’ll have to find you again, won’t they, kid?”

Marcus closed his eyes and tried to concentrate. He told himself the story of the rabbit and the hawk from beginning to end. Yes! Brother Rabbit had tricked the hawk into letting him go. The rabbit had promised to flush partridges out of the briar patch...so that the hawk could eat them. When the hawk took his talons off his back, the rabbit ran into the briar patch and disappeared! Marcus was desperate enough to try the trick. Only he had to lure Max *into* the briar patch first.

Putting on his most pitiful voice, Marcus whined, “I was scared when I got lost, Mister! If you promise not to leave me in the woods, I’ll show you where you can capture plenty of Little People. Just take me back to where you found me. They got a chief that lives there. You can get him, too.”

Suddenly, Max was interested. He glanced in a side compartment to make sure Lennie hadn’t taken the net gun. Seeing that the gun was still on board, he asked, “You know where this chief is?”

“Uh-huh. Will you let me go if I show you?”

“Sure kid. Where is he? This chief.”

“In a cave. He wears this feather cape and a big...”
Marcus gestured with his hands over his head.

Max finished the sentence. “A big head-dress!”

He banked the helicopter and started to head toward Turtletown.

His eyes darting from side to side, Marcus was thinking fast. I'll lead him into the town and...then... Sigigi and Rain and Boomer will be there. Marcus squeezed his eyes together and prayed, Ooh, *please*, let Duffy be there, too!

Chapter 23



Max whistled. "Oh, man, look at that!" He couldn't believe it. It was the chief—just like the kid said.

The Partridges Chase a Hawk

Sigigi stepped aside on the trail and let Rain and Boomer go on ahead. He wanted to speak with Hailey for a moment. Walking beside her, he said, "Hailey, sorry I not leave sooner. Turtletown have to set up guard."

"I know, Sigigi. I'm just so worried about Marcus. Can't we go any faster?"

"No. Sorry. You go fast now—as fast as Little People go."

"Maybe when we get closer, I can pick up a cell phone signal. Then I can call my father. But what am I going to say?" she fretted.

Over his shoulder, Boomer said, “I thought you never got any bars last time—not until we were almost back at Taniba Spr...”

Rain, who was in the lead, stopped suddenly. He turned and looked at Sigigi. The little man had halted, too. He was listening intently.

Hailey looked up. “Oh, no. I hear it, too.”

Rain didn’t say anything. A low branch of a tree presented an opportunity. He pulled himself up on the branch and scrambled up the tree until he could see the skyline.

“Can you see it?” Boomer shouted.

The buzz of the engine grew louder. Instead of answering, Rain climbed up to a higher branch. Suddenly he pointed off to the east. “There it is! It’s headed toward Turtletown!”

“Maybe it’s a different helicopter,” Hailey cried. “If it’s not the one that got Marcus, we won’t have to go back.”

Holding onto the tree’s thickly leafed boughs, Rain safely made his way down the tree. When he dropped to the ground, he dashed Hailey’s hopes. “No, Hailey. Sky High Tours was painted on the helicopter. It looks like another raid.”

Sigigi wasted no time discussing it. He was already running back the way they had come. The kids followed. They had no choice. Keeping a fast pace, they soon

reached one of the major trails used by the Little People. In another 30 minutes, they met up with some scouts who were keeping watch at an outpost between Turtletown and Wolftown. They said that word had come that Turtletown was under attack again. Warriors from the other towns who had joined in the celebrations earlier in the day had begun to mass in the valley below Two Rabbit Mountain.

Sigigi and the kids soon caught up with a party from Wolftown and another from Skunktown that had been patrolling nearby. Being part of such a large group made the kids feel secure. However, they were surprised when a warrior suddenly pulled them back off the trail into a thicket. A bird call up ahead alerted them that a Turtletown warrior was coming down the trail. The leaders of the Wolftown and Skunktown groups emerged and spoke with him. Sigigi pushed forward to find out what was going on. He returned quickly with the news: “They say helicopter at creek. They say Marcus there.”

Rain was astonished. “You mean that Max guy brought Marcus back?”

“Yes. Marcus lead him into town...through secret place.”

“That makes no sense!” Hailey cried. “Why would Marcus do that?”

At that moment, Marcus was leading “that Max

guy” past the gardens on the outskirts of Turtletown. He had easily found the tree that served as one of the town’s hidden portals. But this time the Little People provided a much different reception than the one he had experienced that morning. The town was dead silent. Where is everybody? he thought.

At Max’s continued urging, he walked on—trying to be brave, but becoming more frightened with every step. He fretfully pulled at the rope the pilot had tied around his waist. What if everyone had run away? Marcus didn’t want to think about what would happen to him if there were no “partridges.” Or worse, what if Hailey, Rain, and Boomer had gone back to Taniba Springs?

As they passed the ball ground, Max suddenly stopped. He put down the net gun and grabbed his cell phone. “Oh, man, who’d believe it! I gotta get a picture of those goal posts.” He aimed and snapped shots like a vacationing sightseer. Sweeping the scene with the phone to his eye, he hooted, “Hey, look at those little thatched houses over there!” When he’d finished thumbing through and admiring his album, he jerked the rope. “Okay, keep going.”

Marcus stumbled on with Max pulling him up short when he saw a photo or video opportunity he couldn’t pass up. As they moved between the summer houses, Max gawked at everything: pottery bowls, baskets, a child’s moccasin—even the remains of half-eaten meals

that had been hastily abandoned. Occasionally, before taking a picture, he would place a quarter beside an object to show how small it was. If the tabloids wanted evidence of the Little People, he'd give it to them!

A sudden movement out the corner of his eye made Marcus shift his gaze. Was someone peeking around the side of that corn crib? His senses now on high alert, the boy became aware of flickering shadows—small shadows—moving soundlessly behind the houses and among the tended blackberry thickets. They weren't alone! Maybe his trick was working!

Looking around with some uneasiness, Max said, "Is it always this quiet?"

Marcus replied innocently, "Uh, yeah, they don't make much noise—um, they take a lot of naps—in the cave."

Max sniggered. "They probably don't even know I've got the girl and two kids. Where is this cave?"

Marcus pointed. "Over there."

Max followed Marcus up a small rise on one the pathways to the cave. When they topped the rise, the big public square and the Council House came into view. Beyond it, the mouth of the gigantic cave arched upward, its depths hidden in deep shadow. A fire flickering at the back of the cave's black interior created a fantasy backdrop of dancing wraith-like figures. In front of this mysterious scene stood a tiny man resplendent in a long

cape of iridescent blue and yellow feathers that gleamed in the sun.

Max whistled. “Oh, man, look at that!” He couldn’t believe it. It was the chief—just like the kid said. A cool breeze, wafting from the cave’s subterranean shafts, fluttered the tall feathers that crested the brow of Turtletown’s “chief.” It floated serenely across the square, bringing images of mysterious underground passages where the Little People lived their secret lives.

Max’s mouth fell open (just as the Little Peoples’ spells intended). No longer interested in the boy, he dropped the rope fastened to Marcus’s waist. Raising the net gun to his shoulder, he shouted, “I’m gonna be rich!” Max charged across the square, taking careful aim at his trophy. No way he was gonna miss this shot! Wait ’til those Bigfoot dummies see this!

Suddenly, Max’s aim veered crazily off target. He stumbled to a stop and dropped the net gun. He gasped! A tingling nerve explosion was running up his right leg. Reaching down to swat off the venomous insect that had stung him, Max saw, instead, a bouquet of white fluff sticking in his ankle. He pulled at the fuzzy stuff and dislodged...a barb?

Max was looking at the little missile when a war cry shattered the silence. Jerking upward, Max glanced around wildly. It was an ambush! A shower of blow-gun darts hit him like a squadron of killer bees. Max

screached and ran, batting off the darts and a hail of tiny arrows unleashed by the ballplayers from Panthertown. Running back the way he had come, he jumped over four warriors who had come up behind him. But his retreat was blocked by a group of angry young women who bunched together, forcing him off the path. He crashed through a thicket and found another trail that went in the direction of the creek.

Scores of Little People came spilling out of the cave in fierce pursuit. Behind them came Rain, Boomer, and Hailey—all running as fast as they could to help Marcus. When Hailey reached her brother, she was beside herself. “Marcus! Oh, I’m so glad you’re okay!” The little boy hugged his sister so tightly that neither one of them could breathe. While Boomer unknotted Marcus’s tether, Rain went for the net gun that Max had dropped. He picked up the odd-looking launcher.

“What’s that?” Boomer asked.

It was Marcus who answered. “It shoots out a net! That’s how he caught us.”

Rain examined the net gun carefully. “This looks like the trigger. I guess the net comes out of this end and it looks like...”

The rest of his sentence was drowned out by a party of Turtletown’s best defenders who came charging across the square. Sigigi was with them. His face flushed with excitement, he quickly stripped off the Headman’s

feathered cape and headdress that he had used to lure Max. Handing them to Hailey, he said, “Go into cave. Take Marcus.” To the boys, he yelled, “Come! He run to creek. We set trap!”

Rain held up the net gun. “Come on, Boomer! Let’s see if we can’t catch Max Bigelow in his *own* trap!”

The boys ran after Sigigi. The warriors’ plan was to get in front of Max by moving along the top of a small ridge that served as a natural wall on one side of the town. The ridge ran beside the path that led to the creek. With their longer strides, the boys soon overtook even the fastest of the Turtletown warriors. As they passed Sigigi, he shouted, “Run faster! He almost to helicopter!”

Rain picked up speed. His legs were longer than Boomer’s and he was soon in the lead. From the viewpoint of the ridgeline, he could see and hear the commotion of the chase up ahead. Sigigi was right! Max had almost reached the creek. The helicopter was only a short sprint away. Rain spotted Max lurching from side to side trying to avoid the torrent of darts and pebbles that the Little People rained upon him.

Rain halted and positioned himself. He raised the net gun and aimed at the pilot, but there were too many town folk in the way. Rain had missed his shot.

Max reached the beach. Thinking he was safe, he shook his fist at the Little People. “I know where you live...I’ll catch you all for this. I’ll be back!”



Rain fired the net gun—fooph! The boom of the launcher silenced the angry pursuers who had begun to surge forward. They stopped and watched the net float soundlessly through the air.

Laughing triumphantly, he turned and ran—straight into a human wall.

Chapter 24



“Cricket say she get away from man called Lennie. He bring water and she touch him. He go away. Cricket not sure if she say big spell or little spell.”

Little People Justice

It was Duffy! Staring goggled-eyed at the young giant, Max gulped in fear and let out a shriek that even made Duffy jump. It never occurred to Mr. Bigelow that Goliath might be living with the Little People. He stumbled backwards, giving Rain an opening for his shot. The net gun fired—*fooph!* The boom of the launcher silenced the angry pursuers who had begun to surge forward. They stopped and watched the net float

soundlessly through the air. When it landed on Max, entangling his feet and bringing him to his knees, the Little People broke into a cheer of triumph.

The Turtletown warriors quickly surrounded the man who had stolen Cricket and the children. They were angry, but they parted to let Duffy through. The young giant reached down and wound the net around Max. Then holding one end in a tight grip, he dragged him, bumping over rocks and tree roots, back to the public square. A parade of Little People followed, including Sigigi and the boys. The town council was waiting in the square in front of the cave. All of the old people and mothers with children who had hidden in the cave had ventured out and were standing at its rim. Hailey and Marcus were with them.

Max lay on the ground in the middle of the square, twisted in the net. Finally, he sat up. He started to protest, but thought better of it when he saw Duffy standing over him. Instead, he sullenly watched as the elders talked among themselves.

The council members had different opinions about what should happen to the pilot. Some believed he should be made to disappear in the forest, while others thought he could be imprisoned with a spell. A few said that in past times his violation of the Little People would have been rewarded with the ultimate punishment. It was the Beloved Woman who raised an issue that halted

the discussion—and decided Max’s fate. “We don’t want a search party to come looking for the whirling bird. It must be returned to the Big People’s town. How can that happen if the man does not fly it?” Then she added: “I also think we should consult Hailey. The man tried to harm her brother.”

Osihishi the Headman thought about this. “Yes, this requires more thinking—and the viewpoints of those who have been affected.” He stood up and motioned Sigigi to come forward. When Sigigi arrived at his side, he spoke to him briefly. In response, the young man hurried to the base of the cave and looked up. “Hailey! Come down. We need you.”

Pointing to herself, Hailey cried in surprise, “Me?” Sigigi nodded.

Marcus pulled at her arm. “What does he want you to do?”

Hailey just shook her head. “I don’t know. I’ll be right back—I guess.” She made her way down the steps from the cave. Sigigi took her aside and explained the situation. He said that the Beloved Woman believed she should have a say in deciding what they should do with Max.

Max Bigelow watched as the African-American girl followed one of the little guys across the square. He had already spotted her standing next to that double-dealing little weasel. She must be the boy’s sister. His temper

flaring, Max glanced up at Duffy. What a funny farm did this over-grown clown escape from? Being a jerk that he was, Max sneered, “Hey, Captain America! You like playing superhero?”

Duffy leaned over and said cheerfully, “I’d watch it, Mister, or the only helicopter you’ll be driving is a kiddie ride.”

Max ignored Duffy and focused his irritation on the town council. Everybody kept talking and talking. Now the girl was huddled with the old white-haired lady. Max stared at them and mumbled, “Blah, blah, blah...” Bored, he hunched over and started pulling barbs out of his clothes. He pulled out one that accidentally stuck in his finger. His loud “ouch” caused several Little People to turn and look at him unsympathetically. Max glared back. Fortunately (or unfortunately), the council wouldn’t keep him waiting much longer.

Sumpuhke, the Beloved Woman, was walking across the square toward Max. She stopped just short of where the pilot sat and called Duffy. He went to her immediately and knelt down to hear the words she spoke in his ear. He stepped back, and the little woman approached the pilot. She reached into her cloak and pulled out a small stick.

Max snickered. “That your magic wand?”

The Beloved Woman’s lips moved as she gently touched him on the arm with the stick. Then Duffy

cut the net to release Max. A murmur arose from the crowd—but the Beloved Woman calmed them with a gesture. Then she motioned to Duffy.

Duffy nodded. Looking down at Max, he asked. “Where did you take Cholotka and the children?”

In no particular hurry, Max disentangled his feet from the net and stood up. “Oh, Lennie should have them back at the barn by now. The newspaper’s coming to take pictures.” Smiling, he looked around and waved, “Hi!” No one waved back. Grinning like a little kid, he rushed up to some of the onlookers, excitedly babbling, “I’m gonna be on TV! Maybe even get a reality show!” When he spotted Rain and Boomer on the edge of the crowd, he grabbed at them like they were his long lost friends. “Come on! Get in the chopper! We’re gonna be famous!”

