

Khakhanate

Book II

The Crow

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For Deena

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Amona Island, 118 K

(Mona Is., PR, 1487)

My name is Crow. My name is also Karl Waldman, although I am never called that. Only my parents and sometimes my siblings called me Karl, to everyone else I am, in various languages, the Crow. I suppose it is presumptuous of me to think to carry on my grandfather's narrative, since I share few of his attributes. Still, among those few attributes I do share with him are a good memory and enough patience to ferret out the truth from the official version of events. These qualities would have long ago gotten me killed had I not eventually learned discretion. As it is, they did get me exiled three times (so far), and I now find myself with a lot of time and little to keep me busy. I am now (in my third exile) living on a small island named Amona that lies between the much larger islands of Aiti and Boriquen. It is about eighteen li long and twelve li wide, and is little more than a limestone slab rising about two hundred feet above the surface of the sea. It is riddled with caves and alive with innumerable birds. I am not allowed off the island, but I can receive visitors, and a most attentive staff of two Tainos from Boriquen meets all my needs. They grow, gather, hunt or catch and prepare whatever we eat, and keep my small house clean and cheerful. They are a very warm, friendly couple who make every effort to keep my spirits up. They even insist that they do not mind staying here with me and indeed, they only rarely return home. All this even though I was a complete stranger to them when their cacique ordered them to attend me in exile (in defiance of official instructions that I be left alone on the island) and make sure I live long and well. Their cacique, Behechio, does know me and feels indebted to me, but more on that at the proper time.

One of the few people who care to visit me regularly is my Ani' Yun'-wiya brother Cimmashote. On his last visit, he brought me the copy of my grandfather's memoirs, which I had left with his parents so long ago and reminded me of his mother's prediction that I would finish it. It was that, rather than the birth of a namesake grandson, that has led me to write this book. It should help keep me busy for a good long time.

I must admit that when I first read Grandfather's memoirs, I dreamt of writing my own after a great and successful life that easily eclipsed that of my great ancestor. As it happens, I write now more for lack of anything better to do, and my life has been quite mediocre and forgettable to anyone else but me. Still, I have been around great people and significant events and I can set them down with more disinterest than anyone else I know, especially since only a handful of people, all of whom are related to me, can read this old language.

I should probably begin where Grandfather left off. When he died he was ninety-five years old, a most ancient age that few others have attained, especially after so active a life. I was five years old when he died and while aware of him, knew him only as the very old man who would tell us wonderful stories. He alludes to his talent in the narrative, but he is too modest about it. They were marvelous tales, and he would tell them with exaggerated gestures, expressions, and inflections easily holding my rapt attention. His bright blue eyes would variously burn with intensity, shine with wonder, freeze with icy coldness, or sparkle with fun. I was heartbroken when my sister told me he was dead. It was many years and in my second exile before I fully appreciated such storytelling. I do remember some of his funeral to which my father alluded in his appendix. I stood with the whole family when the funeral pyre was lit by the then Khan, my cousin John. We all subsequently accompanied the ashes out into the middle of the lake in a fleet of small boats. There was a natural whirlpool there, and the ashes were placed in a basket that was directed into the whirlpool where it was sucked under. The only other thing I remember about the day was the silence. There was no sound from the throng in the square. My cousin John said very little. The fire crackled, steamed, and hissed dispiritedly, as if it regretted

its task. I recall being afraid to break the silence and remained quite still throughout the ceremony. Never since have I ever witnessed such reverence at a funeral.

When we returned home, my father gave away all Grandfather's things to the servants and then sat down to read his memoirs. When my father finished, he called the family together and told us about the memoirs and urged us all to read them. I was probably the last to read them, since I was just learning to read at the time and was hardly ready for such a tome. But when I did finally read the book, I was completely captivated and plagued everyone with questions raised by it. I wanted to know more about the old land, the frozen north, the oceans, the plains, the northern people, the southern people; in short, I was a real nuisance. It was at this time my siblings began calling me the Crow. At first they called me Karl, then began calling me "Little Raven" after my grandfather; soon my constant pestering earned me the name "Crow." Since Grandfather narrowly avoided the same name, I suppose it was inevitable and I was young enough to get used to it and eventually take pride in it.

It was no wonder that I would be curious about the world, for I had spent all of my short life in Cuauhnahuac, except for occasional trips to Tlatelolco and a few of the other cities of Anahuac, and there was much about which to be curious. My parents had both been born far to the northwest and had both (especially my father) seen much of the world. My mother's children were also born in the northwest, while most of my father's children were born in Cuauhnahuac. My brothers and sisters were only at home occasionally during my childhood, they were all so much older than me, and my father believed in sending us to stay with our northern relatives for years at a time to keep us "from getting jaded." By the time I was old enough for such a trip, only one of my sisters, Mathilde, was back at home and she was about to marry.

