

THE VISIONARY

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from *Omni* October 1984

My mother and aunt said that when I was learning to talk, I talked to people they could not see or hear, sometimes speaking in our language and sometimes saying words or names they did not know. I can't remember doing that, but I remember that I could not understand why people said that a room was empty or that there was nobody in the gardens, because there were always people of different kinds, everywhere. Mostly they stayed quietly or were going about their doings, or passing through. I had already learned that nobody talked to them and that they did not often pay heed or answer when I tried to talk to them, but it had not occurred to me that other people did not see them.

I had a big argument with my cousin once when she said there was nobody in the wash house, and I had seen a whole group of people there, passing things from hand to hand and laughing silently, as if they were playing some gambling game. My cousin, who was older than I, said I was lying, and I began to scream and tried to knock her down. I can feel that same anger now. I was telling what I had seen and could not believe she had not seen the people in the wash house; I thought she was lying in order to call me a liar. That anger and shame stayed a long time and made me unwilling to look at the people that other people didn't see or wouldn't talk about. When I saw them, I looked away until they were gone. I had thought they were all my kinfolk, people of my household, and seeing them had been companionship and pleasure to me; but now I felt I could not trust them, since they had got me into trouble. Of course I had it all backward, but there was nobody to help me get it straight. My family was not much given to thinking about things, and except for going to school, I went to our heyimas only in the Summer before the games.

When I turned away from all those people that I had used to see, they went on and did not come back. Only a few were left, and I was lonely.

I liked to be with my father, Olive of the Yellow Adobe, a man who talked little and was cautious and gentle in mind and hand. He repaired and reinstalled solar panels and collectors and batteries and lines and fixtures in houses and outbuildings; all his work was with the Miller's Art. He did not mind if I came along if I was quiet, and so I went with him to be away from our noisy, busy household. When he saw that I liked his art, he began to teach it to me. My mothers were not enthusiastic about that. My Serpentine grandmother did not like having a Miller for son-in-law, and my mother wanted me to learn medicine. "If she has the third eye, she ought to put it to good use," they said, and they sent me to the Doctors Lodge on White Sulfur Creek to learn. Although I learned a good deal there and liked the teachers, I did not like the work and was impatient with the illnesses and accidents of mortality, preferring the dangerous, dancing energies my father worked with. I could often see the electrical current, and there were excitements of feeling, tones of a kind of sweet music barely to be heard, and tones also of voices speaking and singing, distant and hard to understand, that came when I worked with the batteries and wires. I did not speak of this to my father. If he felt and heard any of these things, he preferred to leave them unspoken, outside the house of words.

My childhood was like everybody's, except that with going to the Doctors Lodge and working with my father and liking to be alone, perhaps I played less with other children than many children do, after I was seven or eight years old. Also, though I went all over Telina with my father and knew all the ways and houses, we never went out of town. My family had no summer house and never even visited the hills. "Why leave Telina?" my grandmother would say. "Everything is here!" And in summer the town was pleasant, even when it was hot; so many people were away that there was never a crowd at the wash house, and houses standing empty were entirely different from houses full of people, and the ways and gardens and common places were lonesome and lazy and quiet. It was always in summer, often in the great heat of the afternoon, that I would see the people passing through Telina-na, coming upriver. They are hard to describe, and I have no idea who they were. They were rather short and walked quietly, alone, or three or four - one after the other; their limbs were smooth and their faces round, often with some lines or marks drawn on the lips or chin; their eyes were narrow, and sometimes looked swollen and sore as if from smoke or weeping. They would go quietly through the town, not looking at it and never speaking, going upriver. When I saw them I would always say the four heyas. The way they went, silently, gripped at my heart. They were far from me, walking in sorrow.

When I was nearly twelve years old, my cousin came of age, and the family gave a very big passage party for her, giving away all kinds of things I didn't even know we had. The following year I came of age, and we had another big party, though without such lavishness, as we didn't have so much left to give. I had entered the Blood Lodge just before the Moon, and the party for me was during the Summer Dance. At the end of the party, there were horse games and races, for the Summer people had come down from Chukulmas.

I had never been on horseback. The boys and girls who rode in the games and races for Telina brought a steady mare for me to ride and boosted me up to her back and put the rein in my hand, and off we went. I felt like the wild swan. That was pure joy. And I could share it with the other young people; we were all joined by the good feeling of the party and the excitement of the games and races and the beauty and passion of the horses, who thought it was all their festival. The mare taught me how to ride that day, and I was on horseback all night dreaming, and the next day, rode again; and on the third day I rode in a race, on a roan colt from a household in Chukulmas. The colt ran second in the big race when I rode him and ran first in the match race when the boy who had raised him rode him. In all that glory of festival and riding and racing and friendship, I left my childhood most joyously, but also I went out of my House, and got lost from too much being given me at once. I gave my heart to the red colt I rode and to the boy who rode him, a brother of the Serpentine of Chukulmas.

It was a long time ago and not his fault or doing; he did not know it. The word I write is my word; to myself let it be brought back.

So the Summer games were over in our town and the horse riders went off downriver to Madidinou and Ounmalin; and there I was, a thirteen-year-old woman and afoot.