Boomer pulled back. “Is he crazy?”

Rain was looking for Hailey. She would know what was going on. He spotted her making her way through the crowd. Marcus was with her. Glancing over at Max who was taking Boomer’s picture, Rain asked, “Hailey, why is he so happy?”

“Well, uh, Sigigi said they’ve ‘confused’ him. Despite what he’s done, the Little People haven’t hurt him—just mixed him up a little. The Beloved Woman realized that Max and the helicopter have to get back to Taniba Springs—otherwise, an air search will be ordered and there will be more helicopters flying around. So, Max will

fly back the helicopter. And we're going with him."

"What? We are going with Max Bigelow?" Boomer said incredulously.

"That's why he's so happy," Hailey explained, "he thinks we are the Little People he came to capture."

"Man! That is confused," Boomer said.

Sigigi came up behind the boys. "Yes, but not so confused he not fly. He think you Little People now. But after time pass, he forget that... and everything..."

Rain shook his head. "Wow. I thought Coyote was full of tricks."

A young girl ran up to Sigigi. She was carrying a small painted pot with a lid. She spoke to him, pointing toward Max. Duffy took Max by the arm and led him to the girl. She opened the pot which contained a fragrant salve and began applying it to Max's lower legs. Then she gave the pot to Duffy and directed him to put the salve on any scratches or small wounds on his upper body. Max got happier. "Hey, that stuff feels great."

Sigigi said, "Toloowa send medicine. She say when he go home, he look okay. He heal. Nobody see."

Just then, a series of calls could be heard that had started with a scout posted to the west of Turtletown. Sigigi was immediately alert. He listened carefully. Suddenly he turned and ran, hollering over his shoulder, "Cricket is back!" Skidding to a stop, Sigigi hurried back

to his young friends. “Hold on. Don’t turn that dial! I bring her.”

Boomer hollered, “Whoo-hoo! Way to go, Cricket!” Taking a cue from Boomer, Marcus starting yelling, “Whoo-hoo! Whoo-hoo!” Some women and children nearby heard them and began laughing.

Hailey was beginning to understand more about the Little Peoples’ powers. Quietly, she said, “Sigigi said she would get away.”

The kids sat down under the shade of the fruit trees and waited for Sigigi and Cricket. Max was wandering about taking photos. No longer a threat, no one was paying much attention to him. Boomer laughed when he heard Max tell some kids that they would go viral on YouTube.

Rain said to Hailey, “It looks like the council really worked all this out.”

“Yeah, they asked me what I thought about their plan. They said since Marcus had been taken, I should be given the right to speak. I told them it sounded pretty good to me.” Hailey hesitated, “They talked about a lot of things. Like, uh, moving the town.”

Rain was surprised. “You mean abandoning Turtletown?”

“Not abandoning it, but moving it further away. They are really disturbed by the kidnapping. They said they’ve moved towns before when Big People caused trouble.”

Boomer stood up. “Hey! Here comes Sigigi and Cricket.”

Cricket ran up to Marcus and hugged him. “Marcus, you’re okay! I was so worried when the man took you away.”

Marcus was jumping up and down. “How did you get away?” Looking around, he cried, “Where are Foosi and Nikkami?”

Sigigi caught up and translated. “Cricket say she happy you okay.” Then he answered Marcus’s questions. “We take kids to Niska. They fine.” About her escape, he said, “Cricket say she get away from man called Lennie. He bring water and she touch him. He go away. Cricket not sure if she say big spell or little spell.”

“Does it make a difference?” Rain asked.

“Yes. Big spell last forever. Little spell not so long.”

Cricket was looking at Marcus intently. Turning to her brother, she asked a question that made Sigigi smile.

Sigigi translated: “She want to know how you get man to bring you back to Turtletown.”

With complete confidence, Marcus said, “I promised him I’d show him how to get more Little People.”

“Marcus!” Hailey cried. “You mean he’d didn’t force you to show him the way into Turtletown?”

“No, it was like the story Brother Rabbit told me about the hawk catching him. The rabbit told him that

if he let him go, he'd get him lots of partridges that lived in his briar patch. I promised Little People instead of partridges. But I knew you guys—and Duffy—would be here to save me.” Hailey and the boys just stared at Marcus. Smiling sweetly, he shrugged and said, “Well, Brother Rabbit said his stories would make me smarter.”

Sigigi translated Marcus's words for Cricket. Then he said, “She say Two Rabbit right. You smart.”

Grinning, Rain looked over at Sigigi. “And you were a pretty good partridge—dressed up in the Headman's clothes.”

Sigigi smiled. “Yes, I hear story of rabbit and hawk, too.” Everybody laughed.

Boomer, never one to show much sensitivity for timing, suddenly threw a damper on the conversation. “Hailey said the council is talking about moving Turtletown.”

The smile immediately disappeared from Sigigi's face. “Yes, and say maybe not go to Big People town anymore.” Sadly, he added, “Where I get battery for radio?”

Rain understood Sigigi's concern. “Yes, it's probably not a bad thing to know what the Big People are up to.”

“Do you know someone who could buy the batteries?” Boomer asked. Sigigi shook his head.

“We can come back and buy them!” Marcus yelled.

Disappointing her brother, Hailey said, “I don’t think we’ll be coming back any time soon.”

“Is there *anybody* you could trust?” Rain asked.

Sigigi thought about this. Finally, he told them the story about the woman who listened to a warning from his uncle. She had respected the Little People and stopped her husband from diverting water away from a spring that was a major source of water for several of their towns. He said he remembered well the way she had looked at him. Sigigi struggled a bit to express what he had sensed about her. Then he said, “She act like we are relatives.”

“Does she still live on that farm?” Rain asked.

“Yes. And she sell food on big road in Big People town.”

“We’ll try to find her, Sigigi,” Rain said. “If she did get the batteries—where should she leave them?”

Sigigi looked hopefully at Rain. “At spring in back her house. House far from Big People town.” Then he added, “You see her, say ‘thank you’ for not stop spring water.”

“Sigigi,” Cricket interrupted her brother, pointing her chin behind him.

Sigigi turned around. Some of the council members were approaching. “Look like time to go,” he said sadly. The kids watched as one of the elders sent a boy to get Max. The pilot got up and followed him meekly toward

the creek.

Rain looked around. “Well, I guess this is it.”
Everybody suddenly got very quiet.

Boomer laughed a little. “I hope Max doesn’t forget how to fly.”

“Don’t worry, Boomer. Spell not work that way.”
Suddenly, it hit him that he might never see his young friends again. He sighed and said, “No more ‘tune in tomorrow at the same time.’ Too bad you live far away.”

“I’ll come back! I promise I will.” Marcus shouted.
“Besides I want to see Brother Rabbit again.”

Sigigi’s sister smiled at the boy. She knew he wouldn’t understand her farewells—so she just hugged him and whispered the name he called her—“Cricket.”

“Sigigi,” Rain said, “Boomer and I have to come back. We have so much to learn from you, and...and we have to share with the Little People everything the eagle teaches us.”

Hailey had been silent up to now. Suddenly, she burst into tears, “I’ll never forget you, Sigigi.” Choking, she gasped, “You really are ‘the top of the chart’...”

Sigigi looked away. Now he understood the special relationship that the Little People forged with some of the Big People’s children. It was not only knowledge that they gave them, but love as well. Sigigi turned abruptly and walked toward the creek, not wanting the kids to see

his face. He motioned for them to follow.

The town folk from Turtletown and their visitors from the other towns were already gathered at the creek. Max was sitting in the pilot's seat of the helicopter waving happily at the crowd. Duffy was holding open the left door of the helicopter, waiting for them to board.

When the kids arrived, everyone began cheering and waving their farewells. Osihishi the Headman, Sumpuhke the Beloved Woman, Chukmena, and the other members of the council were standing together on the little bluff where Rain had fired the net gun. They were waving, too.

As they made their way slowly to the beach, someone began calling Sigigi's name. It was Toloowa. He saw Cricket trying to help the little healer through the crowd. Sigigi went to her assistance and drew her forward. She wanted to say something to Rain. Sigigi listened respectfully. With Toloowa's gaze fixed intently on the boy, he said, "She say bee not sting any more Little People. Now she know eagle wisdom, she will teach all towns."

Rain heard Max turn over the engine in preparation for takeoff. He leaned down and gave Toloowa a hug. Standing up, Rain looked at Sigigi, but he didn't know how to say good-bye. The young man of the Little People smiled wistfully and raised his hand. "Keep on rockin', Rain that Dances."

Rain turned and joined his friends. They bent down and shuffled under the rotor blades to the helicopter. Boomer, Hailey and Marcus stepped up into the cabin and buckled their safety belts. Rain was the last to board. Duffy reached out to shake his hand. Grasping his huge fingers, Rain remembered Duffy's story about how the Little People had helped to bring harmony to their towns by "doing a kindness." He had intended to ask Sigigi more about it. But he had forgotten.

Duffy saw Rain's hesitation. Thinking he wanted to say something, the young giant waited. When Rain remained silent, Duffy simply said, "Bye, Rain."

"Good-bye, Duffy."

Rain jumped in the helicopter, and Duffy firmly shut the door. He and the Little People moved back, and Max roared up the engines. The blades began to rotate, faster and faster, until the helicopter lifted off. The kids yelled their good-byes, and the people waved their arms over their heads. Then the whirling bird abruptly leaned into a wide arc over the town and zoomed away over the tree tops.

Chapter 25



A tiny fluffy barb was sticking out from under the collar on Max's shirt. She reached over and plucked out the miniature blow gun dart.

The Spectacular News Story

Back at Sky High Tours, the photographer from the *Taniba Springs Herald* sat in the shade of the barn, watching Lennie Blatch wandering in a nearby field. News was slow—but this was ridiculous. How did he and Suzanne get so lucky?

“What is he doing now, Tommy?” Suzanne, one of the two reporters at the *Herald*, was concerned. She wondered if Lennie's strange behavior had anything to do with the “spectacular news story” that Max Bigelow had promised.

“Well, after he ran away from me, he started throwing

metal scraps out of that box over there. Now he's picking weeds in that field. Did you get hold of his wife?"

"Yes. I called the casino gift shop. Gussie said she would get her sister to pick her up. They'll be over here as quick as they can. I can't find Max. There's nobody at the customer desk. I guess he and Lennie run the business by themselves."

"Did 'Mr. Big' give any hint what this all about?"

"No, only that that....wait now, how did he say it? It will 'make leprechauns the next big thing.'" Suzanne opened her notebook. "So how should I lead off this story? 'Local pilot discovers pot of gold in reservation landfill?' Or 'Pot O' Gold slot machine pays off millions in Lucky Charms to local pilot?'"

The *Herald* news team had just about given up on Max when they heard the sound of approaching rotor blades. Lennie heard the helicopter, too. He started running across the field—straight toward the helipad where the helicopter would land. He was waving a fistful of weeds over his head.

Alarmed, Suzanne cried. "Get him, Tommy! He's gonna get killed. He's got no sense at all."

Tommy jumped up and ran toward Lennie. He grabbed him by the shoulder and pulled him to safety. "Hey, fella, watcha got there? Let's get away from the landing pad and you can show me."

Wide-eyed, Lennie stared blankly at the photographer. “Uh, I’ve got some...” Suddenly, he shouted, “I know! Flowers for Gussie. And there she is!”

Tommy turned to see Myrtle Owl’s old van churning up the gravel road to Sky High Tours. Lennie wriggled out of the photographer’s grip and charged toward the van. Myrtle pulled up in front of the barn and cut the engine. Gussie unbuckled her seatbelt and jumped out. “Lennie! What’s going on?”

“Gussie! I picked these for you!” He thrust the weeds in her face and turned to run off again. “We’ll make millions. I’ll get more!”

Gussie reached out and held on to his arm before he could escape. “Stop, Lennie. Calm down.” Myrtle came around the car and helped her sister guide her husband into the barn. They sat him down in Max’s office.

Myrt turned on a little fan that sat on the desk. “Here, Lennie. Cool off for a minute.”

Suzanne poked her head in the office. “Is there anything we can do?”

Myrtle looked up. “I don’t think so. I’m not sure what the problem is. But thanks for calling, Suzanne.”

“Well, holler if you need us. We’ll be around for a while longer. We’re supposed to get some pictures of something Max Bigelow wants us to see. The helicopter’s coming in now.”

Lennie was jerking open the drawers in Max's desk. "He's got a list of those supermarket newspapers, honey. I gotta call 'em. They'll know what to do."

Gussie was getting very upset. "What's wrong with him, Myrt?"

"I'll get him some water." Myrtle found a bottle in a small refrigerator and took it to her sister.

Pouring the water into a paper cup, Gussie said, "Maybe Max knows something."

"I'll ask him, Gussie." Myrtle was beginning to get suspicious. She thought she knew what Max wanted to show the news team. She went outside and joined Suzanne and Tommy.

The helicopter appeared over a low hill two miles from the Sky Tours landing zone. At about 900 feet it started a constant descent and decrease in ground speed. Max expertly brought the chopper to zero speed at approximately three feet off the ground and lowered it gently dead center on the helipad. He cut the engine and the blades slowly stopped rotating. When all was quiet, Max opened the right door and jumped out. He ran toward Suzanne and Tommy hollering, "I got 'em! I got 'em!" Coming to an abrupt halt, he looked around. "Where's everybody else? I thought there'd be a reception committee. Never mind, just start taking pictures!" Laughing hysterically, he dashed back to the helicopter. Jerking open the passenger door, he started

pulling out the kids.

Rain stumbled out first, then Hailey and Marcus, and finally Boomer. Max grandly swept out his arm, introducing his prizes like a TV game show host. “I give you—the Little People!”

Myrtle and the news team walked over to the helicopter. Tommy took a couple of shots just for kicks, but Suzanne wasn’t having any of it. “What kind of a joke is this? Come on, Tommy, let’s pack it up.”

Max freaked out. “No! No! Don’t leave. Please!” He pulled out his cell phone and frantically began to pull up his photos—“Look! I’ve got proof!” But where there had been dozens of pictures and video of Little People, there were now only blurry images of bushes and trees. Desperate, Max ran to the barn, shouting, “Lennie! Bring out the other ones!”

The befuddled mechanic appeared at the barn door. “Where’s your Little People, Max? I lost mine.”