Grandfather mentioned my parents in his memoirs, but he only fleshed out my father a little. Since my father was his youngest son and spent very little time with him, that is not surprising. Still, I think he missed some of the man. He was most dedicated to healing the sick and worked tirelessly in that capacity— - readily interrupting whatever else he was doing to help anyone who was ill. He was also no respecter of persons, spending just as much time and effort on a slave or a beggar as on a wealthy merchant or even a relative. He had no patience with malingerers, however, and gave any that took up his time a rather strong laxative. His efforts were not always successful, but whenever he lost a patient, it was not because he didn't try everything to save him. On the other hand, when I was a child, I always found him distant and rather melancholy. The only time I remember him seeking me out was when he heard that there was an outbreak of the Zhen plague nearby and he gathered me up and rushed there, so that I could have the disease as a child when it was more easily endured. He was quite attentive to me and the other sick in the stricken town, making sure we did nothing to exacerbate the symptoms. His attentiveness was such a pleasant surprise to me that I made the mistake of faking illness after we returned and received his usual remedy along with a thorough dressing down. I never tried that again, and indeed I was very rarely ill. He had also given me the treatment that prevents the barbarian pox, but I was too young at the time to remember it. Other than these events, I had little contact with him until much later, not too long before he died.

My mother is just mentioned in Grandfather's book, and I suppose that was not strange since he hardly knew her, and even though they lived in the same house for his last years, she was rather quiet and unobtrusive. She also had an air of melancholy about her, and I always preferred the company of my siblings and the servants to either of my parents. It was not that she wasn't attentive to me, for she was a most conscientious mother, and the household was smoothly run, and all needs met. It was just that she wasn't good company. Some years later, I mentioned our parents' lugubrious aspect to my sister Mathilde, and she suggested that it was because they had both been in love with someone else and had lost those loves prematurely. While they were the best of friends, they still pined for their lost loves. She may have been right, since she knew our mother before she met my father, but Mathilde was quite young at the time, and perhaps it was just a bit of romanticism on her part. I did not really feel connected to my mother either, but was moved at her passing because of Mathilde, who deeply mourned her.

My father's children were Ignace, Sarah and Theodore. Ignace was twenty years older than me and was only home on rare visits. He had become a soldier and was posted to an Ordu somewhere in the west while I was growing up. He had married Goa, a woman from Coosa (one of the Southeastern towns), whom he had met while he was staying with his Ani' Yun'-wiya relatives. He had a broad physique, a short stature, and a

propensity to stand very still and very straight making him look more like a slab of dressed stone than a man. He was a man of few words, and those were mostly barely audible grunts, further contributing to his lithic aspect. Goa was very reserved and very polite. She was expressionless and impossible to befriend since one could never feel any warmth from the woman. It was impossible to tell if they were happy together, but they did remain together until their deaths and had four children who were nearly as inscrutable as they were. I never got to really know them and was guilty of wondering if they even knew each other. Sarah had married a local man, Tepeyotl, a Tlahuica merchant who took her on many of his travels. She was a cheerful person, with a sturdy build and a well-developed sense of fun. She teased all of us, but especially and unmercifully Ignace, whenever he was around. She always brought me something back from her many travels. Tepeyotl was a wonderful man, tall and strong; he would toss me up on his shoulders and tell me all about the strange lands he had visited and the various things for which he had traded there. They eventually had five children with whom I became more acquainted between exiles, but more of that later. Theodore had become a healer like our father and had married Mahwissa, a Dzitsiista whom he had met during his travels in the north. He was very kind and thoughtful, although he also was very quiet. He was often lost in thought, much like our father and also undertook many journeys. He was the most patient with my questions when he was at home. He eventually moved to the Blue Sky Khanate and I rarely saw him as a child. Mahwissa was a very sweet and quiet lady. She, too, was most kind to me and with the utmost patience taught me her native language. They had three children, but I only met one of them once when he was an adult.

