CATHLEEN GALITZ

WARRIOR IN HER BED

Desire

Cathleen Galitz

Warrior In Her Bed

«HarperCollins»

Galitz C.

Warrior In Her Bed / C. Galitz — «HarperCollins»,

Annie Wainright hoped teaching on an isolated Native American reservation would bring peace to her troubled soul.But that was before she came face-to-face with the most compelling man she'd ever known - a man who made it clear he didn't want her there…. John Lonebear, an ex-marine who had returned to make his home a better place, was as harsh and unyielding as the land he loved. And yet even he could not deny the wildfire heat that blazed between him and this unwelcome stranger….She wanted to believe love could build a bridge between their worlds. But what would happen when he learned about the new life their love had created…?

© Galitz C.
© HarperCollins

Содержание

John Lonebear Was A Big Man, 6
Warrior in Her Bed 7
CATHLEEN GALITZ, 8
Contents 9
One 10
Two 16
Three 22
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента. 26

CATHLEEN
GALITZ
WARRIOR IN
HER BED
Desire

John Lonebear Was A Big Man, Annie thought to herself. A Very Big Man.

He had to be at least six feet two inches tall, and his broad shoulders filled his Western-cut shirt as completely as his very presence filled the room. His face was angular, and his skin was the color of burnished copper. A military-style haircut didn't hide his heritage any more than his store-bought jeans and shirt concealed his rock-hard physique. Absently, Annie wondered what this man would look like with his thick black hair grown out and braided in the traditional Native American manner.

Most unnerving of all was the predatory glint in those unfathomable black eyes of his. It made Annie hesitate to offer him her hand. She had the unnerving feeling that he might bite it off.

Lonebear? she thought. Lone Wolf would suit you better.

Dear Reader,

Spring into the new season with six fresh passionate, powerful and provocative love stories from Silhouette Desire.

Experience first love with a young nurse and the arrogant surgeon who stole her innocence, in USA TODAY bestselling author Elizabeth Bevarly's Taming the Beastly MD (#1501), the latest title in the riveting DYNASTIES: THE BARONES continuity series. Another USA TODAY bestselling author, Cait London, offers a second title in her HEARTBREAKERS miniseries—Instinctive Male (#1502) is the story of a vulnerable heiress who finds love in the arms of an autocratic tycoon.

And don't miss RITA® Award winner Marie Ferrarella's A Bachelor and a Baby (#1503), the second book of Silhouette's crossline series THE MOM SQUAD, featuring single mothers who find true love. In Tycoon for Auction (#1504) by Katherine Garbera, a lady executive wins the services of a commitment-shy bachelor. A playboy falls in love with his secretary in Billionaire Boss (#1505) by Meagan McKinney, the latest MATCHED IN MONTANA title. And a Native American hero's fling with a summer-school teacher produces unexpected complications in Warrior in Her Bed (#1506) by Cathleen Galitz.

This April, shower yourself with all six of these moving and sensual new love stories from Silhouette Desire.

Enjoy!

Joan Marlow Golan

Joan Marlow Golan
Senior Editor, Silhouette Desire

Warrior in Her Bed
Cathleen Galitz

CATHLEEN GALITZ,

a Wyoming native, teaches English to students in grades six through twelve in a rural school that houses kindergarteners and seniors in the same building. She feels blessed to have married a man who is both supportive and patient. When she's not busy writing, teaching or chauffeuring her sons to and from various activities, she can most likely be found indulging in her favorite pastime—reading.

For my aunt Cleo who, when I least expect to hear her voice, reminds me to laugh and to celebrate the joy of life most precious.

Contents

Chapter One
Chapter Two
Chapter Three
Chapter Four
Chapter Five
Chapter Six
Chapter Seven
Chapter Eight
Chapter Nine
Chapter Ten
Chapter Eleven
Chapter Twelve

One

She was much prettier than Johnny Lonebear had expected. Not that it took much to beat the pair of horns and tail he had envisioned as part of the personage of the infamous Ms. Anne Wainwright. To be sure, it had been his own past experience, rather than anything his niece said about her new teacher, that had led him to picture a woman with a pitchfork for a pointer: the kind his own second-grade teacher used to whack him with across the knuckles whenever he acted up in class, which he had to admit was more often than not. Indeed, on the surface, the lovely Ms. Wainwright was nothing at all like that old warhorse Miss Applebee.

But Johnny wasn't as easily deceived by this young woman's ready smile and considerable talent as was his impressionable niece when it came to judging outsiders. Crimson Dawn's mother believed that beneath the surface, they were all devils. And according to her, the do-gooders were the worst of all. Johnny's suspicions were more tempered than those of his older sister. His wariness had been bought and paid for on the field of battle, where all too often the enemy that he had faced was attempting to prove with bullets the superiority of a particular culture, religion or skin tone. That so many radicals believed genocide a viable option made Johnny proud to have served as a U.S. Marine dedicated to the concept of upholding freedom for all. As far as he could tell, the only thing keeping the next madman from rising to power in any number of hot spots all over the world was that good men were willing to give their lives for one another without regard to the color of the man fighting next to them.

It was Johnny's belief that mercenaries were much easier to defeat than zealots. And he feared a zealot in the classroom was potentially far more dangerous than one in a designated war zone. If Ms. Wainwright proved herself to be the misguided extremist that his sister, Ester, believed her to be, she could well be as formidable an enemy as any he had ever faced before. At least, that was the way Ester put it to him. After thoroughly chastising him for even letting the woman into his school at all, she had expressly sent him into the classroom to check out that "she-devil" himself.

"I don't hire 'em, sis," he had told her. "I just do my best to keep the place up and running."

Studying one fair-haired head surrounded by so many dark ones gathered around her, Johnny had to admit that the newest member of his staff didn't look particularly diabolical this morning. In fact, it took a concerted effort on his part to pull his thoughts away from the intriguing way the light was toying with her hair and remind himself just why he was here.

As if somehow sensing the liberties that his thoughts were taking, the lady in question looked up from a piece of blood-red glass that she was cutting to look directly at him.

"Would you care to join us?" she asked.

Her voice was not overtly hostile. In fact, Johnny was surprised at its gentle quality and lack of discernable Midwestern accent. That utterly feminine sound wrapped itself around his senses and reminded him, in the most visceral way, that he could not help but respond to her invitation as anything but an interested male. In stark contrast to that mellifluous voice, her eyes openly challenged him.