Myrtle was sizing up the situation. Both Max and Lennie were talking about Little People. But these four children were clearly *not* Little People. Giving the kids a reassuring smile, she said, “Are you guys okay?”

Rain answered nervously. “Uh, yeah, we’re fine.” Boomer, Hailey, and Marcus nodded earnestly in agreement. “Oh, yeah. No problem here.”

Myrtle knew almost all of the families on the

reservation. She didn't recognize Rain or Boomer.

"Where are you from?"

Rain introduced everyone. "We're visiting. Our dads are attending a conference here this week."

"Did you book a tour with Max?"

"Well, not exactly. We...ah..."

Suddenly, Max rushed at Myrtle. "Aren't they great? Have you ever seen anything like them? You should see the real itty-bitsy ones that Lennie's got!" He stared wild-eyed at Myrtle. "You've got to believe me...there really are Little People."

Myrtle glanced over at Lennie, then back at Max. It was obvious. Lennie hadn't listened to her warning. Myrtle pushed the pilot back a little. She smiled and said the words he wanted to hear. "I do believe you, Mr. Bigelow."

Myrtle wasn't just trying to humor him. As close as Max was to her, she saw the evidence. A tiny fluffy barb was sticking out from under the collar on Max's shirt. She reached over and plucked out the miniature blow gun dart. Then she pulled out a tissue, wrapped it around the dart, and carefully replaced it in her overalls pocket. Myrtle patted Max on the shoulder and said, "Just calm down." Then she walked over to the children who were standing to the side, watching. By the looks on their faces, they knew something. "Are you kids staying in town?"

“We’re at the Bear Cove Campground,” Boomer said. “And Hailey and Marcus are staying at the casino hotel.”

Hailey had been texting with her father. She told Myrtle that he was expecting them at 1:00 p.m. at the hotel.

“Tell him where you are and that I’m gonna give you kids a lift into town.” She helped Gussie put Lennie in the van. He had become very docile and gave them no trouble. Gussie said they should take him to the reservation clinic. Myrtle knew there was nothing a doctor could do, but she agreed. It might make Gussie feel better.

Lennie was stretched out on the back seat with Gussie, so she put Hailey and Marcus in front seat. Rain and Boomer could ride on the floor in back.

Standing behind the van, Myrtle said, “Just push aside those baskets of produce, fellas. There should be enough room.” As she closed the back doors, she heard Boomer whisper to Rain, “Lennie’s the one that Cricket put the spell on.” Myrtle sighed. The boy had confirmed what she already knew.

Suzanne and Tommy turned their car around and headed out to Reservation Road. Myrtle started up the van and followed. Suddenly, Max began banging on the driver’s window: “Stop! Stop! Don’t go!” Myrtle slowly pulled forward. She didn’t pick up speed until she was clear of the pilot. Looking in the rearview mirror, she

saw Max running after them, waving his arms.

Gussie was shaken. “This is freaky, Myrt. Max must have the same thing that Lennie does.”

“We’ll tell them at the clinic. Maybe the fire department can send somebody out here.”

Myrt took a right and headed toward town. Lennie soon dropped off to sleep and was snoring softly. After they’d driven about three miles, she pulled off onto a roadside clearing. “Kids, this is my fruit and vegetable stand. I’m gonna unload the produce in the back, and then we’ll be on our way. I can do it faster if you boys back there will help.” Getting out of the van, she said, “Hailey, Marcus, if you’d like to pick out some fruit to take with you, come on and help yourself. I’ve got blackberries and peaches...”

Nobody moved. Hailey whipped around her head, staring at the boys who were staring at her. Rain mouthed, “It’s her!” This was the lady who Sigigi was talking about!

Rain unlatched the back of the van. “Sure, we’ll help. Come on, Boomer. Let’s get this stuff.” The boys unloaded the baskets and followed Myrtle. Hailey and Marcus hauled some sacks of beans, too.

The kids put the produce on the porch of the fruit stand. It sheltered two rows of wooden trays filled with corn, beans, tomatoes, sweet potatoes, and fruits. Myrtle hadn’t had time to move the produce inside when Gussie

had called. Unlocking the door to the little store, Myrtle asked, “Have you ever eaten a maypop? They grow wild around here. Some of them ripened a little early this year.”

The kids were curious. Boomer said, “I’ve never had one. That would be cool.”

“What’s a maypop?” Marcus asked.

Myrtle got a bag and picked out several of the yellow, hen’s egg-sized fruits from a small wooden crate. Showing them to the kids, she said, “That’s a maypop. They grow on a vine.” She added some peaches and a pint of blackberries as well. “There’s enough for your dads, too.”

Rain accepted the bag and stood there not quite sure how to proceed. Myrtle looked at him with raised eyebrows. “Don’t you kids like fruit?”

“Oh, yeah, we love it. Thanks a lot. Um...well, um.” Rain remembered the sign over the vegetable stand—“Big Myrt’s Fruits and Veggies.” “Ah, are you Myrt?”

“Sure am. That’s what everybody calls me.”

Ran put the bag of fruit on the floor. “Well, we have something to ask you,” Rain said. “We have a friend—a *little* friend...”

“A little friend?” Myrtle thought to herself, here it comes. They’re going to tell me what happened to Max and Lennie.

“You know him,” Boomer said cheerily.

Boomer’s statement caught her totally by surprise. “What do you mean I know him? Know who?”

“His uncle wanted your husband to stop damming up the spring,” Rain explained. “He—our friend—was standing at the back of your yard. He said you saw him. After that, you left the spring alone. See, their towns got water from that spring.”

Hailey added, “Sigigi said to thank you.”

Myrtle Owl sat down on a crate. She was dumbfounded. “I...ah...I remember that day very well.” Only now, Myrtle thought, I know why Wesley had to stop tampering with the spring.

Rain went on. “Well, he needs you to do him a favor. He needs some AA batteries. From time to time could you leave some by the spring?”

“Batteries?”

“Double As. For his radio,” Boomer said matter-of-factly.

Myrtle nodded slowly. “For his radio. Oh, yes. Of course, I’ll do that.”

“Thanks. Um...we’re sorry about Lennie,” Hailey said. “Is he your brother-in-law?”

“Yes, he is. I warned him, but he didn’t listen. It was all Max’s idea.” Myrtle sighed. “We’re taking him to the doctor, but it won’t do any good.”

Trying to make Myrtle feel better, Boomer said brightly, “The spell on Lennie may not be as bad as the one they put on Max.”

The big woman stood up. Always cautious, she said, “I think we’re saying too much now. You kids just keep this to yourselves, okay?”

Rain smiled. “We understand, Myrt. Don’t we, guys?”

Boomer nodded and Hailey said, “Yeah, we promise not to say anything about the Little People.”

Gussie poked her head in the little store. “Myrt, can we get going? Lennie’s waking up.”

“Sure. We’re coming.” Going out on the porch, she said, “Don’t forget the fruit.” Rain reached down to get the bag, but it was gone. So was Marcus.

Hailey looked outside, but didn’t see him. “Marcus! Where are you?” she shouted.

“Over here!” Marcus had the bag of fruit. The bright yellow pods of the maypop just begged to be played with. Like thousands of kids before him, he’s discovered that if you step on a maypop—they pop! “Listen to this!” he yelled. Marcus put one of the maypops on the ground and stomped it. The fruit burst like a popped paper bag.

Myrtle laughed. She remembered how they used to do that when she was a kid. “Well, you won’t be eating that one. I’ll get you a few more.” Stepping back inside the store, she absentmindedly thrust her hands in her

pockets. Her fingers found the tissue-wrapped dart.
The image of the small youth disappearing into the sun
instantly took shape in her mind. Myrtle Owl smiled. So,
his name is Sigigi...

Chapter 26



“Marcus learned Brother Rabbit’s lesson—that the little rabbit can outsmart the big bear.”

The Power of Stories

After Myrtle dropped them off, the kids headed to the hotel lobby. The final session of the conference was over at 1:00 p.m. Rain glanced at the clock over the registration desk. It was 12:20 p.m. No one made mention of the fact that only 3 hours had lapsed since they left Taniba Springs that morning. They were used to “Little People time” now.

Rain and Boomer collapsed into a big couch across from the hallway to the conference center. The chair that Marcus crawled into was so oversized that his feet barely

hung over the end of the seat cushion. Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out a match box that Myrtle had given him. The box housed two cicadas that he had found on the tailgate of her van just as they were leaving. Along with a couple of extra maypops stuffed in his pockets, the large red-eyed insects promised considerable entertainment. Until he let them go, of course.

Hailey took the bag of fruit to her room and put it in the refrigerator. Catching her reflection in a mirror, she thought about trying to do something with her hair. She had pulled it back into a fat, untidy ponytail on their emergency return to Turtletown. But she was just too tired to fool with it. Instead she trudged to the elevator and went back to the lobby. Spotting the boys, she stretched out on the couch across from them. If someone else wanted to sit down, they would just have to find another seat.

Boomer announced that he was thirsty and went to buy some bottles of water. When he returned, Marcus had already dropped off into a doze. He handed a bottle to Rain and Hailey; then opened his own and took a long swig. Twisting back on the top, he took a deep breath and stated the obvious: “Wow! This has been some adventure.”

With her head resting on the arm of the couch, Hailey gazed up at the lobby ceiling. “I can’t believe it. The Little People’s towns have been saved. Once from a good

guy—Eugene—and once from a bad guy—Max.”

“And both times, it was because of Brother Rabbit,” Rain said.

Hailey glanced proudly at her sleeping brother. “He remembered the story about the hawk that Brother Rabbit told him.”

Rain looked at Marcus, too. “Yeah, the little rabbit can outwit the hawk—even after he’s been caught. For a little guy Marcus sure fooled Max Bigelow.”

Boomer added, “‘The Moon in the Millpond’ worked pretty well on the business committee, too.”

But Rain didn’t hear Boomer. He was thinking about the power of little things. Sigigi and the Little People had taught him a lot about that. They were tiny, but their power was great.

Boomer sat back down and clasped his fingers behind his head. “Yeah, I still feel kinda bad about Eugene though. But Brother Rabbit’s shape-shift was awesome.”

Rain sat up a little straighter. He was just realizing how small things that we do together as individuals can add up to become a powerful force—like the storytelling network that had fueled Brother Rabbit’s transformation. “He was awesome, Boomer. But he couldn’t have done it without the help from all our friends...and a lot of kids we don’t even know.”

Boomer pumped his fist in the air. “Whoo-hoo!

Wabbit Power!”

“Yeah,” Rain said thoughtfully, “the power of stories...”

Suddenly Boomer remembered Thomas Wang. “I bet he’ll be surprised when he finds out that his proposal won.”

Hailey screamed: “Eeeeeee! The business committee is gonna go bonkers when he doesn’t look like Jackie Chan!”

Rain laughed. “Yeah, the trick that just keeps on tricking.”

Hailey yawned. She was getting sleepy and a little giddy. What day was it? “I don’t think I’ll ever stop thinking about Sigigi and Cricket. If I knew which radio stations he listened to I would dedicate a song to them or something. You know, ‘This goes out to all you Little People out there...’”

At 1:10 p.m., the double doors to the conference center swung open and a hubbub of talk filled the lobby. Don and Gerald emerged with a small group of tribal representatives whose nametags identified them as being part of a business consortium from the Northwest. The kids watched them exchange business cards and other gestures of friendly departure.

Rain and Hailey waved at their fathers. The chattering of the conference attendees awoke Marcus, who sat up

and waved too. Don and Gerald joined the kids and took them out to a nearby sandwich shop. It didn't get past Don that Marcus's shirt and pants were covered in dirt, and Hailey had twigs in her hair. Gerald also noticed that Rain and Boomer didn't have much appetite and they looked dog-tired. They'd sure been draggy at the powwow last night, too.

"What have you guys been up to? What were you doing out there at Sky High Tours?" Don asked.

Hailey replied (leaving out all the important details), "We went on a hike in the woods with a guide. We learned a lot about the forest around here."

Don didn't look pleased. "Hailey, you didn't ask permission to do that, Sweetie." Gerald wasn't too happy about it, either. He gave Rain a look—like did you instigate this?

Luckily, Marcus rode to the rescue with a nifty diversion. "Hey, Daddy. We brought you some fruit. Have you ever heard a maypop pop?"

"I've heard of maypops, but I never *heard* one," Don confessed. The conversation then turned to things that Don and Gerald remembered doing as kids—including some things they got in trouble for. Rain always liked his father's stories about his childhood, but he was eager to hear about their fishing trip.

"So, Dad, when are we gonna catch those 'brookies' and 'brownies?'"

“Starting tomorrow. Trout, here we come!”

Since it didn't look as if the kids were going to finish their lunch, Gerald picked up the check and they walked back to the hotel. Along the way, they planned for Don and his kids to meet Gerald and the boys at the campground early the next morning—then they would head out to a fish camp on Turkey Hen Creek. The rest of today would be best spent doing laundry, packing up—and napping. As they crossed the courtyard in front of the hotel, Marcus suddenly entertained everybody with an impromptu demonstration of the maypop stomp. It was impressive, but Don told him to clean up the mess anyway.

Chapter 27



Rain walked over to the dejected boy and put his hand on his shoulder. “I was your age when the eagle talked to me. I was afraid he wouldn’t come back, but he did. Brother Rabbit won’t forget you. He can’t.”

Brother Rabbit’s Gifts

Don’s SUV, followed by Gerald hauling the old Airstream, maneuvered along the twists and turns on the road that paralleled the Conetah River. Sitting in the front seat, Rain enjoyed watching the SUV rhythmically disappearing around the curves, then coming back into view as they caught up. He was loving everything about this July 4th morning, especially the way the glint of the sun on the river created a magical shimmer of gold in the trees. Rain could feel a growing love for this land of forest and river—so different from his own homeland.

Rain turned and looked at Boomer who was lying on the back seat. A good night's sleep had recharged his battery, but Boomer was still run down. "Come on, Boomer. Sit up. You'll feel better."

Boomer groaned. He had already given warning of an impending barf. "When does the road straighten out?" He pulled himself up into a sitting position and squinted greenly out the side car window.

Gerald answered, "Hold on, Boomer. The map shows that we'll hit a straight stretch in a minute." True to his prediction, the road uncoiled and the trees thinned as they turned onto a two-lane state highway and headed toward one of the tributaries of the Conetah. The mountainous horizon came into view. Two Rabbit Mountain lay dead ahead. Despite his motion sickness, Boomer saw it the same time that Rain did. The boys exchanged glances but didn't say anything. They were entering familiar territory.