I wore the undyed clothing I had been making all the year before, and I went often to the Blood Lodge, learning the songs and mysteries. Young people who had been friendly to me at the games remained friends, and when they found I longed to ride, they shared the horses of their households with me. I learned to play vetulou and helped with caring for the horses, who were stabled and pastured then northwest of Moon Creek in Halfhoof Pasture and on Butt Hill. I said at the Doctors Lodge that I wanted to learn horse doctoring, and so they sent me to learn that art by working with an old man, Striffen, who was a great doctor of horses and cattle, I would listen to him. He used different kinds of noises, words like the matrix words of songs, and different kinds of silences and breathing; and so did the animals. But I never could understand what they were saying.

Once when I came to the Obsidian heyimas for a Blood Lodge singing, a woman, I thought her old then, named Milk, met me in the passage. She looked at me with eyes as sharp and blind as a snake's eyes and said, "What are you here for?"

I answered her, "For the singing," and hurried by, but I knew that was not what she had asked.

In the summer I went with the dancers and riders of Telina to Chukulmas . There I met that boy, that young man. We talked about the roan horse and about the little moonhorse I was riding in the vetulou games. When he stroked the roan horse's flank, I did so too, and the side of my hand touched the side of his hand once.

Then there was another year until the Summer games returned. That was how it was to me: There was nothing I cared for or was mindful of but the Summer and the games.

The old horse doctor died on the first night of the Grass. I had gone to the Lodge Rejoining and learned the songs; I sang them for him. After he was burned I gave up learning his art. I could not talk with the animals or with any other people. I saw nothing clearly and listened to no one, I went back to working with my father, and I rode in the games in Summer . My cousin had a group of friends, girls who talked and played soulbone and dice, gambling for candy and almonds, sometimes for rings and earrings, and I hung around with them every evening, There were no real people in the world I saw at that time. All rooms were empty. Nobody was in the common places and gardens of Telina . Nobody walked upriver grieving.

When the sun turned south, the dancers and riders came again from Chukulmas to Telina , and I rode in the games and races, spending all day and night at the fields. People said, "That girl is in love with the roan stallion from Chukulmas ," and teased me about it but not shamefully; everybody knows how adolescents fall in love with horses, and songs have been made about that love. But the horse knew what was wrong: He would no longer let me handle him.

In a few days the riders went on to Madidinou , and I stayed behind.

Things are very obstinate and stubborn, but also there is a sweet willingness in them: They offer what they meet, Electricity is like horses: crazy and willful and also willing and reliable. If you are careless and running counter, a horse or a live wire is a contrary and perilous thing. I burnt and shocked myself several times that year, and once I started a fire in the walls of a house by making a bad connection and not grounding the wires. They smelled the smoke and put out the fire before it did much harm, but my father, who had brought me into his Art as a novice, was so alarmed and angry that he forbade me to work with him until the next rainy season.

At the Wine that year I was fifteen years old. I got drunk for the first time. I went around town shouting and talking to people nobody else saw. So I was told next day, but I could not remember anything of it. I thought if I got drunk again, but a little less drunk, I might see the kind of people I used to see, when the ways were full of them and they kept my soul company. So I stole wine from our house neighbors, who had most of a barrel left in bottle after the dance, and I went down alone by the Na in the willow flats to drink it.

I drank the first bottle and made some songs, then I spilled most of the second bottle and went home and felt sick for a couple of days. I stole wine again, and this time I drank two bottles quickly. I made no songs. I felt dizzy and sick and fell asleep. Next morning I woke up there in the willow flats on the cold stones by the river, very weak and cold. My family was worried about me after that. It had been a hot

night; so I could say I had stayed out for the cool and had fallen asleep, but my mother knew I was lying about something. She thought it must be that I had come inland with some boy but for some reason would not admit it. It shamed and worried her to think that I was wearing undyed clothing when I should no longer do so. It enraged me that she should so distrust me; yet I would say nothing to her in denial or explanation. My father knew that I was sick at heart, but it was soon after that that I set the fire, and his worry turned to anger. As for my cousin, she was in love with a Blue Clay boy and interested in nothing else; the girls with whom I gambled had taken to smoking a lot of hemp, which I never liked; and though the friends with whom I rode and looked after the horses were still kind, I did not want to be with humans much or even with horses. I did not want the world to be as it was. I had begun making up the world.

I made the world this way: That young man of my House in Chukulmas felt as I felt; and I would go to Chukulmas after the Grass this year. He and I would go up into the hills together and become forest-living people. We would take the roan stallion and go to LooksUp Valley, or farther; we would go to the grass dune country west of the Long Sound, where, he had once told me, the herds of wild horses run. He said that people went from Chukulmas sometimes to catch a wild horse there, but it was country where no human people lived. We would live there together alone, taming and riding the wild horses. Telling myself this world, in the daytime I made us live as brother and sister, but in the nights, lying alone, I made us make love together. The Grass came and passed; I put off going to Chukulmas, telling myself that it would be better to go after the Sun was danced. I had never danced the Sun as an adult, and I wanted to do that; after that, I told myself, I would go to Chukulmas. All along I knew that if I went or if I did not go it did not matter, and all I wanted to do was to die.

It is hard to say to yourself that what you want to do is die. You keep hiding it behind other things, which you pretend to want. I was impatient for the Twenty-One Days to begin, as if my life would start over with them. On the eve of the first day, I went to live at the heyimas.

As soon as I set foot on the ladder, my heart went cold and tight. There was a long-singing that night. My lips got numb, and my voice would not come out of my throat. I wanted to get out and run away, all night, but I did not know where to go.