My mother's children were Sealth, Taiwit, and Mathilde. Her first husband had insisted on naming the boys, but allowed her to name the lone daughter. Sealth, and Taiwit were both soldiers, the former stationed with his father's old Ordu, the Salmon and the latter with the Pelicans. Sealth had married Kudeitsaakw, a 'Lingit woman he had met while on patrol off the coast north of the Ordu. (This alliance would serve me handsomely during my second exile.) Sealth was a tall, broad-shouldered man who seemed to radiate quiet strength and self-confidence. Kudeitsaakw was a cheerful though shy and self-conscious lady who was very fond of me and always made a big fuss over me when they visited. They had two children after a long barren time and I didn't meet them until after my second exile. Taiwit had married Simahi, an A'palachi woman he had met when he was taken to her town after a fall while he was serving as a courier. He was much like Sealth, except that he was friendlier and had a weakness for strong drink. Simahi was a strong woman who did all she could to cover up Taiwit's weakness, but things eventually caught up with them. They had no children. Finally there was Mathilde. She was only nine years older than me and had returned from her sojourn among her Salst relatives when I was five, just before Grandfather's death. She taught me to read and write the old language as well as Mongol and Nahual. She also taught me Salst, Nimipu, and Siksika and together we prepared dictionaries of all the languages I had learned using the Uighur script. It resulted in some awkward pronunciations at times, but helped me remember the languages well enough to converse in them. She was a wonderful girl, always eager to teach me and help me find the answers to all my questions. We both spent many hours together pouring over my father's books.

Because of his rather narrow medical focus, one would not have expected my father to have as many books as he did. He did, indeed, write down his discoveries in his field, and he would get a copy of any musings from a colleague that had been written down, but by far the bulk of his library was nonmedical. He had kept all of Grandfather's books and treated them with great respect and made sure we did as well. Grandfather didn't mention it in his book, but after he retired, he spent most of his time making sure that all the things he had learned in the old land were written down. His remarkable memory was as sharp as ever and had filled many books, all in Mongol, covering the many subjects he had studied and mastered. Copies of these had been made and sent to the Khakhan and both southern Khans. It was a bewildering mass of information. Grandfather had even compiled a dictionary of the Hanjen picture writing, but after spending a little time comparing it to that of the Nahual and Maya, I decided the latter were easier to figure out and gave up on the former. Another remarkable thing I remember was a book that had plans for many different things including a kind of weapon that hurled fire through the air at the enemy. This weapon required a kind of fuel with which I was unfamiliar, but he included instructions on finding such a fuel and preparing it for use. As it happened I was not the only one impressed with this device, and it was eventually made and kept secret until its surprise use at a most opportune moment.

I was a bit miffed at first when Mathilde met her future husband, because she no longer had as much time for me. But she was so happy, I put aside my disappointment and became her confidant and courier. The young man was Aspenquid, a member of the Pesmokanti, one of the northeast bands. He had joined the local Ordu and because of his remarkable skill on horseback had become a courier. In this capacity, he had traveled all over the northeast and had finally happened to be sent to Tlatelolco. He had become ill while waiting to return and had been sent to my father for treatment. He and I became fast friends during his recovery, and after I got over my initial jealousy, I cheerfully served as a messenger between him and Mathilde. After their marriage they decided to go back to his Ordu, the Panthers, to live and I was sent along to be delivered to the Ani' Yun'-wiya along the way. They eventually had five children all of whom are still fairly close to me and irregularly keep in touch with me, even during this exile.

Of course Mathilde was not charged with all my education in Cuauhnahuac. My father did not like the Mexica calmecac schools which were long on teaching discipline and short on education, so he instead had Qualiameyatl, an educated young man from Chalco, come and teach me for a fee. Through his efforts, I was fully schooled in the Nahuatl language and taught to read the picture writing. It was becoming obsolete (except on monuments) however, since the language had been put into the Uighur script and was being widely taught that way. Many of the more worthwhile books were being translated into the script from the pictures to make them more available generally. The Tlahuica had led the people of the basin in adopting the script and teaching most of their people to read and write, but others had been slowly following their example and even the Mexica had come on board. I was also taught the Maya language and picture writing. Actually, it wasn't exactly picture writing, but a combination of some pictorial representation and syllabic symbols. It was like a compromise between Nahuatl and Hanjen. Here, also, there had been an attempt to wean the Maya away from their difficult picture writing to the Uighur script, but except for the ever pliable Putun Maya, little progress was made among them, and few knew the script. Qualiameyatl also taught me the history of the Nahuatl-speaking people. It seemed to me little more than an attempt to prove that they were the greatest people ever spawned, and when I complained to my father, he said it was useful to understand how a people viewed themselves even if the vision was flawed by tribal tunnel vision. Had I understood his warning, I might have avoided my first exile some years later.

My brother Theodore taught me a little of the healing arts, enough to protect myself should ill befall me while in between towns. He readily admitted that I had no aptitude for his art, but did the best he could. He also taught me how to recognize and avoid poisonous plants and snakes and what to do should I fail to avoid them. This instruction saved my life more than once.