There was nothing subtle about those blue lasers that she leveled at him from across the room. Johnny was certain they could slice through a man's heart as easily as the glass cutter she held in her hand. Suddenly feeling like he was back in grade school all over again, he reverted to the kind of insolence that had so often led him to the principal's office. Deliberately, he let his own dark eyes traverse this young woman's body from head to toe—and back up again. The smile playing with the corners of his lips left little doubt that he liked what he saw.

"No, thanks," he said, leaning against the doorjamb with his arms folded insolently across his chest. "I can see everything I want to see just fine from right here."

"Suit yourself," she replied, slipping on a pair of safety goggles and proceeding with her presentation.

Had it not been for the telltale flush in her cheeks, Johnny might have believed that his presence had absolutely no effect upon the lady. She was one cool customer. He had to admire the way she sidestepped his intended power play by simply continuing on with her demonstration as if he were not in the room at all. The difficult curve of her intended pattern snapped the thick glass neatly in two separate pieces, causing her pupils to let out an appreciative "ohhh!" at what was apparently a remarkable feat.

Calling to mind his sister's directive—to keep the teacher from disrupting her relationship with her daughter, Johnny provided a sarcastic second syllable to the class's admiring outburst.

"Ahhh," he murmured just loudly enough for everyone to hear.

Crimson Dawn shot him a dirty look and muttered a one-word warning under her breath. "Uncle…"

Glancing in the general vicinity of where the heckler was standing, her teacher pushed the goggles to the top of her head. "It's not all that exciting, but I'm glad you approve nonetheless. You'll have to come back tomorrow when we'll begin the thrilling process of grinding off the rough edges."

Johnny noticed that her smile did not reach her eyes, which were presently shooting off more sparks than an arc welder. If he hadn't been spoiling for a fight, he would have been tempted to put on a pair of protective goggles himself. He wondered if her seemingly benign remark was actually pointed at him on a personal level. The hint of a smile flitted across his face. Every woman with whom he'd been involved before had inevitably come to discover that his edges were far too rough to be smoothed away.

"That's all for today, class. Time to put up your materials."

As her students scurried to do her bidding, Ms. Wainwright proceeded to divest herself of her goggles altogether. Johnny found himself wishing that she would free her hair from its restraint, as well. The no-nonsense ponytail pulling her hair so austerely away from her face didn't do her justice. He imagined what she would look like with that lustrous mane loose about her face. He suspected it would make her look older—perhaps all of twenty-seven or twenty-eight. When she put a hand to the middle of her back and stretched her taut muscles, something dangerous tightened in Johnny's loins. Feeling like a voyeur, he was unable to pull his gaze away.

"Why don't you introduce me to your uncle?" he heard her ask Crimson Dawn.

The girl blew her bangs out of her eyes with an exasperated burst of air directed heavenward. Johnny grinned unabashedly. It wasn't the first or the last time he would be destined to embarrass his headstrong niece, the one most like him of all his kin. Reluctantly she obliged, leading her teacher across the spacious art room to where he struck a leisurely pose. With his back against the doorway, he gave every impression that he had all the time in the world. One knee was bent to allow a booted foot to rest against the door frame. His arms remained stubbornly crossed over his chest, calling into question whether he would actually extend a hand by way of a customary polite introduction.

"This is my uncle Johnny—"

"John," he corrected his niece. "John Lonebear."

Lone wolf suits you better, Annie thought to herself.

At six foot two inches, John Lonebear was a big man, whose broad shoulders filled his Western-cut shirt as completely as his very presence filled the airy room in which they stood. His face was angular, and his skin was the color of warm, burnished copper. A military-style haircut didn't hide his heritage any more than a pair of store-bought jeans and shirt could conceal his rock-hard physique. Absently Annie wondered what this man would look like with his thick black hair grown out and braided in the usual manner that Hollywood liked to portray Native American men. Such a fierce-looking warrior would undoubtedly be the bane of traditional leading men by stealing any scene in which he appeared. The predatory glint in those unfathomable black eyes of his made Annie hesitate to offer him her hand.

She had the unnerving feeling that he might well bite it off.

"Pleased to meet you," she said nevertheless, holding her breath and sticking her hand out bravely.

He took a long time uncrossing his arms before finally taking her hand inside both of his. The jolt that surged through Annie at his touch was nothing short of primordial, causing such a pure animal-like reaction in her that she actually felt the fine hair on her arms responding. Though her own knowledge of Native American culture was shaky at best, she found herself wondering if this mysterious fellow was part shaman or medicine man.

What kind of magical powers did John Lonebear have that evoked images of a magnificent beast, part man and part wolf dominating not only the rugged landscape but also the pack that relied upon his cunning? Such a creature was certain to savagely protect what he considered to be his territory.

Annie withdrew both her hand and her hesitant smile. Hoping that he hadn't noticed that she was actually shaking slightly from the encounter, she refrained from rubbing away the goose bumps on her arms and drawing even more attention to her involuntary reaction.

"What exactly can I do for you, Mr. Lonebear?" she asked directly.

You can remove yourself from my niece's life and my school and run away from here as fast as the wind will carry you, Johnny was tempted to tell her straight-out. You can pack up your big-city ideas and that enticing perfume you're wearing and hitch a ride off the reservation before you get gobbled up by some big bad wolf who finds you too tempting a morsel to pass over. And, since you're asking, what I really want you to do is to kiss me like you've never kissed anybody before.

Where that thought came from, Johnny couldn't say. He knew only that the visible shiver running through this woman's body was transferred to his by way of some unseen conduit. His fingertips tingled as if he had foolishly wet them before sticking them into an open socket. His body hummed with an awareness that made him want to divest himself of his skin altogether and to discount the gut feeling that was pulling him toward an uncertain and dangerous destiny. The old ones would say this was undoubtedly a sign that should be heeded.

A portent not to be ignored.

More likely a warning from above, Johnny thought wryly. An omen that this woman harbored the kind of prejudice that had shaped him into the man he was. The smile he had considered bestowing upon her a mere moment ago turned into a sneer. Pushing himself out of the doorway, he leaned right into her personal space.

"What you can do for me, Ms. Wainwright," he said drawing the "Ms." into an intentional hiss, "is stick to teaching stained glass and stop putting that pretty little nose of yours into your students' personal lives."

She couldn't have looked more stunned had he hauled off and slapped her right across the face.

"Please call me Annie," she suggested, hastening to set the conversation on a more personal level before attempting to isolate the source of this man's annoyance.

"Around here, we like to maintain the formality of addressing our teachers by their last names out of respect for the dignity of the profession," he informed her coolly.

If this woman thought she could gentle him like some newborn foal with that soft, coaxing voice of hers, she was sorely mistaken. Just because her name was as simple and welcoming as the very sound of it rolling off her tongue didn't mean he was about to succumb to her surprisingly down-to-earth charm.