Next morning three groups formed: One would go over the northwest range into wild country in silence; one would use hemp and mushrooms for trance; and one would drum and long-sing.

I could not choose which group to join, and this distressed me beyond anything. I began shaking, and went to the ladder but could not lift my foot to climb it.

The old doctor named Gall, who had taught me sometimes at the Doctors Lodge, came down the ladder. She was coming to sing, but the habit of her art distracted her, and she observed me. She turned back and said, "Are you not well?"

"I think I am ill."

"Why is that?"

"I want to dance and can't choose the dancing."

"The long-singing?"

"My voice is gone."

“The trances?”

“I’m afraid of them,”

“The journey?”

“I can’t leave this house!” I said loudly and began to shake again.

Gall put her head back with her chin sunk in her neck and looked at me from the tops of her eyes. She was a short, dark, wrinkled woman. She said, “You’re already stretched. Do you want to break?”

“Maybe it would be better.”

“Maybe it would be better to relax?”

“No it would be worse.”

“There’s a choice made. Come now.”

Gall took my hand and brought me to the doorway of the inmost room of the heyimas, where the people of the Inner Sun were.

I said, “I can’t go in there. I’m not old enough to begin the learning.”

Gall said, “Your soul is old.” She said the same to Black Oak, who came from the gyre to the doorway: “This is an old soul and a young one, stretching each other too hard.”

Black Oak, who was then Speaker of the Serpentine, spoke with Gall, but I was not able to listen to what they said. As soon as we had come into the doorway of the inner room, my hair lifted up on my head, and my ears sang. I saw round, bright lights coming and going inside the room, where there was no light but the dim shaft from the topmost skylight. The light began to gyre. Black Oak turned to me and spoke, but at that time, as he spoke, the vision began.

I did not see the man Black Oak, but the Serpentine. It was a rock person, not man nor woman, not human, but in shape like a heavy human being, with the blue, blue-green, and black colors and the surfaces of serpentine rock in its skin. It had no hair, and its eyes were lidless and without transparency, seeing very slowly. Serpentine looked at me very slowly with those rock eyes.

I crouched down in terror. I could not weep or speak or stand or move. I was like a bag full of fear. All I could do was crouch there. I could not breathe at all until a stone, maybe Serpentine’s hand, struck my head a hard blow on the right side, above the ear. It knocked me off balance and hurt very much, so that I whimpered and sobbed with the pain, and after that I could breathe again. My head did not bleed where it had been struck but began swelling up there.

I crouched, recovering from the blow and the dizziness, and after a long while looked up again. Serpentine was standing there. It stood there. After a while I saw the hands moving slowly. They moved up slowly and came together at the navel, at the middle of the stone. There they pulled back and apart. They pulled open a long, wide rent, or opening in the stone, like the doorway of a room into which I knew I was to enter. I got up crouching and shaking and took a step forward into the stone.

It was not like a room. It was stone, and I was in it. There was no light or breath or room. I think the

rest of the vision all took place in the stone; that is where it all happened and was; but because of the human way human people have to see things, it seemed to change and to be other places, things, and beings.

As if the serpentine rock had crumbled and decayed into the red earth, after a while I was in the earth, part of the dirt. I could feel how the dirt felt. Presently I could feel rain coming into the dirt, coming down. I could feel it in a way that was like seeing, falling down on and into me, out of a sky that was all rain.

I would go to sleep and then be partly awake again, perceiving. I began feeling stones and roots, and along my left side I began to feel and hear cold water running, a creek in the rainy season. Veins of water underground went down and around through me to that creek, seeping in the dark through the dirt and stones,

Near the creek, I began to feel the big, deep roots of trees, and in the dirt everywhere, the fine, many roots of the grasses, the bulbs of brodiaea and blue-eyed grass, the ground squirrel's heart beating, the mole asleep. I began to come up one of the great roots of a buckeye, up inside the trunk and out the leafless branches to the ends of the small outmost branches. From there I perceived the ladders of rain. These I climbed to the stairways of cloud. These I climbed to the paths of wind. There I stopped, for I was afraid to step out on the wind.

Coyote came down the wind path. She came like a thin woman with rough, dun hair on her head and arms, and a long, fine face with yellow eyes. Two of her children came with her, like coyote pups.

Coyote looked at me and said, "Take it easy. You can look down. You can look back."

I looked back and down under the wind. Below and behind me were dark ridges of forest with the rainbow shining across them, and light shining on the water on the leaves of the trees. I thought there were people on the rainbow but was not sure of that. Below and farther on were yellow hills of summer and a river among them going to thesea. In places the air below me was so full of birds that I could not see the ground, but only the light on their wings,

Coyote had a high, singing voice like several voices at once. She said, "Do you want to go on from here?"

I said, "I was going to go to the Sun."

"Go ahead. This is all my country." Coyote said that and then came past me on the wind, trotting on four legs as a coyote with her pups. I was standing alone on the wind there. So I went on ahead.