When they arrived at the fish camp 20 minutes later, Boomer was already feeling better. That was the gift of youth—resiliency. The boys had a talent for quick transition that was not limited to popping back and forth between the domains of the ordinary and the magical. Apparently Hailey and Marcus did, too.

Pulling into the gravel yard of the small fish shack Don had rented, Gerald said, "Look at that! Hailey's already got out her fishing pole. She's raring to go."

Rain spotted Marcus helping his dad haul a couple of suitcases out of the car. Powering down his window, he shouted, “Hey Marcus! Who’s gonna catch the most fish?”

“Me and my Daddy!”

While Don checked in with the manager of the fish camp, Gerald and the boys unhooked the trailer and set up the awning (the tent would come later). When Don returned, with a small bucket of live bait (mostly worms), everybody piled in the SUV and set off for an afternoon of fishing on Turkey Hen Creek. Gerald had researched the streams in the area and had chosen this one for several reasons. The creek had a very shallow gradient, and the current was slower than most streams. Consequently, the water temperature was consistent, and the streambed was abundant in plant life and insects—just perfect for trout.

Driving along a narrow road that followed the creek, Don soon spotted where a few other anglers had parked their cars. He pulled over on the side next to the creek bank. The little party got their rods, tackle, and creels and headed down a narrow trail to the creek. Then they split up. Gerald, Rain, and Boomer wanted to try out some of the deeper pools favored by the bigger trout. Don selected a spot where the water was shallow and ran a little faster.

Marcus stuck by his father, but Hailey moved a bit

further up the creek—although she stayed within view of her dad. She knew how to fish. Her mom had taught her how to cast her spinning rod, set the hook, play the fish, and reel it in. The young girl stood on a flat rock and cast her rod upstream. Then she let it drift downstream. Before long, Hailey had pulled in her first trout—a medium-sized rainbow. She celebrated by yahooping to her father and holding up her catch. A short time afterwards, Don heard a faint cheer coming from the pools where Gerald and the boys were fishing. Having no luck, he decided to check out Hailey’s spot.

Collecting Marcus, Don moved up the creek and chose a nice shady place. He decided to try his imitation minnows as bait, but realized he had left them in the SUV. Giving Marcus the keypad, he told him to fetch some minnows and a couple of small spoons from his big tackle box. From where he was standing, Don could see the trail they had taken from the road; it would be easy to keep an eye on the boy.

It always made Marcus feel important to help out his dad. He skipped along the pebble path beside the creek and followed the trail up to the SUV. He unlocked the hatch. Pushing it up, Marcus heard a smacking noise behind him. When he turned around, Marcus became the happiest boy in the world. It was Brother Rabbit eating a sandwich!

Marcus forgot the imitation minnows. “What are you

doing here, Brother Rabbit?”

“Eating your daddy’s lunch. What else do it look like?”

“But how did you get in our cooler?”

“Please, Brother Marcus! You give me no credit. You forget that folks generally open the gate for me!” Grinning, the trickster added, “The car weren’t locked.” Swallowing the last bite, he brushed off the crumbs on his chest and said, “Your daddy make a mighty fine sandwich.”

When Marcus asked what his dad would eat for lunch, Brother Rabbit replied, “Well, that’s his problem, not mine. He’ll scare up something. See, us tricksters don’t worry about small ’taters as they say. We’re always thinkin’ ’bout the big stuff.”

In truth, the “big stuff” the rabbit was worried about was his failed attempt to educate Marcus about healthy food. This was his last chance. Approaching the problem more directly, he said, “I brought you some presents—ah, some right special vittles I want you to taste.”

“Where are they?”

“Over there—across the road. Come on.” As they crossed the asphalt, Marcus told the rabbit to look both ways. Brother Rabbit patiently reminded Marcus that rabbits had eyes on both sides of their heads. Hopping into a little bower of dogwood trees, he led the boy to a banquet. There on an old picnic table were baskets and

bowls of the freshest and healthiest fruits and vegetables.

Marcus was amazed. “Where did you get all this food?”

Mischievously, the rabbit replied, “Brother Marcus, you ask too many questions. Now you sit down right here. I’m gonna show you the good stuff that your great-great grandmamas and daddies give us, and all the good stuff that Rain and Boomer’s ‘grands’ give us, too.” Pointing to the different dishes, he said, “Miz Rabbit, my dearly beloved, cooked you up some okra, rice, black-eyed peas, and yams. They all come from Africa. And right here is the squash, beans, and corn that Indian folks been growing right here for hundreds of years.

“I just want you to try a mouthful—that’s all. You need a lot more variety than what you been eatin’. Now, to help you remember where all this good stuff come from, I got a song to teach you.” The rabbit took out his fiddle and played a little tune. Pulling Marcus close to him, he whispered the words in the boy’s ear—because this song was only for Marcus.

The rabbit waited for a response. But Marcus said nothing; he just smiled pleasantly. The trickster began to panic. He’d flopped again! Desperate, he got right in boy’s face. “Brother Marcus, listen to me. I ain’t trickin’ you—I’m tryin’ to warn you about tricks, just like my stories do. I’m mighty worried that folks are gettin’ tricked wicked by the food they been eatin’. All full of

lip-smacking foolishness that don't give a child enough strength to cross the road! Why Brother Fox never set a trap for me that was that bad!"

Marcus was surprised that the rabbit was so worked up. A veteran of food wars with his parents, he was used to multiple skirmishes before giving in and eating a vegetable. "Well, uh, I did listen to what you told me before. A little bit, anyway. I ate some salad the other night, and I ate some fruit and turkey stew the Little People gave me. They don't have spaghetti—Duffy said."

Brother Rabbit was pooped out. All this health messaging was hard work. But maybe—just maybe he *was* getting through to Marcus.

Trying to please the trickster, the boy picked up a platter and spoon and helped himself from several bowls. Some of the rabbit's offerings he liked and others he didn't. The rabbit said that was alright. He just wanted Marcus to find out what he *did* like. Appreciating all the trouble that Brother Rabbit had gone to, the boy asked, "We're having trout tonight...could I take this stuff with me and give some to Hailey and everybody?"

"Sure you can! Sharin' is what I want you to do!" Scratching his head, the rabbit said, "Hmm. Trout, you say. I don't recollect where I put *my* fishin' pole. I got to find it. Us rabbits ain't much on meat, but I do like a tasty fish on occasion." Brother Rabbit chuckled. "You may have noticed. I ain't your run-of-the-mill rabbit."

Suddenly the trickster's ears turned toward the creek. Someone was coming. "Marcus! Marcus! Where are you?" It was Rain.

"I'm over here!"

Rain jogged across the road. Spotting Marcus at the picnic table, he said, "Your dad sent me to look for you..." Rain stopped. "Wow! Where did all this food come from?" Gawking at the huge spread, he didn't notice Brother Rabbit until he started talking.

"Why if it ain't Brother Rain! I just been talkin' to Marcus here 'bout how important it is to eat all these vegetables. You could probably fill him in on everything—seeing as how Sky Heart taught you all about it. Uh, he said it was all about preventin' diabetes, didn't he?"

Rain was stunned. "How do you know about the eagle and diabetes?"

"Thistle and Coyote told me about it. Thistle asked me to keep an eye on you."

Rain just stared at the rabbit. Then the clouds began to part. "That's right! You asked us if the Little People were treating us right...but who is Thistle?"

"My niece."

Everything was becoming clearer. Rain's jaw dropped. "You mean Thistle is our rabbit from Thunder Rock...and the eagle's name is Sky Heart?"

“Uh-huh. That’s what I said.” Brother Rabbit got up to go. “Well, I like visitin’, but I got to get back to my Laughin’ Place.”

“Wait, Brother Rabbit,” Rain cried. “We have to thank you—again. The story you told Marcus about the hawk... well, it helped him to...”

The rabbit held up his paw. “Now, now, Brother Rain. Ain’t no need to go braggin’ on me. Sigigi done told me all about it.” Looking at Marcus, he said, “I’m mighty proud of that boy.” Hopping over to Marcus, he said, “Now, you promise me you’ll tell my stories—the old stories. And when you get older, I want you to study up on all the African and Indian folks that told ’em. And make up some new stories, too. I got to stay young!”

The rabbit leaped in two jumps to the edge of the dogwood trees. He turned and fixed his black eyes on Marcus—eyes that were bright, terribly clever, and covetous of knowledge. Like Sky Heart, Thistle and Coyote, he would find ways to help these children to be healthy and live long lives.

Marcus cried, “Please don’t go, Brother Rabbit!” But the storytelling had made the trickster of Two Rabbit Mountain strong and he was eager to test his vigor. He spun away—racing, dodging, and bounding his way into the forest.

Marcus stopped and looked back at Rain. He sighed. “Do you think he’ll come back?”

Rain walked over to the dejected boy and put his hand on his shoulder. “I was your age when the eagle talked to me. I was afraid he wouldn’t come back, but he did. Brother Rabbit won’t forget you. He can’t.” Marcus looked up at Rain, trying to feel reassured.

“Come on. Your dad’s gonna think we fell in the creek.” Rain started picking up the baskets and bowls of food. Marcus helped. It took three trips to move it all into the SUV. It was a good thing that the Jacksons had a big cooler. Marcus popped the lock on the keypad, and they hurried down the trail to the creek. Everybody was fishing in the shallow water now. Rain retrieved his rod and joined Boomer.

“Hey, what have you been doing?” Don asked Marcus. “I thought you fell in the creek. Where’s my minnows?”

Handing the imitation minnows to his dad, Marcus answered, “We’ve been talking about vegetables.”

“Really? Talking about vegetables? That’s hard to believe.” Hmm, Don thought, maybe Rain is having better luck with him than I’ve had.

When they took a lunch break, Don naturally wanted to know where all the food came from. Marcus just said that Miz Rabbit had cooked it. Don said it was nice of a reservation family to share their dinner with Marcus, although he was a bit surprised at the quantity. As expected, the missing sandwich was a mystery, but not a problem. Gerald had packed plenty of sandwiches. After

all, he was feeding adolescent boys.

By mid-afternoon, everybody was ready to chill out. The fishing had been great and they all had an appetite for trout. They packed up and left for the fish camp. The rest of the day was spent settling into their new digs. While Gerald took a quick trip to the closest town for supplies, the boys set up their tent, and Don and Hailey squared away the shack. Later, everyone would pitch in cleaning the fish.

When the long summer afternoon began to cool into dusk, Gerald started up his camp fire. He let it burn down to smoldering coals. He lightly salted and peppered the trout, stuffed in a little butter, and wrapped them in tin foil. Then he put the fish on the coals. After cooking about 8 minutes on each side, he removed the foil packets and set them aside. Pulling out two big fry pans, he heated up Brother Rabbit's vegetables.

Then everybody piled up their plates. The trout was flaky and sweet. Don noticed that Marcus ate all of his fish and had dug into several spoonfuls of black-eyed peas, yams, and squash on his plate. The father made no comment; he didn't want to spook his son.

After they'd finished eating, the kids sat around the campfire, talking quietly. The only remaining evidence of the sun was a pinky glow that brightened a few low clouds. Rain and Boomer said they thought the meal was

the best they ever had. Hailey agreed, insisting that the fish she caught was the tastiest.

Gerald and Don joined them, each with a big cup of coffee. They were hashing over a couple of issues that had come up at the conference. Don interrupted their conversation to ask where Marcus was.

“He’s right there, Daddy,” Hailey said, pointing near the tree where the boys had put up the tent. “He’s letting his cicadas go.”

Marcus hollered, “Daddy, I let them out, but they didn’t run off.”

Don laughed. “Maybe they’re just tired, Marcus.”

Everybody got quiet for a while. A gentle breeze ruffled the leaves in the trees and the fire flickered. Suddenly, Gerald raised his head. “Do you hear something?” A sweet, wistful sigh seemed to have joined the breeze, making it more tone than wind. Everyone listened as it transformed into a jolly little melody that began to drift over the camp.

Puzzled, Don said, “That sounds like fiddle music. Who’d be playing a fiddle out here?”

Hailey and the boys glanced knowingly at each other.

Marcus stood up and looked in the direction of Two Rabbit Mountain. A smile spread over his face. Rain was right. Brother Rabbit couldn’t forget him. He was working with the eagle now.

Marcus turned to his very surprised father and said,
“Sounds like Ol’ Hoppum-Skippum Run and Jumpum to
me!” Then he began to sing:

*“Indian folk gave corn, squash, and sassafras tea,
And African folk made okra, yam, and the black-
eyed pea.*

*Rice under the red bean and banana on the side,
Cut me some melon and make it wide;
Turkey, and guinea hen, and hominy.
All for little folks just like me.”*

Epilogue

Readers may be interested in what happened after the Jacksons and Gerald and the boys left Taniba Springs.

Rain, Boomer, and their friends, Hummingbird, Simon, and Arianna, share Skype time every week with Hailey and Marcus. They come up with ideas for promoting type 2 diabetes prevention that they are now calling “The Power of Stories.” Their inspiration comes from the Sky Heart, Thistle, Coyote...and now Brother Rabbit.

Rain didn’t forget Toloowa’s questions about the effects of high levels of blood glucose on the body. His mom answered her questions, but he is still trying to figure out a way to get the information to the little healer. He is hoping that Simon can come up with a solution.

Hailey wrote up their adventures (as much as she could without revealing their encounters with the Little People) in her family newspaper. She gave a colorful description of the powwow, their treks through the local forest trails, and their ride in a helicopter (she got in some trouble with her parents for not getting permission first—but that blew over pretty quickly). Hailey also reprinted the story from the *Thunder Rock* Times about Rain saving his Granma from a kidnapper and foiling a gang of fossil poachers. She wanted her friends to know that she really knew a boy that brave. With Marcus’s

help, she also started a healthy food and physical activity column. Later in her eighth grade year, her school's newspaper advisor suggested that she transfer it to the school paper. Hailey calls her column, "Veggie Girl," in honor of Rain that Dances—the original "Veggie Man." Mrs. Corn at Thunder Rock Middle School is corresponding with Mrs. Graham, the advisor at Hailey's school. They plan to share stories and newspaper columns.

Marcus got his mother to buy him every story book about rabbits that she could find, especially trickster rabbits. His favorites are *Zomo the Hare and Trickster: Native American Tales*, a book of illustrated stories that has a rabbit on the cover. He is also fond of Ananzi the Spider tales. Of course, he has all of Brother Rabbit's stories. His favorite is *Brother Rabbit Gets the Provisions*.[‡] You will be happy to know that Marcus has since expanded his diet far beyond spaghetti, pea soup, and oatmeal.