Apparently deciding that it was time to step in, Crimson Dawn found her voice at last. "Stop hassling her, Uncle!" she admonished, spearing him with a look intended to convey the message that she fully intended to kill him later. Turning her attention to her newly found mentor, she attempted to underplay her uncle's gruffness.

"Don't pay any attention to him, Miss Wainwright. I'm sure my mother is the one who put him up to this."

Annie didn't look particularly reassured by this bit of information.

"Speaking of your mother, she's waiting in the truck for you," Johnny told his niece without so much as breaking eye contact with her teacher.

Sensing the girl's reluctance to leave her alone with hostile forces, Annie urged her to, "Go on. I'll be just fine. See you in class tomorrow."

The determined set of Crimson Dawn's shoulders as she marched through the open door gave every indication that a major confrontation between mother and daughter was imminent. One could almost feel the storm clouds gathering about the girl as she stomped down the hallway and prepared herself to do battle on her teacher's behalf. A veteran of similar wars, Annie wished there was some way she could intervene but knew any such attempt on her part would be a waste of time. Attempting to stop a teenage girl on a mission was akin to stopping a tornado with nothing more than a book on etiquette and good intentions.

"Okay. What is this all about?" Annie asked the intimidating man towering over her. "I honestly have no idea what you are so upset about, and I've never been much of a mind reader."

Johnny paused to consider this woman's eyes. They were, he decided, more wary than cold as he had first been inclined to describe them. Something vulnerable flickering in those blue depths unsettled him and knocked him off balance. Something about the way she boldly stood up to him with her arms tellingly wrapped around her body made him suddenly feel like protecting her.

From himself no less.

"Said Custer to his troops," he quipped, trying to make the raw feeling in his heart go away by employing a favorite weapon in his arsenal of defense: humor.

"If I may borrow the historical reference," Annie said, tightening her smile, "if I'm about to be scalped, you might at least do me the honor of letting me know why."

Johnny bit the inside of his lip to keep from smiling. The lady had spunk. He had to give her that. Taking this game to the edge by indulging his curiosity, he risked reaching out to touch a lock of her hair. Neither true blond nor brunette, it was more the color of honey with cinnamon highlights swirled throughout. Between the rough pad of his thumb and fingertips it felt silky soft.

"Very pretty," he said, as if considering it as an adornment.

Annie bristled. He had employed the word pretty twice now to describe her, albeit once in reference to her nose, and rather than a compliment, he somehow made it sound synonymous with stupid. Never having considered herself a great beauty, she was particularly uneasy with such teasing. Determined to put an end to it, she jerked her head back to free her hair from his hold. In the process, she caused his hand to graze her cheek. It tingled as if she had been caressed not by mere flesh but rather a tangle of loose, exposed wires. Instinctively she reached up to touch the spot with her own hand.

Johnny's dark eyes narrowed. He was particularly sensitive to the fact that in every movie script written, white women were portrayed as being terrified of the savage "Injun."

"I didn't mean to scare you," he said, hoping she wasn't going to faint on him like those fragile ladies of the silver screen. After all, he hadn't thought to bring along the customary packet of smelling salts employed in those same films to bring the fairer sex back from the brink of hysteria.

"You didn't," Annie responded, keeping her eyes trained upon his.

It was only partly a lie. As big as this man was, Annie wasn't in the least afraid of him in any physical sense—other than the way he made her skin itch and her stomach clench in feminine awareness. After being numb for so long, what really scared her was that he made her feel anything at all.

"Would you mind telling me what I've done to upset you?" she asked him, ready to put an end to all of his play-acting and get to the bottom of his grievance without further ado.

What she wasn't ready for was the lyrical, lilting quality of his voice. The rhythm and cadence were specific to the man's unique culture. To her ears, it sounded foreign. Exotic.

And erotic.

"Crimson's mother thinks you're to blame for putting wild ideas into her head about leaving the reservation to pursue an art degree in some fancy college in St. Louis."

Troubled clouds passed over the clear skies of Annie's eyes. "I didn't advance any ideas that weren't already there," she told him frankly. "I'm sure you're well aware that your niece has remarkable talent. I would assume you'd want to encourage it."

Johnny rubbed his chin. The faint fragrance of tuberose and subtle musk from where Annie's hair had touched his hand lingered upon his fingers and imprinted itself upon his subconscious. Like the woman herself, the scent was intriguing. Obviously strong enough to make her way in the world on her own, there was nonetheless an aura of vulnerability about Annie Wainwright to make a man want to challenge that sense of independence.

"When Crimson asked for my opinion, I simply told her that I thought she has what it takes to make it out in the 'bigger world,' if that's what she really wants to do. I hardly see how that could be misconstrued as meddling."

"Lady, in case you don't know it, just being an outsider working on the reservation makes your motives suspect to a lot of people around here."

The very idea confounded Annie. Her forehead wrinkled in consternation. "I'm just here to teach a class. A noncredit, community interest, elective class, at that," she added defensively.

"Are you sure you aren't really here to save the Indian nation?"

The sarcasm dripping from Johnny's words voice underscored his disdain.

Caught completely by surprise, Annie replied honestly. "God, no!" I'm having a hard enough time saving myself, she almost blurted out.

What exactly was it was about her that gave others the impression she was a huge bleeding heart willing to single-handedly rescue the world and ready to accept the blame when it became apparent that she wasn't up to the task? Annie rubbed her eyes, vainly trying to massage away the headache that was staking out a permanent residence inside her thick skull. Superwoman she was not.

"It appears that you don't understand how desperately we need talented young men and women like my niece to remain on the reservation to provide leadership to our people," Johnny told her, speaking slowly as if he were addressing someone who was mentally challenged. "What we don't need is foreigners pushing the idea of assimilation at the expense of our native culture. As someone who spent years in the white man's world, I'm back on the reservation of my own volition to tell you and anybody who'll listen that it's not all it's cracked up to be."

Annie threw up her hands in surrender. When she spoke again, it was with a detached professional tone clearly designed to bring this impromptu conference to an end. "I'll be sure to take that under advisement."

"See that you do," Johnny snapped, angry with himself for putting that wounded look upon her face. If he didn't get out of here within the next minute or two, he was afraid she would be blowing her nose on a piece of his world-weary heart.