My steps on the wind were long and slow, like the Rainbow Dancers' steps. At each step the world below me looked different. At one step it was light; at the next one, dark. At the next step it was smoky; at the next, clear. At the next long step, black and gray clouds of ash or dust hid everything; and at the next, I saw a desert of sand with nothing growing or moving at all. I took a step, and everything on the surface of the world was one single town, roofs and ways with people swarming in them like the swarming in pond water under a lens. I took another step and saw the bottoms of the oceans laid dry, the lava slowly welling from long center seams, and huge desolate canyons far down in the shadow of the walls of the continents, like ditches below the walls of a barn. The next step I took, long and slow on the wind, I saw the surface of the world - blank, smooth, and pale, like the face of a baby I once saw that was born without forebrain or eyes. I took one more step and the hawk met me in the sunlight, in the quiet air, over the southwest slope of Grandmother Mountain.

It had been raining, and clouds were still dark in the northwest. The rain shone on the leaves of the forests in the canyons of the mountainside.

Of the vision given me in the Ninth House, I can tell some parts in writing, and some I can sing with the drum, but for most of it, I have not found words or music, though I have spent a good part of my life ever since learning how to look for them. I cannot draw what I saw, as my hand has no gift for making a likeness.

One reason it would be better drawn and is hard to tell is that there is no person in it. To tell a story, you say, "I did this" or "She saw that." When there is no I nor she, there is no story. I was, until I got to the Ninth House; there was the hawk, but I was not. The hawk was; the still air was. Seeing with the hawk's eyes is being without self. Self is mortal. That is the House of Eternity.

So of what the hawk's eyes saw, all I can here recall to words is this:

It was the universe of power. It was the network, field, and lines of the energies of all the beings, stars, and galaxies of stars, worlds, animals, minds, nerves, dust, the lace and foam of vibration that is being itself, all interconnected, every part part of another part, and the whole part of each part, and so comprehensible to itself only as a whole, boundless and unclosed.

At the Exchange it is taught that the electrical mental network of the City extends from all over the surface of the world out past the moon and the other planets to unimaginable distances among the stars: In the vision all that vast web was one momentary glitter of light on one wave on the ocean of the universe of power, one fleck of dust on one grass seed in unending fields of grass. The images of the light dancing on the waves of the sea or on dust motes, the glitter of light on ripe grass, the flicker of sparks from a fire, are all I have: No image can contain the vision, which contained all images. Music can mirror it better than words can, but I am no poet to make music of words. Foam and the scintillation of mica in rock, the flicker and sparkle of waves and dust, the working of the great broadcloth looms, and all dancing have reflected the hawk's vision for a moment to my mind; and indeed everything would do so, if my mind were clear and strong enough. But no mind or mirror can hold it without breaking.

There was a descent or drawing away, and I saw some things that I can describe. Here is one of them: In this lesser place or plane, which was what might be called the gods or the divine, beings enacted possibilities. These I, being human, recall as having human form. One of them came and shaped the vibrations of energies, closing their paths from gyre into wheel. This one was very strong and was crippled. He worked as blacksmith at the smithy, making wheels of energy, closed upon themselves, terrible with power, flaming. He who made them was burnt away by them to a shell of cinder, with eyes like a potter's kiln when it is opened and hair of burning wires, but still he turned the paths of energy and closed them into wheels, locking power into power. All around this being now was black and hollow where the wheels turned and ground and milled. There were other beings who came as if flying, like birds in a storm, flying and crying across the wheels of fire to stop the turning and the work, but they were caught in the wheels and burst like feathers of flame. The miller was a thin shell of darkness now, very weak, burnt out, and he too was caught in the wheels' turning and burning and grinding and was ground to dust, like fine, black meal. The wheels as they turned kept growing and joining until the whole machine was interlocked cog within cog, and strained and brightened and burst into pieces. Every wheel as it burst was a flare of faces and eyes and flowers and beasts on fire - burning, exploding, destroyed, falling into black dust. That happened, and it was one flicker of brightness and dark in the universe of power, a bubble of foam, a flick of the shuttle, a fleck of mica. The dark dust, or meal, lay in the shape of open curves or spirals. It began to move and shift, and there was a scintillation in it, like dust in a shaft of sunlight. It began dancing. Then the dancing drew away and drew away, and closer by, to the left, something was there, crying like a little animal. That was myself, my mind and being in the world; and I

began to become myself again; but my soul that had seen the vision was not entirely willing. Only my mind kept drawing it back to me from the Ninth House, calling and crying for it till it came.

I was lying on my right side on earth, in a small, warm room with earthen walls. The only light came from the red bar of an electric heater. Somewhere nearby people were singing a two-note chant. I was holding in my left hand a rock of serpentine, greenish with dark markings, quite round as if waterworn, though serpentine does not often wear round, but splits and crumbles. It was just large enough that I could close my fingers around it. I held this round stone for a long time and listened to the chanting until I went to sleep. When I woke up, after a while I felt the rock going immaterial so that my fingers began sinking into it, and it weighed less and less, until it was gone. I was a little grieved by this, for I had thought it a remarkable thing to come back from the Right Arm of the World with a piece of it in my hand; but as I grew clearer headed, I perceived the vanity of that notion. Years later the rock came back to me. I was walking down by Moon Creek with my sons when they were small boys. The younger one saw the rock in the water and picked it up, saying, "A world!" I told him to keep it in his heya -box, which he did. When he died, I put that rock back in the water of Moon Creek.