My father sent me for a winter down to Texcoco to a calmecac school run by the ruling family of that city. He wanted to expose me to Nahuatl poetry and literature and perhaps some art. He felt that in Texcoco I would become acquainted with the highest expression of Nahuatl culture. I was received most cordially and treated quite well, but again was found to hold no detectable talent in the arts, and, frankly, insufficient appreciation for them. In fact, I was bored to death by their poetry and found their literature bewildering. The art was a bit grotesque, but quite colorful. I did not, however, betray any skill in that realm either. What I did enjoy in Texcoco were the wonderful gardens the speaker or ruler, Nezahualcoyotl, had planted. I spent many hours in them befriending the tame animals that were kept there, and I returned home with a pet animal, a large blue and yellow parrot (the kind called chiconquetzalin in Nahuatl). He had a large beak and an interesting vocabulary of insults in the Otomi language (he had belonged to an Otomi feather merchant). He was a gift from Nezahualcoyotl, who appreciated my fondness for animals. Had he not given me the bird, I doubt if my father would have let me keep it. As it was, it would have been bad manners to get rid of a gift from the speaker of Texcoco.

I named the parrot Cuauhtzin (Little Eagle) and we were inseparable friends until I was sent north. He had a remarkably loud voice that on occasion was earsplitting. Because of this, he and I were relegated to a small servant's house some distance from the main house during much of the day. He was very quiet at night and I was allowed to have him in my room as long as I cleaned up after him. He was quite a guano factory, and it was a nasty business cleaning up in the morning until the intervention of one of the more ingenious and thoughtful of our servants, a mysterious Otomi who insisted that we call him Tetl (rock in Nahuatl—hardly a proper name).

He devised a sort of flatbed cart made of wood with a branch in the middle that served as a perch for Cuauhtzin and confined his mess to the cart which could be much more easily cleaned and occasionally replaced. Tetl loved the bird as much as I did and would help me with him when he could. I rewarded Tetl with most of the feathers Cuauhtzin shed (quite a prized commodity in the markets), and I entrusted him with his care during my absence in the north as well as my subsequent exiles until I returned from my second one. He never disappointed me and always returned the bird to me in the best of health and spirits. Tetl died shortly after I left Anahuac for the last time. Cuauhtzin and I were parted for a while during my time in the Khanate of the Clouds, but we were reunited once I was sent here. He is still with me but is quite old and seems a little feeble. He is probably quite a few years older than me and I don't know how much longer he can live, but I prize him and will do all I can to make him happy and comfortable for whatever time he has left.

Returning to my education, my brothers Sealth and Taiwit both had hands in teaching me to use the bow and the lance. I had a lot of trouble with both, but finally did get fairly good with the bow. I was too clumsy for the lance and was usually quickly disarmed in practice. They were not optimistic about my chances of a military career. Everyone had a hand in teaching me to ride, and in this I was quite adept. My only problem here, according to my siblings, was that I loved the horse too much. They felt it was better to remain in command of the horse and have him do as you instruct out of fear or respect and not out of friendship. But I couldn't help it, I loved horses and they knew it. Only a few of them did not return that love, and their previous handlers had jaded them.

My fondness for animals was not limited to horses and parrots. I also became quite a nuisance by befriendng the domesticated animals and vigorously protesting their inevitable slaughter. I would self-righteously refuse to eat my "friends" and would glare accusingly at the rest of the family while they ate. Hypocritically, I would have no trouble eating a "strange" animal. This distinction began to blur when my brothers started taking me hunting with them. I very much enjoyed the tracking and stalking of the animals, but I soon developed a fondness for the prey and could not bring myself to kill them, nor would I allow anyone else to kill them. I think it is safe to say I was sent away to the north just in time. My entire family was convinced that unless they intervened my only future would be as a courtier, and they felt they could not allow me to become such a parasite.

I was actually quite excited about the trip and eagerly prepared for my great adventure. I was especially happy that Mathilde and Aspenquid would be with me for the entire journey. On the other hand, I was surprised and quite upset when told the climate in the north was too cold for Cuauhtzin and he would have to remain behind. This was made tolerable only by Tetl's assurance that he would care for him. I am ashamed to admit that after fussing over him the day before I left, I ran out before light the morning we left without giving him a thought, and in fact only remembered him when we stopped at an inn that evening and came upon another traveler who had his pet chiconquetzalin with him. His was one of the mostly red ones and it only spoke the Purepecha language, which I didn't understand. It brought home to me my own fickleness and made me see myself in an unflattering light. It was a valuable lesson

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Itsati, 83–5 K

(E. TN, 1451–3)

My soul-searching only lasted until we began our ascent of the pass between the volcanoes, the same pass my grandfather had used to enter Anahuac so long ago. It was much as he described it, except that it didn't snow on either of the peaks although they both had some snow on them. He had not exaggerated the cold once we were above the trees; it was numbing. I really didn't have much trouble breathing like some of his men did. Still, I was quite happy to regain the protection of the trees on the other side of the pass.