"Before you leave, let me give you a little free advice," Annie offered in a gentle tone she hoped belied the harshness of the message she was about to deliver. "If you think you can control any adolescent by controlling what I might happen to say, you are sadly mistaken. The dreams of the young belong solely to them, Mr. Lonebear. Personally I won't be a party to killing anyone's dreams —however large or small or ill conceived anybody else might consider them to be. While I have no desire to meddle in anyone's business, especially yours, I would like to remind you that as an educator, my business is helping children attain their dreams. If you really care for your niece, as I suspect you do, you'll respect her enough to let her make her own way in the world. After all, there is a distinct possibility that she might return home as you did with a whole lot more to offer than when she left."

Johnny stared at this audacious woman for a long time before responding. To be put in his place in such a calm, forthright manner deeply disturbed him. As the one who plucked the name Dream

Catchers from native folklore and personally attached it to this school, he resented the accusation that he was into squelching anyone's hopes and aspirations. Especially considering the fact that he had dedicated his life to helping others turn those dreams into reality. It was as insulting as this woman's belief that young people would have to leave the reservation in order to be truly successful.

When he spoke at last it was with stony self-control.

"I'd advise you to be more careful in the future, Ms. Wainwright," he said, purposely ignoring her earlier invitation to call her by her first name, "of how you address your supervisors. I might not have been the person who hired you, but let me assure you, I most certainly have the power to fire you if I see fit."

With that he turned his back on her, leaving the lady with yet another crucial bit of information to solder into the stained-glass mosaic that was destined to interlock his complicated life with hers.

Two

Having recently given up a much better paying position in St. Louis with the understanding that she could come back anytime she wanted, Annie was sorely tempted to gather up her things and do one Mr. John Lonebear a gigantic favor by quitting right then and there. It certainly wasn't the money that kept her from walking. The pittance she was making as an adjunct faculty member at Dream Catchers High was hardly enough to buy groceries and pay the phone bill. Luckily, her friend Jewell, whose house she was sitting while she was away at summer school working on her master's degree, insisted on taking care of the utilities. Although Jewell maintained that Annie was really doing her a good turn, she was the one who felt truly indebted.

No, the necessity of a steady income was not the reason Annie stubbornly refused to cut her losses on this particularly lovely day the first week in June and call it quits. A practical sort, she had almost a whole year's salary in reserve while she figured out what it was she wanted to do with the rest of her life. Her decision to stick it out at Dream Catchers had more to do with wanting to finish the ambitious mural that she had designed, was in the process of constructing, and ultimately planned to dedicate to the school that John Lonebear so presumptuously claimed as his own. Unless there was no other option available to her, Annie Wainwright liked to finish what she started. There was also the matter of a pleading look in Crimson Dawn's eyes when she had tentatively approached Annie seeking approval and advice. And last but not least, she suspected that there was a certain amount of spite involved in her decision not to let anyone goad her into making a decision that she wasn't good and ready to make on her own.

No matter how self-important he thought he might be.

No matter how undeniably sexy he was.

Having professionally advised any number of clients that geographic changes did little to address the pain that one carried deep inside, Annie knew it was futile to try to outrun one's problems. Still, as she bumped along the washboard road leading to her friend's cozy log cabin, she couldn't help but feel this was the perfect place for mending broken hearts and healing wounded spirits. Nestled at the base of the Wind River Mountains, Jewell's isolated home boasted a view of the river that carried the same name as the mountain range that cast its shadow over the surrounding countryside. Though not nearly as famous as its sister, the Tetons, the Winds were just as magnificent in their own right. The fact that they were relatively undiscovered by tourists made them all the more attractive to someone looking for respite from big-city woes.

Watching the sun slowly slide into place like a diamond being positioned into its proper setting in a crown of sheer granite was enough to make Annie forget her troubles for a moment and melt into a landscape that, with the exception of the dust rising from behind her car, seemed virtually unchanged since the dawn of time. The fact that the sun rose and set predictably every day behind this mountain did not make the spectacle any less miraculous. Taking time to enjoy such pleasures was yet another reason Annie wanted to hang around a while longer—at least until the end of summer when monetary matters would dictate the choices that would likely have to be made out of necessity.

For right now it was enough to simply park her dusty little blue sports coupe beside the cabin and take a seat on the porch swing where an unrestricted view of the painted sky made Annie wish she could somehow capture those vivid colors in glass. She wanted to include every shade of that incredible sky in the life circle that was to be the backdrop of her own masterpiece. The peaceful scene featured a tepee with a family gathered in front of a gentle campfire. Rotating in the background were both the seasons and the time of day. Six feet in diameter, the impressive panorama was held together by thin metal strips woven by design to look like a dream catcher, symbolic of the school that bore its name.

The fact that Annie found herself wondering what the antagonistic Mr. Lonebear would think of her tribute to his culture made her cross with herself for even remotely caring what that big bully thought. It made her furious that the mere remembrance of his touch sent another frisson of heat sizzling through her body, conjuring up X-rated images that were completely out of character for someone of her usual, refined sensibilities.

Hearing the phone ring, she hopped off the porch swing, stepped inside the front door and reached for the sound of a friendly voice. Though the solitude of this place was far more peaceful than that of her old apartment, which had been located on a busy downtown street, it also became oppressive at times, as well. Grateful to hear Jewell's warm, familiar greeting, Annie didn't hesitate to tell her old friend all about the "beast" who had accosted her earlier in the day.

"Johnny?" Jewell asked, sounding incredulous. "As much as I hate to question your judgment, he's never been anything but nice to me and professional in every respect. In fact, the entire staff is as devoted to him as the student body is. I can't imagine what you could have possibly done to have gotten off on the wrong foot with him."

Indignation rose like bile in Annie's throat at the implication that she was somehow at fault for the rude behavior to which she'd been subjected earlier in the day.

"Johnny?" she mimicked, recalling the formality that he had demanded of her. It seemed she was the only one not at liberty to call the man by his more familiar moniker. In the future Annie vowed to address him as sir and leave it at that.

"I was given the definite impression that your fellow teachers at Dream Catchers are in the habit of addressing one another by their last names," she said stiffly and added softly under her breath, "And saluting their superior officers."

"Only in front of students," Jewell told her, choosing to ignore her friend's mumbled jab. "Coming from the unruly environment you just left, I'd think you'd prefer a more structured environment. Our teachers sure do. The truth of the matter is that most of the kids do, too. So many of them have no rules at home to speak of, and school provides them a safe haven."

Even though Annie could believe it, she wasn't inclined to agree at the moment. Not when doing so would cast the villainous Mr. Lonebear in an angelic light. Cradling the phone between her shoulder and cheek, she opened the refrigerator door, took out a pitcher of lemonade and grudgingly encouraged her friend to enlighten her further.

"Go on," she muttered, wrestling with a tray of ice cubes that had shrunk to strange powdery shapes. "I'm listening."