I had been in the vision for the first two days and nights of the Twenty-One Days of the Sun. I was very weak and tired, and they kept me in the heyimas all the rest of the Twenty-One Days. I could hear the long-singing, and sometimes I went into other rooms of the heyimas; they made me welcome even in the inmost room, where they were singing and dancing the Inner Sun and where I had entered the vision. I would sit and listen and half-watch. But if I tried to follow the dancing with my eyes, or sing, or even touch the tongue-drum, the weakness would wash into me like a wave on sand, and I would go back into the little room and lie down on the earth, in the earth.

They waked me to listen to the Morning Carol; that was the first time in twenty-one days that I climbed the ladder and saw the sun, that day, the day of the Sun Rising.

The people dancing the Inner Sun had been in charge of me. They had told me that I was in danger and that if I approached another vision, I should try to turn away from it, as I was not strong enough for it yet. They had told me not to dance; and they kept bringing me food, so good and so kindly given that I could not refuse it, and ate it with enjoyment. After the Sun Risen days were past, certain scholars of the heyimas took me in their charge. Tarweed, a man of my House, and the woman Milk of the Obsidian, were my guides. It was now time that I began to learn the recounting of the vision.

When I began, I thought there was nothing to learn. All I had to do was say what I had seen.

Milk worked with words, Tarweed worked with words, drum, and matrix chanting. They had me go very slowly, telling very little at a time, sometimes one word only, and repeating what I had been able to tell, singing it with the matrix chant so that as much as possible might be truly recalled and given and could be recalled and given again.

When I began thus to find out what it is to say what one has seen, and when the great oomplexity and innumerable vivid details of the vision overwhelmed my imagination and surpassed my ability to describe, I feared that I would lose it all before I could grasp one fragment of it and that even if I remembered some of it, I would never understand any of it. My guides reassured me and quieted my impatience. Milk said, "We have some training in this craft, and you have none. You have to learn to speak sky with an earth tongue. Listen: If a baby were carried up the Mountain, could she walk back down, until she learned to walk?"

Tarweed explained to me that as I learned to apprehend mentally what I had perceived in vision, I would approach the condition of living in both Towns; and so, he said, "there's no great hurry."

I said, "But it will take years and years!"

He said, "You've been at it for a thousand years already. Gall said you were an old soul."

It bothered me that I was often not sure whether Tarweed was joking or not joking. That always bothers young people, and however old my soul might be, my mind was fifteen. I had to live a while before I understood that a lot of things can only be said joking and not joking at the same time. I had to come clear back to Coyote's House from the Hawk's House to learn that, and sometimes I still forget it.

Tarweed's way was joking, shocking, stirring, but he was gentle; I had no fear of him. I had been afraid of Milk ever since she had looked at me in the Blood Lodge and said, "What are you here for?" She was a great scholar and was Singer of the Lodge. Her way was calm, patient, impersonal, but she was not gentle, and I feared her. With Tarweed she was polite, but it was plain that her manners masked contempt. She thought a man's place was in the woods and fields and workshops, not among sacred and intellectual things. In the Lodge I had heard her say the old gibe, "A man fucks with his brain and thinks with his penis." Tarweed knew well enough what she thought, but intellectual men are used to having their capacities doubted and their achievements snubbed; he did not seem to mind her arrogance as much as I sometimes did, even to the point of trying to defend him against her once, saying, "Even if he is a man, he thinks like a woman!"

It did no good, of course; and if it was partly true, it wasn't wholly true, because the thing that was most important of all to me I could not speak of to Tarweed, a man, and a man of my House: and to Milk, arrogant and stern as she was, and a woman who had lived all her life celibate, I did not even need to speak of it. I began to, once, feeling that I must, and she stopped me. "What is proper for me to know of this, I know," she said. "Vision is transgression! The vision is to be shared; the transgression cannot be."

I did not understand that. I was very much afraid of going out of the heyimas and being caught in my old life again, going the wrong way again in false thinking and despair. A half-month or so after the Sun, I began to feel and say that I was still weak and ill and could not leave the heyimas. To this Tarweed said, "Aha! About time for you to go home!"

I thought him most unfeeling. When I was working with Milk, in my worry I began crying, and presently I said, "I wish I had never had this vision!"

Milk looked at me, a glance across the eyes, like being whipped in the face with a thin branch. She said, "You did not have a vision."

I sniveled and stared at her.

"You had nothing. You have nothing. The house stands. You can live in a corner of it, or all of it, or go outside it as you choose." So Milk said and left me.

I stayed alone in the small room. I began to look at it, the small warm room with earth walls and floor and roof, underground. The walls were earth: the whole earth. Outside them was the sky: the whole sky. The room was the universe of power. I was in my vision. It was not in me.

So I went home to live and try to stay on the right way.

Part of most days I went to the heyimas to study with Tarweed or to the Blood Lodge to study with Milk. My health was sound, but I was still tired and sleepy, and my household did not get very much

work out of me. All my family but my father were busy, restless people, eager to work and talk but never to be still. Among them, after the month in the heyimas, I felt like a pebble in a mountain creek, bounced and buffeted. But I could go to work with my father. Milk had suggested to him that he take me with him when he worked. Tarweed had questioned her about that, saying that the craft was spiritually dangerous, and Milk had replied, in the patient, patronizing tone she used to men, "Don't worry about that. It was danger that enabled her."