As for Eugene Frimble, the kids were very pleased to find out that their fathers had recommended Eugene for a variety of career opportunities. He was hired to design eco-tourism businesses for two tribes and is currently designing an educational animal sanctuary in

[‡]In this story, Brother Rabbit takes Brother Wolf's wagon of "vittles" and his horses and hides them. Then he cuts off the tail hair of the horses pulling the wagon. He buries half of the horse hair in the road, and the other half he leaves sticking out of the dirt. He shows the horse's tails to the wolf, saying how awful it is that the wagon and the horses have mired so far down into the mud. Now the wolf will never be able to dig them out. While Brother Wolf laments his loss, Brother Rabbit makes off with the horses, the wagon, and the "vittles." Marcus could never figure out what he was supposed to learn from the story, but as a boy, he admired it for its pure silliness and mischief.

South Africa. The kids worried that Eugene had been the victim of too much tricking, but no doubt the knowledge imparted to him by the Little People taught him about being humble. He now understands that plans, no matter how brilliant or well-intended, can have unintended consequences. Indeed, any interaction with the environment can have unexpected effects. Now, Eugene tries very hard to identify as many of these potential threats as he can before going forward with a proposal.

Back at Taniba Springs, Myrtle Owl began to leave the batteries for Sigigi in a plastic bag beside the spring at the back of her house. In later months, Sigigi would leave presents for Myrtle, too—one was a sack of some of the rarest maize seed in the world. (Myrtle hasn't planted it yet for fear it will get contaminated by other corn species.) One day she brought Lennie with her. He placed three of his tinkers beside the spring. They were miniature sculptures of a tiny woman and two children. Soon after the Little People accepted his gift, Lennie's "confusion" was lifted.

Max Bigelow, however, became convinced that UFOs were using the Wetumka National Forest as a staging area for extraterrestrial operations on earth. Two years after his encounter with the Little People, he was abducted by alien spacecraft. (In actuality, Max is currently residing at the Happy Valley Rest Home. He looks forward to his discussions about intergalactic travel with the night nurse who he respectfully addresses as Commander Andromeda.)

Cast of Characters

(in order of appearance)

Visitors to Taniba Springs

Rain: (Rain that Dances; also called Rain or RD by his friends). The American Indian boy chosen by the Eagle. In this story, he accompanies his father on a trip to the Taniba Springs Indian Reservation where he joins with new friends to protect the towns of the Little People from discovery. Rain never forgets the Eagle's messages about eating healthy and being active, and he happily shares the Eagle's diabetes prevention messages with his new friends and the Little People.

Boomer: (Thunder Cloud). Rain's oldest friend. Always ready for adventure, Boomer goes on the trip with Rain and his father. When the situation gets serious, he lifts spirits with his good humor and special talents—most notably his very loud voice. Boomer recognizes that problems created by tricksters are opportunities for learning.

Hailey Jackson: A young African-American girl; Marcus's sister. Like Rain, Hailey accompanies her father to Taniba Springs. When Rain and Boomer plead with her to join their efforts to aid the Little People, she helps them by obtaining the plans that detail a potential invasion of their hidden homes—a plan that is supported by her father.

Marcus Jackson: An African-American boy; Hailey’s brother. Marcus, a 6 year-old boy, learns valuable lessons from a trickster Rabbit known by the Little People. The Rabbit teaches Marcus how to outwit a dangerous adversary and encourages him to try new foods—especially vegetables.

Eugene Frimble: An economic developer. Eugene is a nerdy “good guy” who plans to introduce Taniba Springs to an environment-friendly approach to tourism. Although his intent is to generate jobs, he is not aware that his plans could potentially have unintended, negative consequences.

Turtle-town Folk

Cricket: (Cholotka) A young woman of the Little People; Sigigi’s sister. Cricket, known for her enchanting singing voice, uses spells to protect her people from the threat of the whirling bird.

Sigigi: A young man of the Little People. Sent to discover why a helicopter has been flying over the Little People’s towns, Sigigi meets four children of the Big People who help him overcome threats to the well-being of the tiny folk of the forest.

Duffy: A young man of the Big People; Sigigi’s friend. Duffy was found in the woods by the Little People when he was a small boy. He chose to stay with them, rather than return to his family. He uses his great strength and size to help the Little People.

Big People of Taniba Springs

Max Bigelow: A helicopter pilot and owner of Sky High Tours. Max Bigelow is a “bad guy” who discovers the Little People while flying over their towns. He devises a scheme to capture and market them as “real-life leprechauns” that will make him a fortune.

Lennie Blatch: An aircraft mechanic for Sky High Tours. Despite warnings from his sister-in-law, Lennie reluctantly joins Max Bigelow in his plot to seize the Little People—and pays the price for believing that Max will let them go free.

Myrtle Owl: A farmer; Lennie Blatch’s sister-in-law. Myrtle is the owner of a small roadside store where she sells fruits and vegetables. When Lennie asks Myrtle what happens to people who “mess with” the Little People, she reflects on her own encounter with the tiny folk and her grandmother’s teachings. She warns Lennie to have nothing to do with Max’s scheme.

The Animals of Stories

Thistle: The little Rabbit; a relative of Brother Rabbit. Thistle always keeps a close eye on the well-being of Rain and his friends. When she has a dream that Rain may be in danger, she and Coyote follow him to Two Rabbit Mountain in her homeland where she seeks the advice of a great trickster.

Sky Heart: The Eagle. Sky Heart does not accompany Thistle and Coyote on their trip to Two Rabbit Mountain. Rather, he knows that Rain will be guided by the lessons he has taught him about making healthy choices and honoring Native culture and values—and dealing with situations created by tricksters.

Coyote: A Trickster. Coyote is eager to meet the famous trickster of Two Rabbit Mountain. Using his magical prowess, he takes Thistle to see Brother Rabbit, her wily and very funny uncle. Coyote, however, has his own motive for the trip—he wants to learn the source of the trickster Rabbit’s power.

Brother Rabbit: A Trickster (The Two Rabbit; Chufezomo; Brer Rabbit). Brother Rabbit is a crafty fellow whose origins are found in American Indian and West African stories. He draws on his considerable powers to perform a great trick that protects the Little People’s towns from discovery. He also teaches the wisdom of clever thinking over ineffective struggle and the good sense of healthy fruits and vegetables.

Other Characters

Niska: A young woman of Turtletown; Cricket’s friend. Niska is the young woman spotted by the whirling bird. Her children, Foosi and Nikkami, are kidnapped by Max Bigelow.

Gerald: Rain's father. Gerald's plan is to take Rain and Boomer fishing with his friend, Don Jackson who (like Gerald) is attending the economic conference in Taniba Springs. Gerald is pleased when Rain and Boomer get to know Don's kids, Hailey and Marcus.

Osihishi: The Headman of Turtletown. Osihishi oversees the town council and its strategies for protecting Turtletown and the other towns of the Little People.

Don Jackson: Hailey and Marcus's father. Don, who has prediabetes, is impressed by Rain and Boomer's healthy eating habits and says he would like to learn more about diabetes prevention. He hopes that their good example rubs off on his son, Marcus.

Gussie Blatch: Wife of Lennie Blatch; Myrtle Owl's sister. Gussie is a pow-wow dancer and employee at the casino gift shop. She becomes worried when Lennie begins to display strange, confused behavior.

Chukmena: A member of the Turtletown town council; husband of Toloowa. Chukmena advises the Little People to be cautious about eating the Big People's foods and not to become too fond of their material goods.

Toloowa: A healer; wife of Chukmena. Toloowa observed that bees were attracted to the "honey" or sugar in the urine of young men who were eating junk food from the Big People's campgrounds. When Rain told her about the causes of type 2 diabetes, she

promised to tell all the Little People to be active and eat healthy foods.

Sumpuhke: The Beloved Woman of Turtletown.

Sumpuhke recommends the strategy that keeps Max Bigelow’s discovery of their town a secret—without doing anyone any physical harm.

Hummingbird (Bird): An American Indian girl; a friend of Rain and Boomer. In this story, Hummingbird stays home in Thunder Rock. However, she organizes local reading and storytelling of rabbit stories that “powers” the great trick that subverts the discovery of the Little People’s towns.

Arianna: A Hispanic girl; a friend of Rain and Boomer.

When Arianna meets Hailey on Skype, she explains that she has type 1 diabetes. Arianna offers to invite her online support group “Type 1 Tweenies” into the storytelling network.

Simon: An American Indian boy; a friend of Rain and Boomer. Simon, also in Thunder Rock, also helps to organize the storytelling network. However, Simon uses social media to promote the reading and telling of rabbit stories across the country.

Glossary

A

Absentminded: Tending to not notice or pay attention to things.

Abundant: Occurring in large amounts.

Accentuated (to accentuate): To make something more noticeable.

Accommodate: To do a favor or provide for; supply with.

Accompany: To be or go with as a friend.

Address: To speak to.

Adjourn: To end a meeting or suspend it until a later time.

Adolescent: A young person, usually between the ages of 12 and 18.

Adventure: An exciting experience or journey.

Affiliate: A company or group that works in partnership with another company or group.

Agenda: A list of items to be considered as at a meeting.

Aggressively: In a forceful or hostile way.

Aghast: Filled with surprise or horror.

Agility: Ability to move quickly and easily.

Agitated (to agitate): To cause to move or to be upset.

Airstream: A brand of recreational vehicle.

AKA: Abbreviation for “also known as.”

Alcove: A small area forming a room-like shelter. An alcove can be inside a building or outside in a natural environment like a forest or a cave.

Alternate: Substitute or other choice.

Altitude: The distance an object is above the ground or above a given level.

Ambition: Determination; desire for work or activity; energy.

Ambush: To attack someone or something by surprise from a hidden place.

Amiss: Not quite right; out of place.

Amplified (to amplify): To make bigger or louder.

Ananzi: A West African trickster character who often appears in the form of a spider. Pronounced A-Nahn-see.

Ancestries: The many lineages from which a family may descend. May include racial and/or ethnic origins or country of origin.

Andromeda: A galaxy in space and the name of a science fiction TV series.

Anglers: Persons who fish with a rod and line.

Antennae: Thin, sensitive organs on the head of an insect or crab that are used to feel and touch things.

Anticipate: To expect ahead of time.

Appetizer: A small dish of food served at the beginning of a meal or a snack shared instead of a meal

Aquarium: A glass-sided bowl or tank where fish, other water creatures, or plants are displayed.

Arc: To move along a curved path.

Array: A large group or assortment of things.

Ascents: Upward slopes or paths.

Asphalt: A black substance used for making roads.

Assessment (to assess): To find out the importance, size, or amount of something.

Assessment: An opinion or analysis of a situation.

Assurance: A feeling of confidence.

Astounded (to astound): To fill with puzzled wonder.

Attachment: Strong feeling of affection or loyalty.

Attendees: The people who are present at a meeting or conference.

Attentive: Listening to or thinking about something very carefully.

Authentic: Real; genuine.

Avocado: A pear-shaped fruit with a dark green skin, large stone inside, and mild, light green fleshy fruit. Avocados are often used in salads and Mexican food.

Awesome: Breathtaking or remarkable.

B

Babbling (to babble): To talk foolishly, unclearly; or to talk too much.

Backhoe: A large machine that digs into the ground.

Banked (to bank): To tilt sideways while making a turn.

Banner: A long sign made of cloth or paper; a flag.

Banquet: A large meal or feast.

Barge: A flat-bottomed boat that carries cargo.

Basked (to bask): To take great pleasure in.

Bat Boy and Elvis: Bat Boy and Elvis are popular subjects for sensational stories in some tabloid newspapers. Bat Boy is a fictitious character that is supposed to be half bat and half human. The singer Elvis Presley died in 1977. Stories have appeared over the years that claim Elvis is “alive and well” and living in various locations around the world.

Beam: A stream of light shining [verb]; as in a wooden support [noun].

Beaming (to beam): To be full of joy.

Beloved Woman: Honored title given to extraordinary women by the Cherokee, Creeks, Choctaws, Chickasaws, and other southeastern tribes; tribal spokesperson or peace negotiator.

Bigfoot: A legendary creature who lives in the woods and is said to be part human and part ape. Also known as Sasquatch.

Billboard Chart: Billboard is a weekly magazine about the music industry. It publishes charts that list the most popular songs.

Billboard: A large advertising sign that is placed on a building or the side of a road.

Binoculars: An optical device, such as a pair of field glasses to see distant objects.

Blacktop: The material used for making roads.

Blazer: A type of jacket resembling a suit coat.

Bleachers: A stand of benches arranged like steps for people to sit on.

Blood sugar: A substance in the blood that rises after eating. People with diabetes have blood sugar levels that are too high.

Blowgun: A long narrow tube through which a person blows a small arrow or dart. The blowgun was used by southeastern tribes for hunting and defense. Skill with the blowgun is still maintained today among some tribes, and is a tool in everyday use by some Amazonian tribes.

Bluntly: Surprisingly or disturbingly truthful.

Bobbled (to bobble): To bounce up and down.

Bonkers: Slang for crazy.

Boogied (to boogie): To dance rhythmically.

Boughs: Tree branches.

Bounded (to bound): To leap forward.

Bouquet: A small cluster or arrangement.

Briar patch: A brushy area formed by thorny plants.

Brookies: Slang term for brook trout, a type of fish.

Brownies: Slang term for brown trout, a type of fish.

Browsing (to browse): In animals, to feed on leaves, twigs, and branches.

Brusque: Very direct, abrupt, or concise.

Buckled (to buckle): To fasten something with a buckle.

Buenas Dias: Means good morning or good day in the Spanish language.

Buffet: A restaurant where food is set out and customers serve themselves.

Buoyancy: The ability to do well in, or recover quickly from, a disappointment or failure; filled with air or liquid allowing something to float.

Burrowed (to burrow): To make a hole or tunnel to use as a dwelling, especially by animals.

C

Canopy: Something that hangs over an area such as a piece of cloth or the highest layer of branches in a forest.

Carbohydrate: A compound (usually represented by sugars, fiber, and starches) that supplies energy to the body. Carbohydrates are found in dairy products, fruits and vegetables, and grains.

Careless: Thoughtless or sloppy.

Cargo: Goods that are carried in a container or moved by planes, ships, trains or trucks.

Cartridge: A container for gas, liquid or powder that is loaded into another device; the container holding the carbon dioxide that fires the net gun.

Casino: A public room or building for gambling and other entertainment.