"Maybe you just caught him on an off day, Annie. Or maybe his reaction had something to do with him not hiring you personally, although he's never struck me as the type to care about protocol when it comes to filling positions with qualified people. I do know that he was in Washington lobbying during the week you were interviewed. There's always the possibility that he didn't get the backing he was seeking, and that's what put him in such an ill humor, though I seriously doubt it. The man is a genius at procuring funding—and in being instrumental in making Dream Catchers High one of the most successful magnet schools in the country."

The pride in Jewell's voice was unmistakable.

"Gosh," Annie muttered, unable to keep the skepticism from her voice. "He sounds like a veritable saint."

"Oh, I wouldn't go so far as to say that," Jewell said, laughing. "Just ask some of the elders to reminisce if you get the opportunity, and they'll be happy to wax on and on about their favorite son's misspent youth. Affectionately, of course, and with obvious admiration for what he's overcome."

"Misspent youth?" Annie prodded, curious despite herself.

"It seems Johnny Lonebear was every girl's bad-boy heartthrob back in high school. They say he packed an attitude as big as the Great Plains, rode a Harley to school instead of the bus and was a gifted athlete. Rumor has it that his enthusiasm for academics was limited to maintaining his

eligibility for extracurricular activities, and he was indifferent to all the girls who threw themselves at him. There's still some speculation as to whether he actually fathered any of those children running around on the reservation that some people claim he did."

Crunching down hard on what once might have passed for an ice cube, Annie took pleasure in feeling it splinter beneath her molars. She fought the urge to spit it out, along with the bad taste left in her mouth. That was more than enough for her to relegate her new boss to the status of a world-class jerk. Annie told herself it was none of her concern that her dear friend could be deceived by such a nasty piece of work.

Parts of her past were private, and she didn't want to share them with anyone. Not even Jewell, who, had she known of Annie's own troubled high school years, surely would not have joked so offhandedly about such things. Deliberately Annie changed the topic of conversation to something less serious in nature, promising her friend that she would water her straggly bed of marigolds.

And silently promising herself not to give the enigmatic Mr. Lonebear another thought beyond how to best avoid him in the future.

Someone as sweet and naive as Jewell might easily be taken in by a man's dark good looks and colorful past, but Annie knew better than to trust the word of any male, particularly the promises he might utter in the throes of passion. As an expert in the field, Annie wondered whether she should volunteer to teach a class in it as a way of supplementing her meager income. She would label it a self-defense class for the heart and make a case that it was as critical as any other course in the martial arts.

The thought of presenting Mr. Lonebear with such a proposal gave Annie grim satisfaction. The memory of him ordering her to stick to the prescribed curriculum and leave her personal beliefs out of the classroom made Annie far more uncomfortable than he could ever imagine. Used to doing things on her own terms, she wasn't sure whether she was capable of separating one from the other. Such a task was akin to holding the myriad pieces of a stained-glass mural together with nothing more than wishful thinking.

Recalling to mind that it was also what had prompted her to resign from her old position and had sent her searching for a career less hazardous to her emotional well-being, she vowed to do her best to follow John Lonebear's directive. If other people were able to do their jobs, collect their paychecks and go home at the end of the day without investing their hearts along with their time, Annie told herself, there was no reason she couldn't do the same.

Despite her renewed resolve not to become emotionally attached to her students, Annie was genuinely happy to see Crimson Dawn back in class the following day—and relieved that her exasperating uncle was absent. Since time to work with her students on their respective projects was limited, she didn't dally when it came to taking roll and getting class under way. She spent only a few minutes looking over her shoulder to see if a certain unwanted visitor was going to make a follow-up appearance. Once Annie centered her attention upon her pupils, time flew as it always did whenever she was actively involved in the creative process. Something about helping others discover their own natural talents was utterly gratifying in a way that oddly superseded her professional training in more analytic areas.

Brushing off Crimson Dawn's stiff apology on the part of her uncle as being completely unnecessary, she squeezed the girl's shoulder reassuringly.

"Your work is coming along wonderfully. At this rate you'll be able to start another project well before this term is up."

Despite the possible repercussions, Annie's stubborn heart bade her continue. She considered her words carefully, however.

"In case you don't know it, Crimson, I've been expressly forbidden to direct your talents outside of this classroom. Nonetheless, I want you to know that you have been given an incredible gift. However you choose to use it is up to you."

The knowledge that her teacher was referring not only to the unique stained-glass sculpture that she was in the process of finishing, but also the other artwork she had so shyly shown her earlier caused the girl to smile tremulously.

"Thanks," she mumbled, not nearly as capable of expressing her feelings with words as with her hands. That Ms. Wainwright's praise didn't waver in light of the family feud it was causing at home made her heart swell with appreciation. Shyly she ventured words of advice to the teacher who had such faith in her abilities.

"Don't let Uncle Johnny buffalo you. He's really just a big old teddy bear."

Annie tried not to choke on the image. If the man were any kind of bear, a grizzly was what came to mind. Nevertheless, she offered Crimson an appreciative smile for her concern, all the while offering up a little prayer that this girl's beloved uncle had gone into early hibernation and that he would stay there until her own limited tenure was over.

A few hours later, after all her students had vacated the art room, Annie became so completely absorbed in her own work that she had no idea she was not alone. It would take something far louder than a man's studious gaze to disrupt her concentration when she was thus engaged in her work. Even a man whose presence was as disquieting as the one focused so intently upon her at the moment.

"Very nice," Johnny Lonebear murmured, stepping behind her to see what it was that held her attention so completely.

Startled, Annie almost dropped the sizable piece of glass that she held in her hand. She could have sworn he had deliberately sneaked up on her wearing moccasins rather than the pair of work boots he favored. Strangely enough, his compliment burgeoned inside her like a rare tropical flower blooming in the desert. Though Annie knew he was referring to the intricate pattern laid out upon her workbench, she couldn't help but wonder what it would feel like to hear this man speak in such silky tones about the scent of her perfume or the cut of her hair or the swell of her breasts as he fondled them in both hands.

"I'm happy that it meets with your approval," she said tersely, hoping to banish such images with uncharacteristic brusqueness.

Ignoring the obvious ploy to send him on his way, Johnny lingered over her design. He ran a lazy finger over the intriguing bumpy texture that was destined to become part of an amethyst horizon representing both nightfall and daybreak. Though Annie thought it would serve him right if the rough edge cut him, she refrained from saying so, hoping that by keeping silent, he would simply take the hint and leave.

He didn't.

"I've received a lot of unsolicited and contradictory advice lately in regard to you," he told her in a matter-of-fact tone of voice that caught Annie off guard. He leaned his weight on the workbench and gave her what could almost pass as a conciliatory grin.