So I went back to working with power. I learned the art carefully and soberly, and set no more fires. I learned drumming with Tarweed, and speaking mystery with Milk. But it was all slow, slow, and my fear kept growing, fear and impatience. The image of the roan horse's rider was not in my mind, as it had been, but was the center of my fear, I never went to ride, and kept away from my friends who cared for the horses, and stayed out of the pastures where the horses were. I tried never to think about the Summer dancing, the games and races. I tried never to think about lovemaking, although my mother's sister had a new husband, and they made love every night in the next room with a good deal of noise. I began to fear and dislike myself, and fasted and purged to weaken myself.

I told Tarweed nothing of all this, shame preventing me; nor did I ever speak of it to Milk, fear preventing me,

So the World was danced, and next would come the Moon. The thought of that dance made me more and more frightened: I felt trapped by it. When the first night of the Moon came, I went down into my heyimas, meaning to stay there the whole time, closing my ears to the love songs. I started drumming a vision-tune that Tarweed had brought back from his dragonfly visions. Almost at once I entered trance and went into the house of anger.

In that house it was black and hot, with a yellowish glimmering like heat lightning and a dull muttering noise underfoot and in the walls. There was an old woman in there, very black, with too many arms. She called me, not by the name I then had. Berry, but Flicker: "Flicker, come here! Flicker, come here!" I understood that Flicker was my name, but I did not come.

The old woman said, "What are you sulking about? Why don't you go fuck with your brother in Chukulmas? Desire unacted is corruption. Must Not is a slave owner, Ought Not is a slave. Energy constrained turns the wheels of evil. Look what you're dragging with you! How can you run the gyre, how can you handle power, chained like that? Superstition! Superstition!"

I found that my legs were both fastened with bolts and hasps to a huge boulder of serpentine rock so that I could not move at all. I thought that if I fell down, the boulder would roll on me and crush me.

The old woman said, "What are you wearing on your head? That's no Moon Dance veil. Superstition! Superstition!"

I put up my hands and found my head covered with a heavy helmet made of black obsidian. I was seeing and hearing through this black, murky glass, which came down over my eyes and ears.

"Take it off, Flicker!" the old woman said.

I said, "Not at your bidding!"

I could hardly see or hear her as the helmet pressed heavier and thicker on my head and the boulder pushed against my legs and back.

She cried, "Break free! You are turning into stone! Break free!"

I would not obey her. I chose to disobey. With my hands I pressed the obsidian helmet into my ears and eyes and forehead until it sank in and became part of me, and I pushed myself back into the boulder until it became part of my legs and body. Then I stood there, very stiff and heavy and hard, but I could walk, and I could see and hear, now that the dark glass was not over my ears and eyes but was part of them. I saw that the house was all on fire, burning and smoldering, floor, walls, and roof. A black bird, a crow, was flying in the smoke from one room to the next. The old woman was burning, her clothes and flesh and hair smoldering. The crow flew around her and cried to me, "Sister, get out, you'd better get out!"

There is nothing but anger in the house of anger. I said, "No!"

The crow cawed, saying, "Sister, fetch water, water of the spring!" Then it flew out through the burning wall of the house. Just as it went, it looked back at me with a man's face, beautiful and strong, with curly, fiery hair streaming upward. Then the walls of fire sank down into the walls of the Serpentine heyimas where I was sitting drumming on the three-note drum. I was still drumming, but a different pattern, a new one.

After that vision, I was called Flicker; the scholars agreed that it's best to use the name that that Grandmother gives you, even if you don't do what she says. After that vision, I went up to the Springs of the River, as Crow had said to do; and after it I was freed from my fear of my desire.

The central vision is central; it is not for anything outside itself; indeed there is nothing outside it. What I beheld in the Ninth House is, as a cloud or a mountain is. We make use of such visions, make meanings out of them, find images in them, live on them, but they are not for us or about us any more than the world is. We are part of them. There are other kinds of vision, all farther from the center and nearer to the mortal self; one of those is the turning vision, which is about a person's own life. The vision in which that Grandmother named me was a turning vision.

The Summer came, and the people came down from Chukulmas. My brother of the Serpentine did not ride his roan horse in the races; a girl of the Obsidian of Chukulmas rode that horse, and he rode a sorrel mare. The roan stallion won all races and was much praised. After that summer he would race no more, but be put to stud, they said. I did not ride, but watched the races and the games. It is hard to say how I felt. My throat ached all the time, and I kept saying silently inside myself, goodbye, goodbye! But what I was saying goodbye to was already gone. I was mourning and yet unmoved. The girl was a good rider, and beautiful, and I thought maybe they are going to come inland together; but it did not hurt or concern me. What I wanted was to be gone from Telina, to begin living the life that followed the turning vision, that followed the gyre.

So in the heat of the summertime I went with Tarweed upriver, to the Springs of the River at Wakwaha.

On the Mountain I lived in the host-house of the Serpentine, and worked mostly as electrician's assistant at odd jobs around the sacred buildings and the Archive and Exchange. In the morning I would come outdoors at sunrise. All beyond and below the porch of that house I would see a vast pluming blankness, the summer fog filling the Valley, while the first rays of the sun brightened the rocks of the Mountain's peaks above me, and I would sing as I had been taught:

"It is the Valley of the puma,

where the lion walks,

wherethe lion wakes,

shining, shining in the Seventh House!”

Later, in the rainy season, the puma walked on the Mountain itself, darkening the summits and the Springs in cloud and gray mist. To wake in the silence of that rainless, all-concealing fog was to wake to dream, to breathe the lion’s breath.