Casual: An informal way; relaxed.

Caverns: Large caves or chambers in a cave.

Celebration: A special social event, such as a party.

Challenging or challenged: Demanding or difficult.

Charge: To take the lead; to run; and to refill a battery.

Charm: To cast a magical spell.

Chatter: To talk idly, continually, or rapidly.

Chimed in: To break into a conversation or discussion especially to express an opinion.

Chomping: Chewing or biting noisily.

Chopper: Slang for helicopter.

Chortling (to chortle): To chuckle gleefully.

Chuckled (to chuckle): To laugh quietly or to oneself.

Chunkey: A hoop and stick game that has been played by Native American tribes in Southern states for hundreds of years.

Churning (to churn): To stir up; to shake.

Cicadas: Large winged insects with stout bodies and big eyes. They are well-known for their distinctive whirring “song” and long life-cycles. Some cicadas emerge for mating annually, but others have cycles of 2-5 years, 13 years, and 17 years.

Circlet: A little circle.

Circulars: Flyers or pamphlets; round in shape.

Clasped (to clasp): To hold together tightly.

Clump: To cluster or group together; or to walk loudly.

Cluster: A group of things that are close together.

Clutch: To hold with the hands strongly and suddenly.

CO₂: Chemical symbol for carbon dioxide; a gas.

Coaxing (to coax): To convince gently with pleasant words.

Cobb salad: A salad usually made with lettuce, tomato, chicken, hard-boiled egg, avocado, black olives, cheese, and bacon.

Collapsible: Something that can be folded or reduced in size; to fall or shrink abruptly and completely.

Cologne: Perfume or fragrance. Men's aftershave is often called cologne.

Commence: To begin something such as a play, a story, or other activity.

Commotion: Noisy excitement and confusion.

Companion planting: The practices of planting certain crops close to each other that can help each other grow strong.

Competition: A contest between individuals or groups.

Complemented (to complement): To balance or harmonize with.

Complex: Complicated, as in complex thought; a facility with several buildings.

Complicated (to complicate): To make difficult or complex.

Compliment: An expression of respect, affection, or admiration.

Complimentary: Free of charge.

Compulsive: Not able to stop doing something.

Conclusions: What is assumed to be true after evidence has been examined.

Confederation: A body comprising of representatives from different organizations or tribes that wish to work together for a common beneficial purpose.

Conference: A formal meeting, usually lasting several days, where people discuss or make decisions about a particular subject.

Conferred (to confer): To seek the opinions or advice of others.

Confessed (to confess): To admit.

Confidently: Being sure of oneself.

Congestion, congested: Too full or crowded, as in traffic congestion.

Congratulated (to congratulate): To express pleasure to a person, as on a happy occasion.

Conical: Shaped like a cone.

Conscious: Aware of one's own existence, sensations, thoughts, and surroundings.

Consciousness: The condition of being conscious: the normal state of being awake and able to understand or aware of what is happening around you.

Consensus: General agreement about something.

Conserving (to conserve): To protect or to save for later.

Consoled (to console): To give comfort; lessen disappointment.

Consortium: An association of individuals, companies, organizations or governments.

Consult (to consult): To give expert advice or to ask for advice.



Contorted (to contort): To twist, wrench, or bend severely out of shape.

Council: A group of people chosen to make laws or decisions.

Coup: An impressive achievement. Pronounced COO.

Coupler: Device that links pieces of machinery together.

Covetous: Wanting or desiring something greatly.

Crackle: A slight, sharp, snapping noise.

Craftiness: Skill at being clever or deceitfully clever.

Craggy: Rough and uneven.

Craw: The throat of an animal. “To stick in one’s craw” means to cause resentment or discomfort.

Crayfish: A small shellfish, similar to a very small lobster that lives in lakes and rivers.

Creative: Original or inventive.

Creel: A basket for carrying fish.

Creole: A language developed from the mixing of parent tongues.

Crested (to crest): To reach the top.

Critter: A nickname for an animal.

Croker sack: A sack made of a rough material like burlap.

Crouched (to crouch): To stoop or bend low with the arms and legs close to the body.

Culprit: Someone or something responsible for a crime or other misdeed.

Cunning: Tricky or deceitful; also clever and creative.

Curiosity: Having an interest in something, sometimes an interest that is not serious.

Curtly (curt): Speaking in a rude or abrupt manner.

D

Dainty: Delicate; graceful.

Dais: A raised platform. Pronounced DAY-is.

Damper: Something depressing or discouraging.

Dappled: Marked with spots of color or light.

Dawdling (to dawdle): To waste time.

Dead weight: Something heavy that is being carried.

Deafening: Extremely loud.

Debate: A discussion involving several views or opinions.

Debris: Rubble, wreckage, or litter. Pronounced de-BREE.

Deciduous: Describes trees or bushes having leaves that fall off every year.

Decision: A choice made after thinking about several possibilities.

Deflect: To cause something to change direction.

Deftly: Performing in a skillful or clever manner.

Dejected: Very disappointed or unhappy.

Delegation: A group of people chosen to represent or act on behalf of somebody else, a group or organization.

Delicious: Very pleasing to the taste.

Demonstration: A presentation that shows a process.

Depression: A shallow hole or hollow.

Descend: To move from a higher to a lower place.

Destination: The goal of a journey; a place to which something is sent.

Development: The act of creating something over a period of time. Often used to describe groups or companies that create change or build new enterprises.

Devour: To eat quickly.

Digs: Living quarters.

Dill: An herb used to flavor foods such as pickles.

Diminutive: Small or short.

Dinette: A little dining room or a small set of table and chairs.

Discard: To get rid of something that is no longer useful or desired.

Disconcert: To unsettle or unnerve.

Disdainful: Showing contempt or lack of respect.

Disruption: A state of confusion or trouble.

Diverting (to divert): To change a route or path.

DJ: Abbreviation of “disc jockey,” a person who plays recorded music on the radio or at a club.

Docile: Quiet, easy to control, and unlikely to cause trouble.

Dogwood: A flowering tree that is common in the southern United States.

Domains: Worlds or realms of being.

Domestic: Relating to one’s home or family life.

Domesticated: Tame or no longer wild.

Do-se-do: A square dancing step.

Double-decker: A bus or trolley that has two levels.

Doze: A short, light sleep.

Dredge up: Pull something from the bottom of a pond or lake.

Drone: A continuous low humming sound.

Dumbfounded: So surprised or astonished you are unable to talk.

Dumplings: Balls of dough that may have a fruit, meat, or vegetable filling.

Dutifully: Doing without protest; respectfully.

E

Earnestly: Showing deep sincerity or seriousness.

Economic: Based on the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services.

Economy: A system in which people work, produce, buy, and sell goods and services.

Ecosystem: A biological community of interacting organisms and their physical environment.

Ecotourism: An approach to tourism in wilderness areas that promotes protection of the environment.

Elated: Describes a feeling or state of great pride and joy.

Electronics: Devices like phones, tablets, laptops, and cameras that use small electrical parts or computer technology.

Elevated (to elevate): To raise; go up.

Elevation: Height or altitude.

Elmer Fudd: The popular Looney Tunes human character who is usually dressed in hunting gear and tracks the rabbit, Bugs Bunny.

Emcee: A master of ceremonies.

Encounter: A meeting with someone or something.

Energetically: Doing something in a lively or vigorous manner.

Engage (to engage): To get someone's attention.

Engrossed (to engross): To hold attention; to engage or be absorbed.

Ensuing: That which will be happening next.

Enterprise: A project or activity.

Enthrall: To hold by or as if by a spell; to charm.

Enthusiasm: Strong excitement and active interest.

Enthusiastic: Very interested or excited about something.

Entrees: Main dishes. Pronounced AHN-trays.

Enveloped (to envelope): To surround; to be enclosed by something.

Environmental: The surrounding conditions that influence a place or situation.

Erect (to erect): To build something tall and straight; also to be upright.

Esteemed: Admired and respected.

Etched (to etch): To deeply carve.

Evaporated (to evaporate): To dry out, turn from liquid into vapor.

Excursion: A short trip or outing.

Exhausted (to exhaust): To feel fatigue; drained of energy.

Existed (to exist): To be real or to live.

Expectantly (expectant): Describes a feeling that something is about to happen.

Expectation: A belief that something will happen.

Explosive: Expanding violently or bursting with noise.

Extensive: A large amount.

Extraterrestrial: Outside the limits of the Earth.

Exultant: Happy and triumphant.



F

FAA: Abbreviation for Federal Aviation Administration, the government agency in charge of air travel.

Face: The surface, like the front wall of a cliff.

Fancy dancing: An American Indian dance that is fast and energetic.

Fares: Passengers, or the amounts they pay to take a trip.

Fascinated (to fascinate): To attract or entice. In this story, the term suggests a magical attraction.

Fashionista: Someone who is very interested in clothes and fashion.

Fennel: An herb used in cooking and medicines.

Fetch (to fetch): To retrieve; to go for and bring back.

Fidget: To make small movements when nervous or impatient or move about restlessly.

Filed (to file): To walk in a line.

Financial: Having to do with money management.

Flattery: Praise that is excessive or not sincere.

Fledgling: A baby bird.

Fleet: A large group of vehicles or boats.

Flickered (to flicker): to shine unsteadily or to blink off and on.

Flooded (to flood): to produce an enormous flow of water or another substance.

Florets: Clusters of flower or vegetable buds.

Flume: A narrow channel with a stream running through it.

Flush: To drive a bird or animal from its cover.

Fluttering (to flutter): to flap the wings quickly and lightly.

Fluty: Sounding like a flute.

Foiling (to foil): to outwit, to stop in its tracks.

Foliage: The leaves of plants; greenery.

Folksy: Use of simple, unrefined, or friendly speech.

Folly: Foolishness.

Footprint (ecological footprint): The impact of human activities on nature.

Foraged (to forage): To search for food.

Foreclose: To take back property when the money owed on a bank loan is not paid.

Forefinger: Index finger.

Forego: Skip, decline, don't bother with.

Forged (to forge): To shape or form.

Fossil: A bone, body, or print of a dead plant or animal preserved in rock, earth, or tree resin.

Four-eyes: An insulting term for a person who wears glasses.

Foyer: Entry hall. Pronounced FOY-yay.

Fragrant: Having a pleasant or sweet smell.

Freshwater: Water that isn't salty, usually refers to water in rivers and lakes.

Fretful: Fussy or unsettled.

Fretful: To be nervous; upset.

Frolicked (to frolic): To play, romp or move about happily.

Fumbling (to fumble): To search for something in a clumsy way.

Funneled (to funnel): To pour through a narrow opening.

Futuristic: Seeming to appear from the future, not yet invented.

G

Gab: slang for talk.

Gags: Jokes or hoaxes.

Gangly: Tall and awkward.

Gathering basket: a basket used to collect food.

Gawk: To stare; to look at someone rudely.

Generates: Creates or begins.

Generation: The length of time between the birth of parents and their offspring.

Geological: Referring to rocks and minerals that make up the earth.

Gesture: To make a movement of the body that expresses an idea or a feeling.

Giggle (or giggling): To laugh with repeated short high sounds.

Gilded: Covered in gold, or gold-colored.

Glade: An open space in the woods.

Glancing blow: A hit from the side that bounces off at an angle.

Glimpsed (to glimpse): To take a quick look; see a little bit of something.

Glistened (to glisten): to be shiny or glimmering.

Glossy: Shiny.

Glucose: Blood sugar that provides energy to the body's cells.

Goggled-eyed: With eyes very open in a way that shows surprise or amazement.

Golden oldie: A recording or piece of music that was popular in the past.

Goliath: A very tall person. In the Bible, Goliath was a giant who was killed by David with his slingshot.

Gorgeous: Beautiful; very attractive.

Gradient: A place where the ground slopes up or down.

Granary: A storage building for grains like corn or wheat.

Grand finale: An exciting or impressive ending of a show. Pronounced grand fi-NAL-ay.

Granola: A mixture of oats and other ingredients, such as brown sugar, raisins, coconut, or nuts.

Grass dancing: A style of men's powwow dancing invented by warrior tribes from Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, and Nebraska. Dancers wear regalia that are decorated with long strips of yarn or ribbon, so their movements look like swaying grass.

Great Removal: The removal of Native American tribes from the eastern and southeastern states to the West by the U.S. government in the 1830s.

Griot: A storyteller from western Africa who shares history and tradition. Pronounced GREE-oh.

Grommet: A metal or plastic ring placed into cloth or leather.

Guidance: Advice or counseling.

Guileless: Innocent and truthful.

Guinea hen: A bird that tastes like chicken or turkey.

Gusto: Enthusiastic enjoyment

H

Haberdashery: The clothes and accessories sold in a men's clothing store.

Hammering (to hammer): To hit or beat with a hammer or other object.

Hangars: Large storage buildings for airplanes or helicopters.

Harassed (to harass): To bother or torment.

Hares: Large, fast-running, long-eared mammals that resemble rabbits.

Harmony: A state in which everything works together in balance or in agreement.

Haunch: The upper part of the leg; the thigh.

Headman: The chief leader of a community or tribe.

Helipad: An area where helicopters take off and land.

Hiccupping (to hiccup): To make a loud sound caused by a spasm of the diaphragm that pushes air through the vocal cords.

Hickory: A type of tree with very hard wood.

Hitch (to hitch): To pull up as in "hitching up;" or to attach. Also a connection that attaches one thing to another.

Hohokam Polka: A traditional fiddle song from the Southwest.

Hoisted (to hoist): To raise up or lift, like with a crane or forklift.

Hominy: A food made from dried, unshelled corn that is boiled in water.

Hong Kong: One of the world's leading cities. It is a part of China.

Hongry: The word hungry as it is pronounced in some dialects of the American South and West.

Hooey: Slang for foolish talk or writing.

Horizon: Where the sky appears to meet with land or the sea.

Hospitality: Generous and friendly treatment of visitors and guests.

Hubbub: A confusion of many voices speaking at once.

Huddle: To crowd, push, or pile together.

Huff: To say something in a way that shows you are annoyed.

Humble: Not proud or thinking of yourself as better than someone else; respectful.

Humid: Having a lot of moisture in the air.

Husks: The outer covering of corn cobs; also a thin, dry layer that covers some seeds and fruits.

Hutch rabbit: A rabbit raised in a cage.

Hysterically: In an uncontrollable, excited manner.

I

Icily: Describes a very unfriendly tone.

Ill-mannered: Having or showing bad manners; rude or impolite.

Illumination: Light that shines on something.