Annie willed herself not to give in to the temptation of pressing for information that she suspected would only be hurtful.

"Is that so?" she asked as nonchalantly as she could manage over a heartbeat that was galloping out of control.

"My niece insists I should apologize to you," he explained. "And a certain teacher on my staff whom I greatly respect called me up out of the blue yesterday to scold me on your behalf. But my dear sister is still under the impression that you have snakes in your head and wants me to fire you before you completely ruin her daughter."

"Snakes in my head?" Annie parroted. Her confusion was reflected in the furrows in her forehead.

"It's an old Indian expression meaning crazy," Johnny told her with a crooked grin. His gaze fell upon the array of cutting tools set upon the bench. "Looking at the quality of your work, and word of mouth as to your teaching ability, I'm inclined to agree with Crimson Dawn. I'd appreciate

it if you wouldn't let her know that, though. Any administrator worth his salt recognizes it's not good for teenagers to be right too often."

Annie was as taken aback by his backhanded concession as by the sudden appearance of a wry sense of humor.

"Is that supposed to pass as an apology?" she asked, clearly unsettled by this strange turn of events.

"If you're waiting for a formal act of contrition, I wouldn't recommend holding your breath," he said in a tone that belied the good-natured look in his eyes.

Staring into the dark waters of those eyes was definitely a mistake, Annie realized too late, as she struggled valiantly to fight her way out of their depths like a drowning swimmer paddling for the shore for all she was worth. Although she realized that technique didn't count for much when survival was at stake, Annie nevertheless attempted some semblance of style.

"Shall we call it a truce, then, Mr. Lonebear?" she queried with one upraised eyebrow.

"For the time being, Miss Wainwright," he said with a wink that was Annie's undoing.

In a gesture of peace, he reached for the hand that hung loosely at her side and shook it with all the solemnity of someone entering into a formal agreement.

"And when we're not in front of any students, you can call me Johnny. All my friends do."

An all-too-familiar tingling began at Annie's fingertips, traveled up her arm and raced through her body with all the speed and intensity of a hotwired ignition. In the span of a single second, all her senses roared to life. As disconcerting as the warmth that settled into the pit of her stomach was, for some reason she was reluctant to disengage from the source of that power. The strength in Johnny Lonebear's hand underscored the sexual promise in those incredible eyes of his. Eyes that spun the world upside down and left Annie feeling as if she had just landed ignominiously on her backside.

Annie drew her gaze away to stare hotly at some offending spot on the floor. Freeing her hand from his grasp, she gestured at her work in progress, hoping to divert attention away from her perplexing physical reaction.

"What do you think?" she asked. "Since I'm planning on dedicating this piece to the school when I'm finished, I'd take any advice you could give me to make it more authentic and meaningful to your students and community."

Johnny looked so surprised by this announcement that it actually made Annie giggle. The sound was so unexpectedly girlish that it made her blush to hear it. Having had little to chuckle about lately, she decided against apologizing for it.

If he thought her laughter sounded tarnished, Johnny Lonebear refrained from commenting on it. If pressed, he might have admitted that it sounded rather like wind chimes tinkling in an unexpected breeze. A breeze that did absolutely nothing to cool him off but rather served to fan the flicker of interest tickling the inside of his loins.

When he spoke again, he gave absolutely no indication that he was burning up inside. "You might add both a Shoshone and an Arapaho symbol on the sides of the tepee. That way you could unify the predominant tribes on our reservation."

He saw no need to add that the hope of the government, when they initially placed warring tribes on the same piece of land, was that the natives would kill each other off and go the way of the buffalo, which were so shamelessly slaughtered and left to rot in stinking mounds upon the Great Plains a century ago. Nor did he bother explaining how that travesty had been part of a calculated plan to starve this country's native population to death. Johnny forced himself to remember the only thing connecting Annie Wainwright with the sins of her ancestors was her pretty golden hair and fair skin. He knew better than most that any bitter remonstrance against this generation would only add to a hatred that spanned the centuries and turned one man against the other. He hadn't risked his life upon foreign fields of battle in support of America only to undermine it by wallowing in a past over

which he had no control. Not that he advocated sweeping all unpleasant historical facts under the rug, either. Indeed, his sister's wariness was not completely unfounded.

"Thank you," Annie said with a grateful smile that pulled him back into the present moment and added yet another piece of dry kindling to a bonfire that was devouring his resolve to stay professionally detached.

"My knowledge of native culture is limited to what I've read in books, and I'd rather not rely solely upon that," she told him honestly.

"Glad to hear it," he replied dryly.

As far as Johnny was concerned, too many people gleaned everything they would ever know about Native Americans from books written by white men intent on either vilifying or glorifying his culture. Recalling his earlier comment that Annie herself was an outsider and as such was suspect, he appreciated her openness to his suggestion.

"Tell you what," he said, feeling suddenly charitable and wanting to put the past behind them. "There's a powwow coming up this weekend at Fort Washakie. I'd be willing to show you around if you'd like to go. Ideas for art abound there."

He'd be willing to show her around?

Annie wasn't sure whether to be insulted or flattered by such an offhand invitation. Having made it sound as if he were sacrificing himself on her behalf for the good of the cause, she thought he might as well have offered her the use of a Seeing Eye dog to find her way around the reservation.

Certainly no one could accuse the man of being overly suave. Still, the thought of spending time alone with him outside of a school setting had Annie feeling suddenly flushed. Warning lights went off inside her head as hope warred with fear. Though the idea of attending a powwow as an invited guest appealed to her, Johnny Lonebear's reputed past was reason enough to give him a wide berth. Not to mention that any fool knew it was risky to become involved with one's boss outside of the workplace.

Then again, how wise would it be to turn down such an unexpected peace offering?

"Are you by any chance asking me on a date?" she asked, too startled by the possibility of an actual date with him to act coy.

Slow and dangerous, the smile that spread across Johnny's face was reminiscent of the bad-boy persona that rumor had it once made him a target for every silly little heart romantically inclined to impale itself upon a stake. Somehow the smile managed to give the impression that he was laughing at Annie and with her at the same time. It also made her knees turn as wobbly as the newborn fawn that she had spied with its mother in the meadow behind Jewell's house this morning. Annie steadied herself by leaning on her workbench in what she hoped came off as an indifferent pose.

"Why don't we just consider it a homework assignment and let it go at that?" Johnny suggested with a twinkle reflected in the midnight sky of a pair of eyes as completely unfathomable as Annie's reaction to it.

