

# Chapter 1

Daylight seeped from the dreary, overcast sky. As night descended, black clouds drew a veil across the stars. At last, they parted, and the darkness gave birth to a full moon surrounded by a shimmering halo.

A beam of soft lunar light pierced the glass patio doors of the motel room, illuminating dingy walls. An old shaman woman squatted in the middle of the room, preparing herself for a ritual that had been practiced by her tribe for the past ten thousand years. It would transport her to another world, a spiritual realm where the spirits of both good and evil dwelt.

Sitting back on the heels of her bare feet, knees drawn tightly to her chest, she reached for a large tibia bone adorned with beads. The other hand delved into her skirt pocket for a small chicken bone she had salvaged from the motel dumpster the night before. Grinding it slowly in a tiny stone bowl, she began a soft chant.

Next, she pulled out a pouch filled with powder and emptied its herbal contents. Using the jagged edge of the sharp tibia bone, she made a small cut in her finger and waited patiently for the droplet of blood to splash onto the pile of powder. She placed the bone against her thin brown lips. A whistle quavered across the room. Alternating between rhythmic chanting and clicking of her

beads, the old woman stood up and made a slow circle around the bowl. The ceremonial dance would redefine the spiritual properties of her body, mind, and soul.

As she passed the dresser, she grabbed a water bottle and took a sip, then spat the liquid into the powder. The tibia bone that had once connected flesh and sinew, and which contained the essence of physical life, was now used to stir the roux of her potion. Dipping her first two fingers into the concoction, she scooped up a dab of paste and smeared it along her tattooed forehead. It would disguise her face from the evil spirits.

Her finger proceeded down the bridge of her nose, sweeping to the outside perimeter, then down to the chin. She did this first to one side, then to the other. Dipping her fingers in the paste once again, she crossed her arms. Starting at her shoulders, she ran the tips of her two fingers down her arms, all the while continuing her chanting.

The shaman woman had been designated the keeper of sacred knowledge, accumulated over thousands of years. Her role was to restore harmony in the world by dispelling toxic, negative energy and restoring it with healthy, constructive energy to keep the balance between man and nature through ritual laws of wisdom that extended beyond time and space.

In this place, and at this time, the shaman's goal was to manifest the reunion of a particular man's soul back to his body.

Powerful forces gathered, swirling around her. At the moment she pierced the veil of earthly reality, it forged an electromagnetic field that surrounded the old woman's body. In an altered state of consciousness, she became unaware of the external world. Eyes closed,

she entered a dark trance. Spirits collided. Lightning flashed, followed by a deep clap of thunder.

It shattered her trance. She collapsed to the floor. In the instant before her head struck the corner of the dresser, she saw the man's face that would save her granddaughter.