Illusion: Something that seems different than what it is, or something that is not real but seems to be real.

Imbalance: A state of disproportion that causes problems. In this story “imbalance” refers to different parts of the body not working together to produce a state of health.

Imitation: Something that is created as a copy.

Immune system: The set of tissues within one’s body that work together to resist infections.

Impending: To be about to happen.

Impish: Naughty, mischievous.

Impression: An imprint or dent left on a substance, like the imprint of a foot left in clay.

Impromptu: Not prepared ahead of time.

Incisors: Front teeth.

Incomprehension: Lack of understanding.

Incredulously: Indicating or showing unbelief: appearing hard to believe.

Indian Pipe: A waxy, white leafless woodland herb.

Indignant: Offended; resentful.

Inept: Without skill or ability.

Inevitable: Impossible to avoid.

Ingratiating: Intended to please.

Initial: Placed at the beginning.

Inspection: An examination; a “going-over.”

Instincts: A natural ability or behavior that is automatic.

Insulin: A hormone, produced by the pancreas, which helps the body use carbohydrates and fats for the energy it needs. It helps the cells in the liver, muscle, and fat tissue to take up glucose (blood sugar) from the blood and store it as energy.

Interfering (to interfere): To get involved in a situation without approval; to meddle.

Intergalactic: Located in or relating to the spaces between galaxies.

Interjected (to interject): To say or blurt out something in a way that interrupts what is being said or discussed.

Intermarried (to intermarry): To marry a member of another group.

Intrigued: Being curious or very interested by something.

Involuntarily: Not made or done willingly or by choice.

Iridescent: Shining with many different colors when seen from different angles.

Irises: The colored part around the pupil of the eye.

Iroquoian: A family of North American Indian languages that includes Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, Mohawk, Oneida, and Cherokee.

Irresistible: Too tempting to be resisted.

Irritated (to irritate): To make someone angry; to annoy.

J

Jabbing (to jab): To poke or thrust.

Joiners: Pieces of equipment used to join two or more things together.

Journey: A trip; to travel from one place to another.

Jovially: With good humor or a spirit of fun.

Jubilant: Feeling or expressing great happiness.

Jutted (to jut): To stick out, especially beyond the surface or edge of something.

K

Kilns: Ovens or furnaces for hardening, burning, or drying something.

Kindred spirits: Two people who share a bond based on shared beliefs, attitudes, or feelings.

L

Launch: to take off with force.

Laurel: An evergreen tree or bush with shiny pointed leaves.

Leggings: A covering for the legs.

Lengthen: To make or become longer.

Leprechauns: Mischievous elf of Irish folklore that some believe will reveal where treasure is hidden if caught. Pronounced LEP-re-kon.

Limply: Not firm or stiff.

Lingered (to linger): To wait around or move around a place slowly, not appearing to want to leave.

Loafers: Slip-on leather shoes, shaped like a moccasin, with a low flat heel

Lobbed (to lob): To send in a high arc by hitting or throwing.

Lofty: Rising to a great height.

Lop-eared: Refers to lop-eared rabbits whose ears hang down. This is usually a feature of domesticated rabbits.

Lugging (to lug): To carry or drag a heavy or bulky object.

Luminous: Giving off light.

Lurch: To roll or tip suddenly.

Lure: To tempt a person, animal, or fish to go somewhere by offering a reward.

M

Magicians: Persons skilled in magic; wizards or conjurers.

Maintenance: The care of property or equipment.

Mane: Long hair along the top and sides of an animal; long thick growth of hair on a person's head.

Maneuvered (to maneuver): To move skillfully or carefully.

Mantle: A loose sleeveless garment worn over clothes; also the fabric on a lantern that is ignited to provide light.

Marketing (to market): To promote a business or service.

Maypop: The fruit of the passionflower, a perennial vine with a large yellow edible berry.

Maze: A confusing network of passages.

Meandering: Following a winding course.

Meaningful: Being significant or profound; having a purpose.

Mechanical: Made or operated by a machine or machinery.

Melee: A confused struggle. Pronounced MEH-leeh.

Melody: The tune of a song.

Merriment: Fun and enjoyment usually including much noise and laughter.

Merrymakers: Persons who joyfully and enthusiastically takes part in some activity, festival, or community event.

Miffed: To be angry or in bad humor.

Milling: Walking about in a small space, pacing.

Millpond: A pond created by damming a stream to hold water for operating a mill.

Mimicked (to mimic): To copy or imitate.

Miniature: A smaller-than-usual version of something.

Minnows: Very small fish that are often used as bait to catch larger fish.

Miraculously (miraculous): Something so astounding that it appears to be caused by a supernatural power.

Mischievous: Badly behaved, often in a playful manner, but sometimes to do harm.

Mock: Pretending and imitating with some intent to annoy.

Modesty: The quality of being humble; not arrogant or prideful.

Momentousness: Of great importance; a very large and involved effort; a big effort needed to achieve a goal or to finish.

Monkey business: An expression for silly or mischievous behavior.

Mother-of-pearl: The pearly, internal layer of some shells, used to make jewelry.

Mountainous: Having many mountains.

Muffled: Hushed; barely heard.

Multi-hued: More than two colors.

Munchkins: The small characters from Munchkinland in the book, The Wizard of Oz.

Murmur: To speak in a voice too low to be heard clearly.

Muscogean: A language family spoken by Native tribes in the southeastern United States and Oklahoma.

Muscular: Having large and strong muscles; robust.

Mused (to muse): To think about; to consider thoughtfully.

Musical chairs: A game in which players walk to music around a group of chairs containing one chair fewer than the number of players. The players rush to sit down when the music stops. The player left standing is eliminated.

Mustering (to muster): To emotionally gather up confidence or bravery.

Muttered (to mutter): To say something in a low voice.

Muzzle: The projecting part of the face, including the nose and the mouth, of an animal such as a rabbit, dog, or a horse.

Mystified (to mystify): To puzzle or confuse.

N

Nakota: One of the three language groups of the Siouan-speaking peoples. Tribes speaking the Nakota dialect are the Yankton and Yanktonnais tribes of southeastern and north-central South Dakota.

Nanabozho: A spirit in Anishinaabe mythology, who often appears in the shape of a rabbit but can shape-shift and is characterized as a trickster. Pronounced Ne-ne-bou-JOU.

Nasturtium: A plant with circular leaves and yellow, orange, or red flowers that are sometimes eaten.

Neon: Very bold, bright, color. The name comes from brightly colored electric signs and lights made with neon gas.

Nervously: Feeling or showing worry, tension, or fear.

Nestling (to nestle): To settle snugly and comfortably.

Net gunning: Use of a non-lethal weapon designed to fire a net which entangles the target, usually an animal.

Niceties: Small details that are part of polite or proper behavior.

Niche: A cranny, hollow, or crevice.

Nifty: Clever.

Nipping (to nip): To pinch or bite sharply.

Nose blinking: The term for a rabbit's wiggling its nose up and down.

Nudged (to nudge): to touch or push gently.

Nuisance: Something that is bothering or getting in the way of something else.

Nuthatch: A small bird with a narrow beak and short tail.

Nutrition: Foods that form a diet promoting health and growth.

Nuzzled (to nuzzle): To rub or push against gently with the nose or mouth.

O

Obscure: Unclear; little known; hidden from view.

Observations: Spoken or written notes about something seen or heard.

Ojibwe: Refers to American Indian tribes in the region around Lake Superior and westward. Pronounced O-JIB-way.

Old Joe Clark: A mountain folk song.

Old-timey: A style that was popular in the past.

Omega-3s: Refers to a group of three fats, not produced by the human body, that are found in plant and fish oils. These fatty acids are essential to the health of nerve cells in the brain.

Ominous: Seeming threatening or scary; giving a sense that something bad is going to happen.

Omnivore: An animal that eats both plants and other animals.

Orator: A person with skill in speech-making.

Overhaul: To change something completely in order to improve it.

P

Padded (to pad): To walk on padded feet.

Pancreas: A large gland near the stomach that produces insulin and other substances that helps in the digestion of food.

Panorama: A wide landscape seen with a clear view in every direction.

Parallel: Objects in rows that are located next to each other, move in the same direction, and are always the same distance apart.

Paralyzed (to paralyze): To make powerless or unable to act, function, or move.

Parasites: Organisms that feed on other living things, usually at the expense of the host organism.

Parched (to parch): To make dry through intense heat.

Partition: A divider or separator of one space from another.

Pathway: A track made by foot travel.

Peered (to peer): To look at closely.

Perch: A rod, pole, or branch where a bird or another object can rest.

Perk: Something considered an additional bonus or benefit.

Physique: The size and shape of a person's body.

Pinwheels: A type of firework that spins like a wheel.

Plaintive: Being wistful or somewhat sad in nature.

Plantation, plantation settlements: A large farm or estate on which cotton, tobacco, coffee, and sugar cane is grown. Many workers, including slaves in the southern states, lived in settlements located on plantations in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Poacher: A thief who steals illegally.

Pods: The seed cases of a plant.

Poke: To stick out or forward; to jab; or a sack or bag, as in the expression "a pig in a poke."

Pondered (to ponder): To think or consider quietly, soberly, and deeply.

Pooch: A slang word for "dog."

Portals: Entrances.

Pout (to pout): To show annoyance by puffing out the lips.

Pow-wow: A gathering of North America's Native peoples where they meet to dance, sing, socialize, and honor indigenous cultures.

Practicality: Sensible attitude based on reason, common sense, or experience.

Practiced: Experienced; learned by doing something again and again.

Pranks: Practical jokes or mischievous acts.

Prankster: Someone who plays practical jokes on another person.

Precaution: Something done to prevent possible harm or trouble from happening.

Precipice: A very steep side of a mountain or cliff.

Precisely: Very exact.

Predator: An animal that lives by killing and eating other animals.

Prediabetes: A condition in which a person's blood glucose levels are higher than normal but not high enough to be type 2 diabetes. People with prediabetes are more likely to develop type 2 diabetes. However, type 2 diabetes may be prevented or delayed in persons with prediabetes if they adopt a healthy diet, lose weight, and increase physical activity.

Preen: To smooth or clean feathers with the beak or bill.

Premature: Happening too soon or earlier than usual.

Preppy: Acting or dressing like a student at an expensive preparatory school. Preppy clothing is conservative and includes items such as khaki slacks and button-down dress shirts.

Prey: An animal that is hunted by another animal for food.

Privileged: Honored or proud.

Procession: A group of persons, vehicles, or objects moving along in an orderly fashion.

Productive: Beneficial; working hard and getting good results.

Profitability: Effectiveness in making money or producing good or helpful results.

Promenaded (to promenade): A dance step where partners march together.

Promoting (to promote): To help something grow or develop.

Promotion: Some form of advertising or verbal announcement to bring public attention to a product, event, or sale.

Propellers: Two or more blades that turn quickly and cause a ship or aircraft to move.

Proposals: Plans presented for consideration and possible adoption by to a person or group of persons.

Protuberant: Sticking out from a surface, usually with a curved or rounded shape.

Pry: To inquire nosily or excessively into somebody's private affairs

Pulp: Something soft and wet that has been crushed up.

Pulverize: To crush, beat or grind something into a powder or dust.

Pungent: Having a strong, sharp smell.

Puny: Small and weak.

Purse: Prize winnings, usually consisting of money.

Q

Quarters: One of four equal parts of something.

R

Randomly: Showing no clear plan, purpose, or pattern.

Raring to go: Ready and excited to begin doing something.

Rattling (to rattle): To shake or move quickly.

Ravine: A deep and narrow valley.

Reabsorbed (to reabsorb): To take up something previously produced.

Reassuring (to reassure): To support or encourage.

Recognizable: Identifiable.

Recollect: To remember something.

Recount: To report; to tell again.

Red Wing: A song about an Indian woman whose sweetheart died in battle.

Refracted (to refract): To bend a wave of light in direction when it passes from one medium to another, as when light passes from air to water.

Refreshing: Causing to feel rested and cool.

Regalia: Special clothes and decorations worn for festive or ceremonial purposes.

Rehearsed (to rehearse): To prepare; to repeat an activity until it is perfectly done.

Relief: Relaxation after tension has passed; help or assistance.

Reluctantly: Unwillingly, half-heartedly.

Reservation: An area of land reserved for use by American Indians. Tribes manage these lands through a government to government relationship with the United States. In Alaska, land areas set aside for Alaska Natives are managed by villages and Native corporations; or making arrangements before they occur.

Resigned (to resign): To accept something that you don't like.

Resiliency: The ability to adjust quickly to challenging circumstances.

Respectfully: Showing or having respect.

Restless: Feeling nervous and tending to move around a lot.

Retreated (to retreat): To move away from a place or situation.

Retrieved (to retrieve): To get back or take back.

Revitalizing (to revitalize): To bring new life and vitality to someone or something.

Rheumatiz: An expression for rheumatism, a disease that occurs most commonly in old age. It causes muscle pain, stiffness, and painful swelling in the joints.

Rhododendron: A small leafy tree or shrub that has bright flowers.

Ribbon-cutting: Short for “ribbon cutting ceremony,” a public ceremony conducted when a building or business is opened to the public for the first time. Often, a ribbon is tied across the main entrance and cut by a celebrity or official.

Ring (as in a fossil poaching ring): A group of people who work together to commit a crime.

Roach: A headdress worn by American Indian men, often as part of their traditional regalia. It is made from porcupine guard hair and deer tail hair or other stiff hair. A roach is usually dyed a bright color.

Roller-coastered: To go sharply up and down, like a ride in an amusement park.

Rolling (as in rolling song): Even and flowing.

Rotation: The process of moving or turning around a central point.

Ruffled (to ruffle): To disorder or disarrange.

Rugged: Bumpy and rocky, like rough ground.

Rummage: To search quickly through the contents of a place or container.

Rustled (to rustle): To make a crackling or crunching sound.

S

Sammich: Often, a child's way to say "sandwich."

Sanctuary: A place where someone or something is protected or given shelter.

Sash: A large ribbon or band of material worn around the body.

Sashayed (to sashay): A dance step where partners circle each other.

Sassafras: The dried bark from the root of the sassafras plant that is used in medicine and as a flavoring.
Pronounced SA-Sa-Fras.

Savoring (to savor): to take pleasure in; appreciate.

Scanning (to scan): to look over quickly; to look across a wide view.

Scattered (to scatter): To separate and go in different directions.

Schedule: A timetable, calendar, or agenda for planned events.

Score: To record points or numbers for a game; rating something numerically; or a final set of numbers; a count of 20.