Three

Annie spent the better part of the next twenty-four hours berating herself for not following up on the offhand remark that the "date" for which she was meticulously preparing was nothing more than a homework assignment. She couldn't help but wonder exactly whose homework Johnny been referring to. Had he been alluding to her need to familiarize herself with the local culture? Or to the fact that he planned on doing some personal research of his own before reporting back to his sister whether Annie did indeed have snakes in her head and was a danger to the impressionable young minds of this reservation?

Neither scenario appealed to her much.

Furthermore, such contemplation served to make getting ready for what was already destined to be an uncomfortable afternoon all the more difficult. Indeed, Annie had no idea what to wear to a powwow. Neither a true cowgirl nor an Indian, she couldn't very well bring herself to succumb to the lure of either culture. She could no more envision herself bedecked in Native leather and beads than she could picture herself in Western boots and a mile-high Stetson. Believing it to be hopeless that she could ever blend in at such a local event no matter what she wore, she decided at last to simply go as herself. Since her preferred choice of attire for any given outing was a T-shirt, pair of shorts and tennis shoes, she saw no need to stray from comfort now. Having checked with Jewell beforehand to make sure casual dress was acceptable, she decided a pair of jeans would prove less disrespectful to any participants who might resent her presence at such a traditional, time-honored ceremony.

Annie's most overt concession to the fluttery feeling that settled into her stomach whenever she thought about the sexy, intimidating man who was due to arrive any minute to pick her up was to pay her hair more attention than usual. Lately she had taken to pulling it back in a practical ponytail that allowed her to meet the world head-on. Today the thought of using her hair as a curtain if necessary —an old trick passed freely among junior high girls—to obscure her face from Johnny Lonebear compelled her to dig out and dust off an old curling iron. After forcing her naturally straight tresses into loose curls that fell about her shoulders, she decided to forgo applying any blush to her cheeks. They were already burning with telltale anticipation.

Laboring under the assumption that it would give Johnny an enormous sense of self-satisfaction to discover just how nervous this impromptu rendezvous with fate was making her, Annie sternly reminded herself that she was no giddy teenager preparing for her first date. The pink-cheeked woman staring at her in the mirror was certainly old enough to know better.

Definitely old enough to separate fantasy from reality.

Fact from fiction.

And lust from love….

Indeed, Annie had no more reason to believe that she and her enigmatic boss would hit it off any better today than at their first volatile encounter than she could expect to be treated as anything but an interloper at the day's festivities. Johnny Lonebear himself had been eager to spell that particular fact out for her. As a white woman with no obvious ties to the community, her motives were naturally suspect.

The loud knock at her front door did nothing to settle her nerves. Annie jumped at the sound, bumping a bottle of perfume off the bathroom counter in the process.

"Come on in," she hollered, bending down to retrieve the bottle and using the excuse to spritz her pulse points with its delicate scent.

It had been so long since she had been out on anything resembling a date, even one as unofficial as this one, that she felt thrown off balance by the effort it required. Despite her entreaty, the front door remained stubbornly closed. Hurrying to open it, Annie paused only long enough to fasten a plastic smile to her face.

She swung the door open and felt all the air sucked out of her small abode. The man standing there on her front porch looked so utterly devastating, dressed casually in a pair of jeans and a short-sleeved denim shirt, that Annie could almost hear her smile clattering to the floor. His clean-cut military haircut clashed with the predatory look in those dark-chocolate eyes as they swept over her. A flicker of approval illuminated their depths, causing a feminine shiver to ripple through her.

"You look nice," Johnny said, his voice sounding far more noncommittal than his heated gaze indicated.

Having momentarily forgotten how to breathe, Annie attempted to resuscitate herself by swallowing a big gulp of fresh air.

"Thanks," she murmured, thinking there was no need to return the compliment. Nice was such a gross understatement when applied to this striking specimen of manhood. For heaven's sake, the man practically radiated testosterone.

It was all Annie could do to refrain from taking a giant step backward.

It was all she could do to keep from stepping forward and indulging her curiosity by running her hands along the exposed muscles of his arms.

Involuntarily, Annie's headstrong imagination slipped beneath his shirt, as well, to check out the muscles hidden there. It gave her some measure of comfort to think that, just in case she ended up doing something utterly idiotic like swooning at his feet, this hale fellow would have no trouble carrying her to the couch—or to the bed, for that matter.

Attempting to get her runaway hormones under control, she picked her smile up off the floor and gave her best imitation of someone who had it all together.

"Just let me grab my purse, and we can be on our way."

She was eager to dispense with the formality of inviting him inside on the pretense of showing him around the house. Johnny Lonebear did not appear to be the kind of man who was into such things as floor plans and decorative touches. As far as houses went, he struck Annie as the type who preferred a canopy of stars overhead to any fashionable cathedral-style ceiling. The very thought conjured up a vision of two sleeping bags zipped together in a remote and romantic setting. Annie hastened to shake her head to clear it of that image, but it was too late to keep that wicked imagination of hers from diving beneath the sleeping bag covers to reveal herself wantonly writhing beneath this powerful, naked man.

Grabbing her purse off a nearby chair as if it were a life preserver, she heard her lips form a bold-faced lie.

"I'm ready if you are," she said, fighting the urge to run back inside and bolt the door behind her.

Johnny didn't feel the need to respond as he waited for Annie to lock her front door. Nobody on the reservation bothered with such formalities. It wasn't so much that they hadn't anything worth stealing as it was the belief that one's home should always be open to anyone in need—whether or not you happened to be around. Perhaps it was just a small cultural difference, but he couldn't help feeling that the very act itself widened the gulf separating himself from Annie Wainwright.

The four-by-four Dodge Ram parked out front bespoke the personality of its driver. It was a big truck for a big man. The deep-blue, extended-cab's chrome sparkled in the midday sun. Directly beneath a decal of the American flag, a Native Pride emblem decorated the back window. Over them both hung a gun rack, complete with a fearsome-looking weapon that made Annie flinch just to look at it.

In the bed of the vehicle sat a huge black beast that resembled a bear. Ferocious barking at its master's approach only slightly reassured Annie that the creature was, in fact, domesticated. The look of distress upon her face compelled Johnny to chastise the animal.

"Down, Smokey!" he said sternly. "Down."

The command only served to set the brute's great tail in motion. Swishing through the air, it truly seemed to wag the dog, whose wet pink tongue panted in the heat. Annie did everything in her

power to avoid either end of this perpetual-motion machine. She actually imagined disappointment not only in Johnny's but also in the beast's eyes when she failed to reach out and pet it: an act which, in her opinion, would have taken no more courage than sticking one's head in a lion's mouth.

"Smokey the Bear, I presume?" she asked over the thundering of a heart coping with a sudden rush of adrenaline.