Much of each day on the Mountain I spent in the heyimas , and at times slept there. I worked with the scholars and visionaries of Wakwaha at the techniques of revisioning , of recounting, and of music. I did not practice dancing or painting much, as I had no gift for them, but practiced recalling and recounting in spoken and written language and with the drum.

I had, as many people have, exaggerated notions of how visionaries live. I expected a strained, athletic, ascetic existence, always stretched towards the ineffable. In fact, it was a dull kind of life. When people are in vision, they can’t look after themselves, and when they come back from it, they may be extremely tired, or excited and bewildered, and in either case, need quietness without distractions and demands. In other words, it’s like childbearing or any hard, intense work. One supports and protects the worker. Revisioning and recounting are much the same, though not quite so hard.

In the host-house I fasted only before the great wakwa ; I ate lightly, with some care of which foods I ate, and drank little wine and watered it. If you are going into vision or revision, you don’t want to keep changing yourself and going in a different way - through starving one time, the next time through drunkenness, or cannabis, or trance-singing, or whatever. What you want is moderation and continuity. If one is an ecstatic, of course it’s another matter; that is not work but burning.

So the life I led in Wakwaha was dull and peaceful, much the same from day to day and season to season, and suited and pleased my mind and heart so that I desired nothing else. All the work I did in those years on the Mountain was revisioning and recounting the vision of the Ninth House that had been given me; I gave all I could of it to the scholars of the Serpentine for their records and interpretations, in which our guidance as a people lies. They were kind, true kin, family of my House, and I at last a child of that House again, not self-exiled. I thought I had come home and would live there all my life, telling and drumming, going into vision and coming back from it, dancing in the beautiful dancing place of the Five High Houses, drinking from the Springs of the River.

The Grass was late in the third year I lived in Wakwaha . Some days after it ended and some days before the Twenty-One Days began, I was about to go up the ladder of the Serpentine heyimas when Hawk Woman came to me. I thought she was one of the people of the heyimas , until she cried the hawk’s cry, “ kiyir, kiyir !” I turned, and she said, “Dance the Sun upon the Mountain, Flicker, and after that go down. Maybe you should learn how to dye cloth.” She laughed, and flew up as the hawk through the entrance overhead.

Other people came where I was standing at the foot of the ladder. They had heard the hawk’s cry, and some saw her fly up through the entrance of the heyimas .

After that I had neither vision nor revision of the Ninth House or any house or kind.

I was bereft and relieved. That terrible grandeur had been hard to bear, to bring back, to share and give and lose over and over. It had all been beyond my strength, and I was not sorry to cease revisioning .

But when I thought that I had lost all vision and must soon leave Wakwaha , I began to grieve. I thought about those people whom I had thought were my kinfolk, long ago when I was a child, before I was afraid. They were gone, and now I too must go, leaving these kinfolk of my House of Wakwaha , and go live among strangers the rest of my life.

A woman-living man of the Serpentine of Wakwaha , Deertongue , who had taught me and sung with me and given me friendship, saw that I was downcast and anxious, and said to me, “Listen. You think everything is done. Nothing is done. You think the door is shut. No door is shut. What did Coyote say to you at the beginning of it all?”

I said, “She said to take it easy.”

Deertongue nodded his head and laughed.

I said, “But Hawk said to go down.”

“She didn’t say not to come back.”

“But I have lost the visions!”

“But you have your wits! Where is the center of your life, Flicker?”

I thought, not very long, and answered, “There. In that vision. In the Ninth House.”

He said, “Your life turns on that center. Only don’t blind your intellect by hankering after vision! You know that the vision is not your self. The hawk turns upon the hawk’s desire. You will come round home and find the door wide open.”

I danced the Sun upon the Mountain, as Hawk Woman had said to do, and after that I began to feel that I must go. There were some people living in Wakwaha who sought vision or ecstasy by continuous fasting or drug taking, and lived in hallucination; such people came not to know vision from imagination and lived without honesty, making up the world all the time. I was afraid that if I stayed there I might begin imitating them, as Deertongue had warned me. After all, I had gone wrong that way once before. So I said goodbye to people, and on a cold, bright morning I went down the Mountain. A young redtail hawk circled, crying over the canyons, “kiyir! kiyir!” so mournfully that I cried myself.

I went back to my mothers’ household in Telina-na . My uncle had married and moved out, so I had his small room to myself; that was a good thing, since my cousin had married and had a child, and the household was as crowded and restless as ever. I went back to work with my father, learning both theory and practice with him, and after two years I became a member of the Millers Art. He and I continued to work together often. My life was nearly as quiet as it had been in Wakwaha . Sometimes I would spend days in the heyimas drumming; there were no visions, but the silence inside the drumming was what I wanted.

So the seasons went along, and I was thinking about what Hawk Woman had said. I was rewiring an old house, Seven Steps House in the northeast arm of Telina , and while I was working there on a hot day, a man of one of the households brought me some lemonade, and we fell to talking, and so again the next day. He was a Blue Clay man from Chukulmas who had married a Serpentine woman of Telina . They had been given two children, the younger born sevai . She had left the children with him and left her mothers’ house, going across town to marry a Red Adobe man. I knew her, she was one of the people I had gambled with as a child, but I had never talked to this man, Stillwater, who lived in his children’s

grandmother's house. He worked mostly as a chemist and tanner and housekeeper. We talked and got on well and met to talk again. I came inland with him, and we decided to marry.