Scrambled (to scramble): To climb over or up something using your hands and feet.

Scrub: In the outdoors, stunted trees, bushes, and other plants growing in a dry area.

Scruff: The back of a person or animal's neck.

Scruffy: Dirty in appearance.

Scrumptious: Delicious.

Scrunch: To draw or squeeze together tightly.

Secure: To make safe; guard.

Seersucker: A lightweight fabric usually worn in the summer that has an uneven surface and a pattern of lines. Seersucker, once popular for men's suits, is no longer considered fashionable.

Self-conscious: Unsure of oneself; somewhat embarrassed.

Sensitivities: States of high levels of awareness to something of interest.

Sentry: A guard at a point of passage.

Serenity: The state of being calm, peaceful, untroubled.

Shafts: Vertical or inclined openings that ventilate caves or other underground structures.

Shamefaced: Being embarrassed or feeling guilty.

Shape-shift: To change from one kind of being into another.

Shatter: To break or fall into pieces.

Shawl dance: A woman's powwow dance style that is especially popular among southern tribes. Dancers carry large, brightly colored shawls and use them to make motions that imitate butterflies.

Shepherded (to shepherd): To herd, guard, tend, or guide.

Shimmied (to shimmy): To move or shake the body from side to side.

Shrugged (to shrug): to hunch up the shoulders to express hesitation or uncertainty.

Shuddering (to shudder): To tremble or shake.

Shuffled (to shuffle): To walk slowly without picking up the feet; to rearrange papers or a deck of cards by moving them over each other quickly.

Sighted (to sight): To see; to notice or spot.

Signaling (to signal): To indicate or show by signs or other motions.

Signature: A person's name written in a distinctive way.

Silhouetted (to silhouette): To create a dark shape against a lighter background.

Simultaneously: Done at the same time.

Sinkhole: A low area or hole in the ground that is formed when soil and rocks are removed by flowing water.

Situation: All of the facts, conditions and events that affect someone or something at a particular time and in a particular place.

Skeptical: Not easily convinced; having doubts or reservations.

Skids: The undercarriage that supports a helicopter and provides a landing surface.

Skirmishes: Minor or brief arguments or disagreements.

Skype: A telephone service that allows users to communicate with each other through voice and video typically using computers.

Slumped (to slump): To sit, lean, or fall heavily.

Sly: Clever and somewhat sneaky.

Small taters: Small potatoes, a slang term meaning something that isn't important.

Smirk: To smile or say in an insincere manner.

Smoldering (to smolder): To burn slowly without flames but usually with smoke.

Smug: Arrogant; with conceit or self-importance.

Snappy dresser: Someone who wears smart and fashionable clothing.

Snicker: To give a small and often nasty or sly laugh.

Sniggered (to snigger): To laugh quietly at something or someone.

Snitch: A slang term meaning to steal something.

Snooze: Nap or sleep.

Solo: To do something alone; a performance by one person.

Solution: A liquid in which something has been dissolved.

Spare tire: Slang term for the excess fat around an individual's stomach which looks like someone is wearing a tire.

Specialty: Something that a person or place is known for making or producing very well.

Species: A group of animals or plants so closely related that they can interbreed and produce fertile offspring. They have great similarity in DNA, body organization, and ecological niche.

Spectator: An onlooker; a watcher; someone not involved in a situation.

Spells: A magic ritual.

Spiffy: Neat, stylish, and attractive.

Spindly: Long, thin, and usually weak.

Spiritual: Of or relating to sacred matters.

Sprinkled (to sprinkle): To scatter small drops or bits of a substance.

Sprinted (to sprint): To run at top speed especially for a short distance.

Spurt: To burst forth; erupt.

Squalling (to squall): To cry out or make an unappealing sound.

Squatted (to squat): To crouch; sit on one's heels.

Squeal: A high-pitched cry or noise.

Squeezed and squozed: Fanciful language used by Brother Rabbit to mean compressed into a tight space.

Squinting (to squint): To look at something with the eyes partly closed.

Squishy: Soft and often wet.

Stalked (to stalk): To follow by moving slowly and quietly

Stereotypes: Common beliefs about groups of people that imply that particular characteristics apply to all members of the group.

Stickler: A person who believes that something is very important and should be done or followed all the time; a perfectionist.

Stifle: To choke back; suppress.

Sting by Bee disease: In the novel, the name used by the Little People to describe the disease we know as type 2 diabetes. In ancient times, healers noticed that people with untreated diabetes had sweet-smelling urine—a product of too much blood sugar—that could attract bees and other insects.

Stocky: Short with a strong-looking body.

Stomp ground: An open area where traditional dances are performed.

Stomp: A dance with heavy, rhythmic steps.

Stonerollers: A common fish found especially in clear streams of the central and southern United States.

Stoop: To bend over.

Stowaway: Someone who hides in a vehicle in order to travel without paying or being seen.

Strategy: A plan; an approach.

Striations: Tiny grooves or channels most often occurring in parallel.

Struggling (to struggle): Trying to overcome a challenge or opponent without making much progress.

Strut: A thin piece of wood or metal used for support in a building or piece of furniture.

Stuttering (to stutter): To have a speech problem that causes you to repeat the beginning sound of some words.

Subterranean: Existing below the surface of the earth.

Sullenly: Acting resentful or angry, but also dull and silent.

Summary: A short review of something that captures the most important information.

Sunflower: A tall plant that usually has very large yellow flowers and produces edible seeds.

Superstitious: Having beliefs based on magic or ignorance.

Surge: To move forward as in waves.

Suspicion: A feeling of doubt and/or mistrust.

Suspiciously (suspicious): Having or showing a cautious distrust of someone or something.

SUV: Abbreviation of “sports utility vehicle,” a high-powered car with all-wheel drive.

Swagger: To walk or conduct oneself in an arrogant way; strut.

Sweathouses: Various permanent or portable structures typically heated by fire or by pouring water over hot stones and used by American Indians to induce sweating for medicinal, spiritual or social purposes. Also called sweatlodges.

Swig: To drink in large gulps.

Swiped (to swipe): To pass a card through an electronic reader.

Sycamore: A tree of the eastern and central United States that has light-brown bark that peels off in thin flakes.

Symbol: An object that expresses or represents a particular idea.

T

Tabloids: Small newspapers or magazines with lots of photographs of celebrities and world leaders, often with stories that are exaggerated or filled with questionable information. Tack room: A room in or near a barn for storing saddles, harnesses, and other equipment.

Tackle: To force a person to fall to the ground; also equipment used for a purpose like fishing.

Talons: Claws on a bird that hunts and eats other animals.

Tampering (to tamper): To touch or make changes to something that you should not.

Tarmac: A material used to cover the ground that is made of layers of crushed stone covered with tar.

Tarpaulin: A canvas covering.

Tart: Having a sharp and sour, but usually pleasant, flavor.

Tattoo: A permanent design made on the body.

Teaching certificate: An official document that proves someone has the right to be a teacher.

Technical: Having special knowledge especially of how a particular kind of work is done.

Temporary: Lasting for a short term; not permanent.

Tendrils: Something that is long, thin, and wispy like strands of hair, vines, or curls of smoke.

Terraced: Arranged in levels or steps.

Terrain: The land or physical features of the environment.

Terrapin: A kind of small turtle that lives in water.

Terrier: A type of small dog originally used for hunting.

Thatch: To make a roof with dried plant material.

Thermal imaging: The use of heat-sensitive equipment to detect or take an image of people or things.

Thicket: A group of bushes or small trees that grow close together.

Threading (to thread): To make one's way cautiously through something.

Threatened (to threaten): To cause to feel fearful or anxious.

Throng: A large number of people gathered together.

Throttling (to throttle): To reduce the fuel that feeds an engine.

Thrumming (to thrum): To make a low, rhythmic sound.

Tickled (to tickle): To appeal to someone's taste or sense of humor.

Tiers: A series of articles or steps rising one behind the another.

Tingling (to tingle): To feel a slight prickling and stinging sensation.

Tipi: A tent that is shaped like a cone and is used as a traditional shelter among some American Indian tribes.

Tone: The quality of a sound or person's voice.

Torrent: A large amount of something that is released suddenly.

Tourism: The activity of traveling to places for sightseeing and recreation.

Tradition: A long-established way of doing or believing; related to culture and custom.

Trail of Tears: The name given to the forced relocation of American Indian Nations from southeastern parts of the United States following the Indian Removal Act of 1830.

Tranquil: Quiet and peaceful.

Transform: To change or alter something completely from one state to another.

Transition: A shift or movement from one state or condition to another.

Translate: To change words from one language to a different language.

Transmogrification: The process of change from one state or form to another that is out of the ordinary or very weird; a shape-shift.

Tributary: A stream feeding into a larger stream or a lake.

Trickster 101: An expression that implies something that all tricksters have been taught or should know.

Trickster: A god, goddess, man, woman or animal who plays tricks or otherwise disobeys normal rules and conventional behavior. Tricksters break the rules of nature and society without concern about morality. They may cheat, steal, and lie, but their behavior unusually results in creative, positive effects. Tricksters can be cunning or foolish or both. They are often funny even when teaching important life lessons or performing important cultural tasks.

Trillium: An herb of the lily family with a stem bearing three leaves on a solitary spring-blooming flower.

Triumphant: Having won a victory and being proud of it.

Trolley: A bus that makes short trips.

Trophy: An award given to celebrate a victory or other winning achievement.

Trudge: To walk with much effort.

Tubular: Having the form of a tube.

Turkey in the Straw: A well-known American folk song, originally a fiddle tune, which dates from the early 19th century.

Tussle: A short fight or struggle.

Two-bit: Slang term for not being very important or valuable.

U

UFO: A flying object in the sky that some people believe could be a spaceship from another planet, otherwise known as an unidentified flying object.

Ultimate: Greatest or most extreme.

Uncertainty: Not being sure; doubt about something.

Uncharacteristic: Not showing normal or expected behavior.

Undetectable: Unable to discover or determine the facts.

Undulating (to undulate): To roll from side to side; or to heave up and down.

Unease: A feeling of worry or discomfort.

Unpaved: An area without a cover of material, such as stone, tar or concrete.

Unsavory: Offensive or unpleasant.

Upwelled (to upwell): To move or flow upward.

Urine: Waste liquid that collects in the bladder before leaving the body.

V

Vacate: To leave or quit.

Valued: Having usefulness or importance.

Vanity: Self-importance; conceit.

Veer: To change direction suddenly.

Vegetation: Plants that cover a particular area.

Venting (to vent): To allow something to go out through an opening.

Veteran: An expert or someone with much experience; someone who has fought past battles.

Vibrant: Very bright, showing great liveliness and energy.

Vibration: A continuous slight shaking movement.

Vigor: Strength, energy, or determination.

Virtue: The result that comes from something good (as in “by virtue of his wits, he was successful”).

Visual: Relating to seeing or to the eyes.

Vittles: An expression for food and drink that derives from the word “victuals.”

Volume: An amount of something that can vary like the loudness of sound or the number of cars.

Vouch: To give a guarantee.

W

Wail: To cry out in a sad way.

Wary: Not having or showing complete trust in someone or something that could cause trouble.

Weir: A low wall or dam built across a stream or river to raise the level of water or to change the direction of its flow.

Whine: To make a shrill troubled cry or a similar sound.

Whirling (to whirl): To move or go in a circle.

Wilderness: An uncultivated natural area with significant wildlife in which few people live.

Wits: To have understanding, information, or knowledge of something.

Wood that sings: An expression for a fiddle.

Wraith-like: Like a ghost.

Y

Yelp: To cry out suddenly in a high voice.

Yield: To give in to the wishes of another.

Z

Zinnias: A plant that is grown in gardens for its brightly colored flowers.

Zoom: To rush or move quickly; to focus on an object with a computer, microscope or camera with the intent of enlarging or minimizing it in size (as in “zoom out” or “zoom in”).

About the Native Diabetes Wellness Program

The mission of the Native Diabetes Wellness Program is to work with a growing circle of partners to address the health inequities so starkly revealed by type 2 diabetes in Indian Country. With social justice and respect for Native and Western science as grounding principles, we strive to support community efforts to promote health and prevent diabetes.

To request free copies of the Eagle Books series, or for more information about the program, please contact the CDC. Phone: toll free 1-800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636) TTY: (888) 232-6348. E-mail: diabetes@cdc.gov

About the Author

Terry Lofton, former Director of the Eagle Books project at Westat Atlanta, retired in 2013 from a 30-year public health career. As author of *Coyote and the Turtle's Dream* and *Hummingbird's Squash*, the first two Eagle Books youth novels, she was delighted to partner with Kauffman & Associates, Inc., to complete the last novel in the series, *The Trickster of Two Rabbit Mountain*. A frequent traveler through the mountains of north Georgia, she was inspired by the landscape to imagine the hidden towns of the Little People in the fictitious Wetumka Mountains and the Laughin' Place of a legendary trickster.

About the Illustrator

Patrick Rolo, Bad River Band of Ojibwe, draws from his rich Native American heritage to illustrate the Eagle Books. Mr. Rolo's career includes newspaper, magazine, comic book, and courtroom illustrations. Also a painter, his works in oil hang in galleries in Minnesota and Washington.

Praise for *The Trickster of Two Rabbit Mountain*

“I liked this book is because it talks about diabetes and that makes me want to eat healthier. My favorite part is when the rabbit changed into Jackie Chan and did a presentation [that] made the other people laugh hard. The story also reminded me of how my mom tells me about protecting the forests and Mother Earth.”

- **Dominique Gourneau**

Three Affiliated Tribes

Minneapolis, MN

“I learned about a lot of cultures, but the one I really looked into was the Little People of the cave. They are small and everybody there depends on each other. They relied on the environment such as making their weapons, foods, and more. We need to protect the environment because it gives us shelter, water and air.”

- **Jaylen Clark**

Catonsville, MD

“I really liked the book; it was fun, informative, and eye opening. I was really anxious to see what happened next. Before I read the book, I thought that it was just vegetables that you had to eat along with exercising. Now I know that you have to eat all kinds of healthy foods. I also learned that there are many different stories from different cultures. The stories have a moral to them that teach a good lesson.”

- **Jordan L. Gross**

Atlanta, GA

“The story is engaging and connects the adventures of a group of friends with environmental awareness and healthy living. My favorite part of the book was when Marcus paid attention to Brother Rabbit’s story and was able to apply what he learned to his current situation. Marcus also trusted in his friends and knew that they would come to help him.”

- **Arianna Baros**

(The real Arianna)

Albuquerque, NM

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