Impressed with her quick wit, Johnny flashed her a smile.

"Don't worry," he assured her. "He's friendly. That is, unless he thinks I'm being threatened."

Not quite sure what to make of that qualifying statement, Annie kept a healthy distance as she stepped up to the passenger side door with Johnny beside her. Rugged and practical, the ultramanly vehicle sat so high off the ground that it necessitated a helping hand for any woman of normal proportions to manage hitching herself into the contoured bench seat with a minimum amount of clumsiness. As much as Annie appreciated the gentlemanly gesture of someone going to the trouble of opening her door when she was perfectly capable of doing so herself, she almost wished Johnny would have just left her to struggle awkwardly into her seat by herself. The mere touch of his hand at her elbow as he helped her up sent a blast of heat exploding inside her chest like that of a shotgun pointed directly at the freshly painted target on her heart.

Annie had blissfully forgotten just how much her skin hungered for the touch of a man.

Johnny shut the door behind her and crossed to the driver's side in a couple of long, purposeful strides. Hopping into place behind the steering wheel as if it was nothing to climb into a vehicle custom made for the Jolly Green Giant, he turned the key in the ignition.

"So you think you're up for this?" he asked, somehow managing to sound genuine in his concern.

In defiance of the fact that the rest of her body stubbornly disagreed, Annie nodded her head. Yet another sudden power surge of heat rushing through her body, a result of an indulgent smile bestowed upon her, made her wish she had donned a pair of shorts instead of the jeans she had on. Since she didn't want to ask Johnny to turn on the air-conditioning for fear the request would be a dead giveaway to a level of discomfort she couldn't remember feeling since adolescence, Annie suffered the heat in silence.

Any hope of feigned nonchalance evaporated beneath a completely cloudless sky. Demurely, she crossed her legs and grabbed hold of the overhead strap as the pickup lurched forward down a road that resembled the washboard ripples of her driver's hard belly. The stiff suspension of the vehicle rattled Annie's teeth, making pleasant chitchat difficult if not impossible. Concentrating on the scenery rolling past her window, she did her best to dismiss the sexual tension building between them like storm clouds gathering forces in the distance with the potential of unloosing a tornado in the general vicinity.

Johnny was of the impression that his passenger would have preferred riding in the bed of the truck rather than being strapped into a seat next to him. Annie Wainwright's body language couldn't have been any more unsociable had she erected a stone wall between them. He was thinking along the lines of the Great Wall of China. The way she wrapped her one free hand around her stomach reminded Johnny of a seashell curled protectively around itself. He wanted to tell her that she had nothing to be afraid of but couldn't bring himself to utter the lie. The way his body was reacting to this woman's proximity confirmed the fact that her fears were not completely groundless.

That he wanted her came as a surprise to him.

Reminding himself that Annie Wainwright was not his type did nothing to lessen the desire pulsing through him. He was naturally drawn to taller women of a similar complexion and background to his own. Usually the raven-haired beauties in a crowd caught his eye. Not to mention that he preferred women comfortable enough in their sexuality to flirt outright. Women willing and eager to make the first move.

Painful experience had taught him that making the last move was far more to his liking.

That a light-skinned, fair-haired woman of a rather prudish nature was having such a peculiar effect upon his senses was alarming, to say the least. His sister would surely be outraged by the thoughts playing havoc with his imagination. And while Johnny promised his niece that he would put forth an honest effort to give her mentor a fair chance to prove herself, he hadn't expected to feel anything more for this woman than for any other of the other teachers he supervised.

What he was feeling at the moment was decidedly not of a professional nature.

Johnny reached over and turned the air-conditioning on full blast. Unfortunately, it did little to cool him off. For that reason alone he was relieved to reach the outskirts of Fort Washakie. Having traveled all over the world, it never failed to amuse Johnny to see the city population sign proudly announcing all 271 inhabitants of the small outpost to passing motorists. Some of the locals maintained that the reason that particular number stayed so constant was because every time a baby was born, another man left town. Having been on the receiving end of such questionable humor himself, Johnny refrained from repeating the old chestnut as he pulled into the dirt parking lot.

The smell of fry bread wafting on an almost imperceptible breeze brought home memories of the grandmother who had raised Johnny and his sister Ester after their parents had been killed in a tragic car accident. Grandma dubbed the deep-fat fried treat squaw bread and, to this day, Johnny could think of nothing sweeter for the body and soul than rolling fresh, hot twists of it in pure sugar. Others preferred the bread plain or filled with seasoned meat and cheese, not unlike a taco. A single whiff was enough to announce the beginning of three days of singing, dancing and contests. It put him in a fine humor.

After parking the pickup, Johnny proceeded to take Annie on a tour of the premises. The powwow was held in a circular arena surrounded by benches and protected from inclement weather by wooden awnings. Vendors set up stands around the perimeter. The jewelry was predominantly made of silver, turquoise and jade. Also on display was a wide variety of beadwork, leather crafts and toys, as well as an incredible array of food in quantities that astonished Annie.

She expressed surprise that no admission fee was charged and kept looking over her shoulder as if someone might ask her to leave. Their first stop was at a concessionaire's where Johnny bought her a cola and a sample of the fry bread that always took him back to a childhood home that might have been described as a hovel had it not been filled with the sound of his grandmother's humming and the pride she instilled in her grandchildren as patiently and meticulously as the fancy beadwork she sold to make ends meet. For himself, Johnny ordered a "Big Indian", a hamburger concoction served on fry bread that spilled over the edges of a large dinner plate.

Glistening with the inquisitiveness of a sparrow, Annie's blue eyes darted everywhere, reminding Johnny of the excitement he felt the first time he had attended a powwow. Even though Johnny warned her that she would end up a sticky mess, she nonetheless decided to fill her fry bread with honey. Moaning in delight over the concoction, she appeared to have absolutely no idea how delectable she herself appeared with a spot of sweet stuff dribbling down her chin.

"Here," Johnny said, stopping her in her tracks and pulling a handkerchief from his back pocket. "Let me help you."

Annie felt like an errant child only until the next moment when his eyes locked upon hers and the rest of the world faded away. Suddenly there was nothing between them but an expression of totally unexpected and inappropriate longing shimmering beneath the blue sky for anyone happening by to see. Annie tipped her chin up as if inviting a kiss. Johnny paused, considering the wisdom of licking the offending honey from her flesh before dragging her off to one of the surrounding tepees and making passionate love right then and there. Instead he put his forefinger beneath her chin and with staggering tenderness wiped away the sweet trickle with the corner of his handkerchief.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, купив полную легальную версию на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.