

## The Writer of Dreams

by

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My Indian grandfather was a white man. He grew up on the Great Plains, exploring and unearthing beads, arrowheads, and flint tools left by the Pawnee who had lived on that very same land so many years ago. They were the original occupants, there before the cattlemen, even before the soldiers.

Maybe my grandfather had belonged to the Pawnee tribe in a past life. Maybe that was why he attached himself to the traditions of a people he couldn't claim biologically. No one knew why he had his dreams, but my grandfather was deeply respected among both the white community and the Native Americans. He did not lie.

That is why I believed him when he told me the secret, whispered on his deathbed.

Unable to speak as my grandfather uttered his last words, I only listened. Somehow, I thought he was close enough to the other side to know how I felt and what I was thinking without the need for spoken language.

"There is a sacred place," he had said, "back on the homestead." I knew he was referring to the patch of prairieland where he had grown up, a hundred and sixty acres near the old town site of Big Tree.

"Folded within the crevices of Deer Creek Canyon lives the Writer of Dreams." As Grandfather lay on his deathbed, he saw things that I couldn't. His eyes darted back and forth, around the room. I kept turning to see what he was looking at but saw nothing.

He continued in a low voice. “Follow the canyon walls. Find the tiny man who lives there. He is the Writer of Dreams...” Grandfather raised a gnarled hand, pinching the air between his forefinger and thumb to illustrate the “tiny man.”

My grandfather’s wish was to die at home, and we honored this. His hospital bed covered most of the free space in the miniscule living room. My brother was there, his wife and little boy, a hospice nurse, but I was the only one beside Grandfather at three in the morning when he shared his last wisdom.

“A sacred place ... Deer Creek Canyon ... Go there ... find the Writer of Dreams,” he whispered one last time, and he was gone.

I had read stories of such places like the one my grandfather discovered: the Peruvian “Puerta de Hayu Marca” (Gate of the Gods), Stonehenge, Shangri-la. Could this remote piece of land, once home to the Pawnees, really hold the secret to a sacred place?

I wanted to know.

Unfortunately, I had funeral arrangements to make and a house to clear out, one that had been filled with ninety-four years of Grandfather’s clutter. It was months before I could even consider getting away, and as life sometimes has a tendency to do, it got in the way.

Work was short-staffed. The garden produce was ready to be picked. Church needed help. The weather was cold. The months slipped away, and before I knew it, a year had passed.

Grandfather’s death weighed on me. Anyone could argue that he was old and had lived a full life, but his death had left me orphaned at age thirty-two. No parents. No grandparents. My brother lived across the country. Sure, I had lots of friends, but shouldn’t I have found that special someone by now? I fell in love once with a cheating alcoholic. Chris was selfish and

unmotivated and finally ran away with someone younger, better looking, and much more fun than me, or so I was told. No one else ever came along.

I made it through the holidays alone. It was sad, but I always knew that my friends would be around again after all of their family events were over. The problem with having no family around was that *all* I had were my friends. When things turned sour at work, and people were unhappy with me, I turned to my friends, but they were often busy with family, or their jobs, or we lost touch.

A year after my grandfather's death, I felt more alone than ever. After a couple more weeks of going through the motions of life without really feeling anything, I spent some time thinking, just thinking about Grandfather, trying to hear his voice and listen to his advice. The idea of the tiny man who lived in Deer Creek Canyon haunted me. What could he have meant by telling me such a strange story?

He called the tiny man the Writer of Dreams. Grandfather may have been white, but he was known as a wise old Indian. That's what everyone had called him. I smiled at the memory, the first smile in weeks. Yes, I had friends, a job, a house, and a church, but I felt no purpose. I had no reason for being. No one needed me. Not really.

During my time of introspection, I realized life could not continue like this. Nothing mattered. No one cared enough to miss me. No one loved me. I didn't want to feel this way, but I couldn't help it. I needed to stop this existence—one way or the other.

Grandfather would understand. I wondered if he would be there for me on the other side. I wasn't entirely sure he would. I hated my fear.

Grandfather had told me to go to Deer Creek Canyon, and I didn't do it. He said it was a sacred place. He wanted me to meet the Writer of Dreams. Obviously, a tiny man did not live in

the wall of a canyon out in the middle of nowhere, but I wanted to figure out what he meant. Maybe Grandfather was out of his mind. No. I had been there when he died. He was completely clear. He wanted me to find a dream—an ambition, a purpose, maybe have an adventure chasing a fantasy.

Memorial Day was a three-day weekend, and I couldn't stand the thought of three days with nothing to do, so I drove the eighty miles to the old homestead. It took some time to find the place. There was nothing left of Grandfather's home site besides the skeleton of a windmill with broken blades clacking in the breeze.

I had to step out of my comfort zone to ask permission from the landowner to drive onto the property.

"My grandfather grew up out here," I said to the man on the other side of the screen door. "He passed away about a year ago, but if you don't mind, I'd like to take a few pictures of the old place." I felt like a fool standing there on his front step, the man leaning on the half-open door, a yellow lab sniffing my shoes.

"You can drive out there. I don't care. See that gate at the end of the section?" He pointed to the end of the barbed-wire fence at the last intersection. I'd been through gates like this before. A strip of wire attached to a post at one end allowed a person to undo the gate and pull the section of fence back.

"Sure," I said.

"Follow that road for a couple of miles, then head right." He pointed across the rolling hills, his other hand patting the bright green hat placed lopsided on his balding head, clearly a free gift from a seed corn company. "You should run right up against the canyon."