Everything was new and exciting for me during that trip. Mathilde had presented me with my own copy of Grandfather's book, which she herself had made for me, and I eagerly compared our route with his. Ours was much more direct, and there were no sieges or battles, but we passed through a land prosperous and at peace, with many large towns and cities bustling with activity. We only rarely stayed at what Grandfather called yams.

These had been replaced with comfortable inns most of the way in our Khanate. When we left the Huasteca lands into the more barren frontier between the Khanates, the yams predominated and the comfort level dropped precipitously. We stayed in the conical hide tents with dirt floors covered with some skins or old blankets. The food was usually dried meat added to mondamín (or centli as we called it in Nahuatl) stew. The villages were only a little better and I began to get concerned about my future for the next few years. Eventually we reached the towns of the Hasinai Confederacy and I took heart, for these had spacious, clean, and comfortable inns for visitors, and the food was plentiful and excellent.

We had begun the trip in the fall, and it was late winter when we turned off the trade road to go to the Pelican Ordu and visit my brother Taiwit. Once we left the coast, the climate grew cooler and there was snow on the ground after a few days. It was not deep, but it was my first direct exposure to it (I had, of course, seen it from a distance on the mountaintops at home), and I was fascinated. This was quickly eclipsed by my first encounter with an Ordu. We had been following the Ishak River upstream from the coast, and the trail was on the eastern side of the river above the floodplain and through a dense wood. Occasionally the woods would give way to a large clearing and a town with its fields would come into view. Eventually we came to a huge clearing with large tracts of fields on the cleared bottoms of both sides of the river, we went up a small rise, and there spread out was a vast tent city. It seemed larger to me than Cuauhnahuac, but the latter is scattered among hills, not concentrated like an Ordu. A large contingent from the Ordu was practicing maneuvers on horseback just beyond the camp, and I had to be pulled along to snap me out of my reverie.

One might think I would have encountered an Ordu by now, but I hadn't. With peace prevailing in Anahuac, they were rarely on the move, and all were situated away from but nearby the major trade routes. There was one Ordu in the central valley of Anahuac, but it was in the north. There were also three others within a hard day's ride from Tlatelolco, the capital of Anahuac, but I had never had occasion to visit them. I wanted to see everything and we spent several days there so I was able to do so. I was pleased to find I could ride as well as the children raised in the Ordu, but they were much better with weapons than I was, even the bow with which I thought I was proficient. I was only as good as the worst of them. They introduced me to the sword and taught me the rudiments of the weapon. I practiced with it faithfully and eventually got the hang of it. Taiwit surprised me with the gift of a small sword he had had made for me. I was also allowed to watch a test firing of one of the cannon Grandfather had been instrumental in developing. Finally, I was allowed to see a practice drill with the new handheld mini cannons that the now legendary Migizi had spent most of his life developing. They were frightening weapons, although they did not impress most of the warriors, since they had a poor range and were not very accurate. They did think it would be devastating to a massed attack, but only for one volley, after that it would be best to switch to the bow. Many years later, I saw that they were right.

I also got my first chance to see a yurt. Grandfather had lived in one a long time, but we all lived in houses in the south, and hide tents and thatch houses were the rule in the northern villages we had visited so far. In the Ordu, there were a number of yurts, but again the conical hide tent seemed to predominate. Taiwit lived in one of the latter, but a friend of his had married a Mongol woman who insisted on living in the yurt. It was larger than the tents and very comfortable, with rugs on the floor and wooden benches and chairs. I rather liked it. The woman, Borte, showed us all around with quiet pride and great pleasure. Her husband, Guatotente, a Ka-i-gwu, had become accustomed to it and insisted he preferred it. Remembering my grandfather's comments about the Ka-i-gwu language, I prevailed upon Guatotente to teach me a little. Grandfather was right; the language was impossible.

When we left the Ordu, we traveled east to the Red River and the great Hasinai cities. We followed the river to the Missi Sipi River. This river dwarfed any river I had ever seen before. Since it was early spring and the river was rising, we had to be rowed across. The pontoon bridge had already been taken down in anticipation of the floods. The current was not yet strong and we came ashore near one of the Taunika villages. We moved on and eventually arrived at a Pansfalaya town. Everywhere we went we were received cordially, fed well, and given fresh horses. While there were some differences among the various tribes, it was not marked. I noticed that only the oldest of the Pansfalaya and Taunika had the deformed heads Grandfather had mentioned. I embarrassed my sister by staring at those we encountered. It was quite rude, but I had never seen anything like it and had always been curious as to what they looked like. As Grandfather had suggested, the practice had been abandoned, and

all of them have died off by now. I wondered how much the people had changed since he had first traveled among them some seventy years before I did.