My father was against it, because Stillwater had two children in his household already and so I would bear none; but that was what I wanted. My grandmother and mother were not heartily for anything I did, because I had always disappointed them, and they did not want three more people in our house, which was crowded enough. But that, too, was what I wanted. Everything I wanted in those years came to be.

Stillwater and the little boys and I made a household on the ground floor of Seven Steps House, where their grandmother lived on the first floor. She was a lazy, sweet-tempered woman, very fond of Stillwater and the children, and we got on very well. We lived in that house fourteen years. All that time I had what I wanted and was contented, like a ewe with two lambs in a safe pasture, with my head down eating the grass. All that time was like a long day in summer, in the fenced fields, or in a quiet house when the doors are closed to keep the rooms cool. That was my life's day. Before it and after it were the twilights and the dark, when things and the shadows of things become one.

Our elder son - and this was a satisfaction to my grandmother at last - went to learn with the Doctors Lodge on White Sulfur Creek as soon as he entered his sprouting years, and by the time he was twenty he was living at the Lodge much of the time. The younger died when he had lived sixteen years. Living with his pain and always increasing weakness and seeing him lose the use of his hands and the sight in his eyes had driven his brother to seek to be a healer, but living with his fearless soul had been my chief joy. He was like a little hawk that came into one's hands for the warmth, for a moment, fearless and harmless, but hurt. After he died, Stillwater lost heart, and began longing for his old home. Presently he went back to Chukulmas to live in his mothers' house. Sometimes I went to visit him there.

I went back to my childhood home, my mothers' house, where my grandmother and mother and father and aunt and cousin and her husband and two children were. They were still busy and noisy; it was not where I wanted to be. I would go to the heyimas and drum, but that was not what I wanted, either. I missed Stillwater's company, but it was no longer the time for us to live together; that was done. It was something else wanted, but I could not find out what.

In the Blood Lodge one day they told me that Milk, who was now truly an old woman, had had a stroke. My son came with me to see her and helped her in her recovery; and since she was alone, I went to stay with her while she needed help. It suited her to have me there, and so I lived with her. It was comfortable for both of us; but she was looking for her last name and learning how to die, and although I could be of some help to her while she did that and could learn from her, it wasn't what I wanted myself, yet.

One day a little before the Summer I was working in the storage barns above Moon Creek. The Art had put in a new generator there, and I was checking out the wiring to the threshers, some of which needed re-insulation; the mice had been at it. I was working away there in a dark, dusty crawl space, hearing the mice scuttering about overhead in the rafters and between the walls. Presently I noticed with part of my attention that several people were in the crawl space with me, watching what I was doing. They were grayish-brown people with long, slender, white hands and feet and bright eyes: I had never seen them before, but they seemed familiar. I said, while I went on working. "I wish you would not take the insulation off the wires. A fire could start. There must be better things to eat in a grain barn!"

The people laughed a little, and the darkest one said in a high soft voice, "Bedding."

They looked behind them then and went away quickly and quietly. Somebody else was there. I felt one little chill of fear. At first I couldn't see him clearly in that twilight of the crawl space; then I saw it was

Tarweed.

“You never ride horses anymore, Flicker,” he said.

“Riding is for the young, Tarweed,” I said.

“Are you old?”

“Nearly forty years old.”

“And you don’t miss riding?”

He was teasing me, as people had teased me once about being in love with the roan horse.

“No, I don’t miss that.”

“What do you miss?”

“My child that died.”

“Why should you miss him?”

“He is dead.”

“So am I,” said Tarweed. And so he was. He had died five years ago.

So I knew then what it was I missed, what I wanted. It was only not to be shut into the House of Earth. I did not have to go in and out the doors, if only I could see those who did. There was Tarweed, and he laughed a little, like the mice.

He did not say anything more, but watched me in the shadows.

When I was done with the work, he was gone.

When I left the barn, I saw the barn owl high upon a rafter, sleeping.

I went home to Milk’s household. I told her at supper about Tarweed and the mice.

She listened and began to cry a little. She was weak since the stroke, and her fierceness sometimes turned to tears. She said. “You were always ahead of me, going ahead of me!”

I had never known that she envied me. It made me sad to know it, and yet I wanted to laugh at the way we waste our feelings. “Somebody has to open the door!” I said. I showed her the people who were coming into the room, the kind of people I used to see when I was a young child. I knew they were indeed my kin, but I did not know who they were. I asked Milk, “Who are they?”

She was bewildered at first and could not see well, and complained. The people began to speak, and after a while she answered them. Sometimes they spoke this language, and sometimes I did not understand what they said; but she answered them eagerly.

When she grew tired, they went away quietly, and I helped her to bed. As she began to go to sleep, I

saw a little child come and lie down beside her. She put her arms around it. Every night after that until Milk died in the winter, the child came to her bed to sleep.

Once I spoke of it, saying, “your daughter.” Milk looked at me with that whipping look in her one good eye. She said, “Not my daughter. Yours.”

So I keep that house now, with the daughter I never bore, the child of my first love, and with others of my family. Sometimes when I sweep the floor of that house, I see the dust in a shaft of sunlight, dancing in curves and spirals, flickering.