“I’ve been here before,” I told him. “I was a kid. You may know my grandfather.” I told him the name.

“The wise old Indian!” he exclaimed.

“That’s him!” We laughed.

“Appreciate you asking permission to drive out there. Just don’t forget to close the gate. I don’t need my cows getting out.” He smiled, and I felt some comfort at the connection we had to the land and to my grandfather.

I drove across the bumpy grassland, hoping not to get stranded out here. Then again, it wouldn’t have mattered if I did. The thought gave me relief.

As the canyon came into view, I saw a few cows milling around at the bottom. I probably could have driven down into it, the slope was so gradual, but I was too cautious to try. I found the cow path gouged into the canyon from years of hooves following the same route and began my descent.

Here I was at Deer Creek Canyon looking for the tiny man who lived in its walls and was called the Writer of Dreams.

“Ha!” I shouted to the canyon.

“Ha,” said the echo.

The cows stopped grazing and turned wide eyes upon me. Not one moved. They even stopped chewing, small bits of grass left dangling from the sides of their mouths.

“I have an audience,” I said. “Do any of you know where I could find the tiny man? No? Some help you are.” I kicked at the dirt, muddier the lower I went, and continued my exploration.

As I followed the curve of the canyon base, I spotted an area with a sheer face. It had maybe twenty feet of exposed earth, so I headed toward it. Almost there, a sound cut the silence—one I had forgotten but instantly recognized.

It was the shake of a rattle.

The snake was coiled in the shade of the canyon, maybe five feet from me.

I froze.

Would it strike me from where it was? It rattled again. The cows continued to watch the show from a safe distance.

I stared at the snake. It stared at me. I didn't move. It didn't move.

It wasn't exactly my life flashing before my eyes, but I began to think back as I stared at that rattlesnake. I had been out here many years ago with my grandfather. We had picked wild grapes and were loading our buckets into the back of the pickup when he heard a rattle. He located the snake in the grass and killed it instantly with one practiced swing of the spade he kept in his pickup for just such an event.

My brother was with me. Things had changed so much from then to now. How had it happened? I never thought life could look like this. I didn't do anything wrong. I didn't do anything right either. "I don't want my life," I said to the snake.

The blackness of its eyes and the flick of its tongue seemed to be an answer. I had thought about it many times. How would I do it? Pills? A gun? Slit wrists? Running my car into a tree? Once I heard that apple seeds were poisonous, so I thought about saving up a whole cup of them and then chowing down. No matter what scenario I contemplated, I always saw that it could fail. With my track record for failure, chances are, life would go on and be much worse after the attempt.

Now, all I had to do was step forward. It would be an accident. The farmer would find me. My brother would come and make arrangements. He would clean out my house and sell my car.

Yet something held me back. I stood there for what could have been hours. My body did not move, but my mind tumbled forward until I fell into the blackness of the snake's eyes.

The darkness engulfed me. Then I saw colors swirling through the black. Had the snake bitten me? Was I dying?

I suddenly realized I was not alone in this abyss.

"You have control," a small voice spoke. "You are still that little child who thinks anything is possible."

"No," I said, dizzy and confused by the rainbow all around me. "I'm nothing but a failure. I've been rejected. There's been nothing I've accomplished. My grandfather was not proud of me. Look at my brother. He's running his own business. He has a wife and family. I am nothing."

"You can't compare your insides to his outsides," the voice stated. "You have power and potential, but you have been complacent, comfortably living a life set by societal norms where the fear of losing what you have outweighs the hope of achieving something better."

"I don't know what to do?"

"Decide to try," said the voice within the spiraling colors.

"I'll just fail."

"Good. Failure makes us grow. It's the fear of failure that has made you immobile. It's time to try. Now, tell me. What is your dream?"

“I don’t know,” I said in all honesty. Purple dots appeared on a pale blue background. It seemed like I once had a dream. I remembered wanting a dream, but did I ever have one? Yes! What was it?

“Stop waiting. Tomorrow doesn’t exist.”

“I don’t remember my dream!” I yelled.

“Then I will write your dream again.” There was a pause before the small voice returned. The blue now overtook the purple. “Remember the science classes you took in high school?”

“Yes.”

“Did you enjoy them?”

“Yes! Yes, I did!” The colors swirled around me.

“That is your dream.”

“I don’t understand. What do I do?”

“Precisely,” the voice stated. “You must do something. It doesn’t matter what it is, as long as you act.”

“So, you’re saying I should do something with my love of science. I could go to school to be a teacher. Or volunteer. Or work on a project.” I began to see myself going back to school and meeting new people. There was purpose.

“Once you decide, your dream will work itself out, and if it doesn’t, then I will write you a new dream.”

The colors dissipated, and the darkness engulfed me again. Then it lifted as suddenly as it had appeared, and I found I hadn’t moved from Deer Creek Canyon. The sun was low in the sky, and the snake was no longer coiled in front of me.



My grandfather had told me the truth on his deathbed. I was ecstatic! He had once known what it was like to be alone, too, and he knew I could be trusted with the secret. Whether the tiny man I heard was an ancient Pawnee spirit, my higher self, the universe, or the still small voice of God, I learned that there was much more to life than what I had been seeing. From now on, it would be the journey to a dream that would make my life exciting and interesting, and all it took was one decision.

As I wandered out of the canyon, I pictured myself working in a lab, maybe learning about genetics. Then my mind opened to another thought. Someday, somehow, I would bring a child here to this sacred place, and maybe later in life I would share with that child the story of the tiny man who lives in Deer Creek Canyon, the man who is the Writer of Dreams.