We soon turned north to the West Tsoyaha River, which we followed upstream. Here we came upon settlements of the Tsoyaha and the Southeastern Cities until we finally came to the Ani' Yun'-wiya. This was a beautiful time to travel this way, for it was now late spring and the floods had already subsided and our path was filled with flowers, fruit trees in blossom, and fields with young bright green shoots of centli growing out of their little hills, surrounded with young bean, squash and melon plants, in the manner they are planted here in the north.

At last we came to the town of Itsati and I was introduced to my new family for the next few years. Iskagua was the nephew of Metztlaconac, my father's first wife. He was a tall broad-shouldered man with a strong rugged face and the clear eyes of an honest man. He served as the shaman for the town and had the highest regard for my father. His wife was Ghigooie, a small pleasant woman with piercing eyes and a sharp wit. She reminded me of my sister Sarah. They had two sons, the older one was Gatagewi and the younger was Cimmashote. The latter was just my age. I was warmly embraced by all and accepted as member of the family. Mathilde and Aspenquid were also greeted warmly and pressed to stay a few days to be properly feasted.

The town was much like my father had said it would be. He had told me what to expect and how to behave. The houses were still as Grandfather described them, made of wooden planks or logs notched and stacked, then plastered with clay inside and out, although he didn't mention that sometimes they were painted white with a lime solution. The houses were about seventy feet long and sixteen feet wide and were divided into three rooms connected with doors. The rooms were the cooking room, the dining room, and the sleeping room. Many houses had porches and separate storerooms and almost all had the small round dirt "winter house" for their sweat baths. The furnishings included wooden benches and beds, the latter with rush mattresses and hide, cotton, or woolen blankets. There were also baskets and pottery for storing things. The wool and cotton were trade goods.

The town was probably larger than Grandfather would have remembered, but it was still dominated by the huge town house, which was supposed to be large enough to hold the entire town for their meetings, which he hated. He said the house was round, but actually it was seven sided, one for each of the clans. When the meetings were held, everyone was supposed to sit with his clan. The clan affiliation was inherited from one's mother, so Iskagua decided that I belonged to the same clan as his aunt, since she was my "mother," so I sat with the Ani'-Tsi'skwa or Bird Clan. He also belonged to the Bird Clan, but Ghigooie and her sons belonged to Ani'-Ga'tagewi (Ga'tagewi was the name of a plant). I eventually grew to actually like the meetings, although I was too young to participate until my final year there.

When Mathilde and Aspenquid finally left, I stared after their caravan until it disappeared over a hill. I really felt that all with which I was familiar was gone. Still, I was only allowed so much time to adjust, and soon Cimmashote had me in tow and was showing me around the village and introducing me to all his friends. I looked strange to them, of course, but most of the adults had known my father and he was held in great esteem. Actually, I didn't look much like my father, except for the pale skin and blue eyes. My hair was reddish brown at the time and my features rather favored my mother. I was also tall for my age and by the time I returned to Anahuac, I was taller than my father. The height kept me in good stead among the tall Ani' Yun'-wiya, and I was immediately recruited to learn their game "little war," the stick ball game so popular in this part of the land. My grandfather mentioned it in his narrative as well as the ball game of the south. They are nothing alike except in so much as they are very widespread in popularity. Tlachtli is played in many variations from the far western lands of the Hopitu-shinumu all through most of the Anahuac Khanate and even on the islands of the Taino. The "little war" is played by the Ani' Yun'-wiya, the Pansfalaya, the Southeastern Cities, and had spread to their neighbors the Taunika, Timacua, Tsoyaha, and others. It was also played in the north by the Anishinabe and many of their neighbors and had spread east to the Leni lenape and even the several Mingue tribes. The northern version only used one stick and was usually less violent. Tlachtli is more of a contest between individuals to perform a difficult task, hit certain small targets with a ball without using their hands and without letting the ball hit the ground. While there were small teams, only one from each competed at a time, although the other members could pass in an errant ball. The ball was made of solid oli (about eight inches in diameter and rather heavy) and the players had strategically placed pads as part of their equipment. The "little war" was played by

large teams, about twenty or so among the Ani' Yun'-wiya, far more among the tribes to the south. The playing field was quite large and the deerskin ball was not too difficult to hurl over the goal markers with the sticks (about two feet long and bent over to form a loop at one end, with crossed cords effecting a sort of net to hold the ball). However, the game was called "little war" for a reason. Indeed, a player (who wore no protective gear at all) was allowed to do whatever he found necessary to get the ball to his team and expedite the scoring of points. This resulted in the sticks, as well as arms, legs, heads, or even bodies becoming weapons with frequently injurious results. Oddly, both games had religious elements. Tlachtli was seen as a symbol of a struggle to maintain the cycles of nature and fertility from the vagaries of the gods (at least among the Maya). The Mexica would occasionally use it for conjuring (the winner's viewpoint obviously coincided with that of the gods), but usually it was just another medium for gambling. That was why my father had never permitted me to attend one; he despised gambling. The "little war" was preceded by a week of preparation, including fasting, rituals, dancing, and even some scratching of the players' arms and legs. There was also some gambling on the outcome. Still, it was an exciting game to watch and I often regretted that I had to leave before I had a chance to play in a real one.

