

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Shortly after lunch, Mason was handed a note from Dr. Williams demanding he take the rest of the day off. Throughout the morning, Mason had fought through fever-like symptoms and new episodes of faintness and near collapse.

On his way home from the Center, Mason pulled into the asphalt lot of the Old County Library and went inside. He walked past several stacks of books on the second floor until he reached the collection on psychology. Mason hoped a return visit to the library would give him time to find the answers he desperately needed. He looked over the selection and withdrew a couple of texts.

Although the visions were dwindling in number, their intensity and pain were on the rise. His concern was not the pain, however, but the content. The meaning. None of the CME's neurologists offered answers. They performed many tests, but none presented resolution. It was his intention, as he settled into a sturdy wooden chair, to find the root cause of this madness; to once and for all understand the significance of each message.

For the next three hours, Mason read the scientific details of a medical journal, which recounted the case studies and causes for various neurological phenomenon. Although he suffered from many of the classic symptoms, he was unable to find anything where all of the characteristics he experienced were listed. After a while, he found it increasingly difficult to concentrate on the literature before him. He'd read three or four pages at a time, flip back and find that he could not remember a thing.

Removing a thin pair of glasses from his face, Mason stretched his long legs beneath the desk and leaned his head on the back of the chair. He stretched his arms

and yawned. The ceilings were high, maybe twenty feet and adorned with original intricate carvings. He looked to the windows. The low afternoon sun beamed past the elongated rectangular glass giving the library a dusty, antiquated appearance. Mason breathed deeply and closed his eyes. He was exhausted. He hadn't slept much over the past few days.

BOOM. FLASH.

Mason was standing at the corner of an ancient Indian ruin. He could feel the soft dirt beneath his naked feet and although darkness surrounded him, he saw that the building was a single story dwelling located high atop a mesa in the desert flatland. From somewhere on the other side of the building, he could hear the heavy drumbeats and rhythmic chants of an Indian ceremony.

Buhm-ba-buhm-buhm. Buhm-ba-buhm-buhm.

The tips of his fingers slid curiously across the building's stones held firmly together by mud that had been baked by the sun for hundreds of years. He stopped at the corner and peered cautiously around its edge.

A shaman, wearing the ceremonial funeral dress, stood at the foot of a grave inside the circular burial pit. He wore a dark, rectangular mask with thin eye slits. Red streaks embellished the man's arms and chest in symbolic patterns. In one hand he held a long scepter at the top of which stood a black crow. At his side was a large, gray wolf that stared at Mason with unflinching eyes.

Although he could hear the drums beating loudly, Mason found himself alone with the strange Indian priest. The shaman was singing ceremoniously to a brilliant lightning storm looming on the distant horizon. When the chanting ceased, the sound of the pounding drums vanished.

The priest raised his scepter to the sky and slammed it into the earth, allowing the staff to stand on its own. The black crow then left its perch, flying high over Mason's

head, and landed on the dwelling's roof. Either someone had died or someone was about to.

The priest motioned for him to walk forward, but Mason was paralyzed with fear. He gestured again but Mason refused to move. He wanted to run away. Again, the shaman demanded that Mason come forward.

This time Mason complied, passing first through the ancient burial ground and then to the base of the large grave. Across the open pit Mason could see four individual stones placed neatly side-by-side. A pile of fresh dirt lay next to the hole. The priest commanded him to look into the grave but Mason's eyes welled with tears. He couldn't do it. He didn't want to see. The shaman pointed angrily into the grave, insisting.

Reluctantly, Mason crept forward and looked over the edge.

BOOM.

Mason woke in a seated position, his head cocked toward the ceiling. He sat up and looked around, unsure of his surroundings. Nothing looked familiar. He stood and walked aimlessly down a long row of books. He felt as if he were floating. Mason turned a corner and headed down another long row of texts. This was the section of the library where the older books were kept.

Halfway down, Mason stopped and withdrew three texts, each from a section on Native American philosophy and religion. When he finished, Mason navigated back to his seat and began rifling aimlessly through their pages.

The first book had nothing to offer. His fingers danced through the pages without regard to their contents. The next was the same. Within seconds he'd combed it without luck. The third book wore a weathered blue cover that read, "Mi a ba djih" which meant "Sky People." The yellowish pages were stiffened by the passage of time and the threads on the binder unraveling at both ends. Halfway through, Mason stopped. Tucked neatly in the crease of the

pages was a tightly folded, stale piece of lined paper. He carefully unfolded the note making sure not to damage the contents.

Directly before him appeared to be a scribbled map with barely-legible letters marking what he guessed were passageways. Beneath the map was a hand-written note, the words of which Mason could not immediately comprehend. His eyes scanned each line, not really reading them but rather looking for a key word. Finally, he stopped on the last line. The signature. Bearcloud.

Mason lifted the piece of paper from the book, his eyes transfixed upon the open page. On the right was an artistic rendition of an Indian man-spirit with long, dark-flowing hair. His face showed anger and his eyes were as black as night. He wore a vest of bones and held a long black scepter in his right hand that connected with the sky through a thick bolt of lightening. In the background was his animal spirit, an attacking Grizzly bear standing on its powerful hind legs, protecting the man.

On the left page were the title 'Bearcloud' and a small paragraph explaining the meaning and significance of the dark spirit. Mason stared blankly at the note and then at the picture in the book.

"The library will be closing in fifteen minutes," the overhead speakers declared.

Mason looked at his watch. It was 7:45. He was getting closer. He could taste meaning. Mason reached deep into his pocket and withdrew the small bottle of pills. Two more and he'd stop. Two more and perhaps he'd have the answer to his mental plight. He folded the note, dropped it in his pocket, and exited the building.