As children we were not actually allowed to play the game, but we were encouraged to get the feel for it with much running back and forth and practice with the sticks. The ball was considered a sacred object not to be touched by hand, so we had to improvise with a rough facsimile. Another game we practiced was also popular in the near south. It was called chungke and involved skill with a seven-foot-long lance. A disc-shaped stone was rolled on the ground by one player, and the other would try to hit the still rolling stone with his lance while the first would try to hit the other's lance while still in flight. I never showed any talent for this game. We were also encouraged to experience and overcome hunger, cold, and pain. Such endurance was as highly prized as skill with the bow. This proved to be very valuable training.

There was also no getting out of hunting. I had been strongly urged by my sister to overcome my problem with hunting. She explained that the northern people greatly respected their prey, asking their permission to hunt them and thanking them for their acquiescence. I thought that while the hunter's heart may have been in the right place, I doubted that any prey actually went along with this. Of course, she also pointed out that it would be insulting to my hosts if I didn't do whatever they asked me to do, quickly and without comment. The look in her eye gave me the impression that I had better shelve my finer sensitivities and cooperate. After all, I was a long way from home. In fact, hunting was considered an essential part of manhood, second only to warfare. I worked hard to put aside my feelings and did my part to bring meat to the family. I never did enjoy it, however, and still don't.

My education was not all hunt and games, of course. I was also taught how to make bows, arrows, blowguns, snares, traps, canoes, and even pottery. The bows and arrows were only for hunting or emergency, since the Mongol compound bow and iron tipped arrows were far superior in battle. The other skills were useful, although I must admit my attempts at pottery were not memorable. I was helped with my swordplay by retired warriors, happy to share their skills with a youngster. As I found out, the Mongol peace had caused some major changes in the Ani' Yun'-wiya way of life.

In order to prove themselves as warriors, the young men had to go off and join an Ordu for training. Then they had to volunteer to go on the endless campaigns in the southern landmass. These would only be mounted every few years and the volunteers would be gone for quite a while. Most would return from the conflict, few would talk about it, except to compliment each other on particular acts of bravery. Still they held themselves with a certain air of dignity and confidence and were much admired by all. Those who either married young or felt it necessary to care for their parents and families and did not go, found it necessary to excel at bagging dangerous game like bear and panthers to prove their manhood. While no one openly questioned their courage, you could see they bitterly regretted their decision. I understand this situation prevailed among some of the other tribes also.

Perhaps the only man in the tribe who did not go on campaign and had no regrets was my Ani' Yun'-wiya father, Iskagua. As a shaman, he had nothing to prove and was held in the highest esteem by everyone. When he was not caring for the sick or foiling evil spirits, he was much given to introspection and would sit for hours lost in his thoughts until he was needed again. Still, he found time to talk to all of us either together or alone to

advise, admonish, and instruct. Gatagewi was the only one of us interested in becoming a shaman and he received quite a bit of training and instruction. Cimmashote wanted to be a warrior and tirelessly trained himself to that end. I went along with the latter since I found it more interesting than the shaman art. As it happened, I really wasn't too sure what I wanted to make of myself, and indeed, would be hard-pressed to describe my chosen profession up to this point, although I think ne'er-do-well might come close.

Iskagua's talks with me were difficult to characterize. He would answer any factual questions I asked directly, but if my questions were more philosophical or attempted to elicit his opinion, he would question me until I had answered the question myself. At first I found this annoying, but in time I realized he was helping me think logically and I came to greatly appreciate his help. Ghigooie also would talk to us, proffering advice and instruction. She felt we should know what we could eat should we not find any game and took us into the woods to show us what was edible and what was not. She also showed us how to plant and tend crops even though this was considered a woman's job. She felt we should know in case we found ourselves alone. She had the long sight and had foreseen a need we would all eventually have, although in much different situations. We would try to get her to tell us our future, but she would just tell us to do our best and meet the future with no regrets.

Another great influence on my life was Oganaya. He had been a warrior for a long time. He had never married or raised a family, but had returned to his hometown to spend his last days. He left when he was about fifteen years old and had trained with the Manati Ordu in the Timacua Peninsula. He fought in the southern wars for five years, and then returned as jagun commander to train new recruits. He traveled extensively for over a year, then joined another campaign as minghan commander. He remained for twelve years and again returned to train recruits. He was offered command of the next campaign, but felt he was too old and too slow from his many wounds to take on such responsibility, although he went along as part of the staff. On his return from that campaign he retired and came home "to die." He was only about fifty, but he looked older and moved only with a lot of pain.

He took a liking to me because he had met my uncle Theodore a long time ago and greatly respected him. He told me he would have preferred to serve under Theodore's Ordu rather than those of the Blue Sky Khanate since he never would have used disease to defeat his enemy. I remembered what my father had added to Grandfather's memoirs and suggested that perhaps the field commanders had not been aware of the strategy.

"Would that it were so, Crow," he said, "but I know they knew. That was the real reason I could not accept command. Still, I went along for the sake of the men. I must admit it was a most effective weapon, but we are not exactly loved in the south."

"One is never loved by those he conquers," I pointed out.

"Not at first," he shrugged, "but eventually you can win them over. Your uncle Theodore is loved by most. Of course, it was your uncle George who did most of the conquering and Theodore the winning over. Like your grandfather, he retired well loved."

"My cousin George rules there now," I said, puffing up a bit to be related to such powerful men.

"Yes, but he is not like his father," he frowned. "He is bent on conquest and is succeeding from what I hear."

I had to admit I didn't know much about George's progress. My father never spoke of him as though he didn't exist. When I had mentioned to him that I had heard George had succeeded Theodore, he had gotten angry and called Theodore a blind fool. He would not elaborate when I asked him about it, but instead insisted that I never mention his name again. I told this to Oganaya and he nodded.

"Your father had the measure of the man."

"Why do you both despise a man who enables the young men to go to war?" I asked.

"A war for young men to prove themselves need not be a war of conquest. And even if it is, it need not be a war of bitterness. George and the Khan in the eastern part, Hutulu, are harsh conquerors. They destroy everything in their path, take everything of value and impose impossible tribute on the survivors. The result is constant revolts and ambushes. The men pay for their commander's intransigence."

“But Grandfather always wiped out any town or village that did not surrender.”

“Only if provoked by them, except for the campaigns of the wretched Kuyuk. There is something very wrong with the Khanate system, when it allows such unworthy swine such absolute power.”

“But it has brought peace to the land and no one ever suffers because of crop failures. Is not that worth the occasional bad ruler?”

“It is the peace that forces our young men to go so far away for so long a time to prove themselves. It makes those unable to go feel like lesser men. As to the crop failures, are they such a bad thing? Perhaps they are Asgaya’ Galu’ladi’s way of proving us. Is it such a good thing to frustrate his plans?”

Asgaya’ Galu’ladi was the Ani’ Yun’-wiya god. His name meant “Honored Man” and he was a sky god like Tengri. They also believed in a number of spirits with various functions, but did not bother with them as much as the Mongols used to with their ongons when they first came to this land. I couldn’t make much sense of Oganaya’s question, but I later asked Iskagua what he thought about Mongol rule. He, true to form, turned the question back to me. It went something like this as I recall.

“What should I think about Mongol rule?”

“It doesn’t matter what you think, I just wanted to know.”

“If it doesn’t matter, why do you want to know?”

“Your opinion is important to me.”

“But you just said it didn’t matter what I thought.”

“I meant, whatever your opinion was I would be glad to hear it.”

“As a good Mongol, I should think you would not be glad to hear that I did not approve of Mongol Rule, only if I approved it.”

If I didn’t have such a high regard for his opinion, I would not have gone to such trouble to elicit it. After more such verbal sparring, I finally told him what Oganaya had said and tried to get Iskagua’s view of the remark. Predictably, we went around for a while before he demanded my view first.

“Oganaya is a great warrior and a wise man, I cannot ignore what he said, yet to agree with him is to despise all my grandfather’s efforts.”

“So then, you want me to approve of your grandfather’s life’s work?”

“Not necessarily, I just wanted your opinion.”

“Why?”

“Because I respect your opinion.”

“Your grandfather did what he did with great energy, cleverness, inspiration, and dedication. He clearly thought he was doing what was best for his people first and for those who joined them second. Who am I to approve or disapprove of such a man?”

“But was he right to do what he did?”

“What do you think?”

“I think he thought he was doing the right thing.”

“Should not a man do what he thinks is the right thing?”

“Well, of course.”

“Then you have answered your question.”

“No, that’s not what I want to know. Do you think his effort has made the Ani’ Yun’-wiya better off?”

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