

Rocking the Cradle of Civilization



Honor the Creator by honoring the creation.

John Slade

**Rocking the Cradle
of Civilization**

Volumes I and II

John Slade

Volume I

Part I

Hey Boss, Who Am I?

Chapter One

“Hey Boss, I don’t think I’m ready for this.”

“What do you mean, not ready? I’ve worked for over a million years to make you as perfect as possible. I can’t make you any more ready than you are.”

“Yeah, but I’ve heard reports, first-hand reports, from folks who have been down there. One who came back was shot dead on the street by police while he was jogging through his own neighborhood. One who came back was just a kid, eight years old, who died from an asthma attack in a refugee camp. Then there was a whole group from a wedding in Afghanistan—even the bride and the groom—who had been killed by somebody’s drone. Boss, it’s rough down there.”

“Are you blaming me? War is a word in your lexicon, not mine.”

“Well, I’m not saying it’s your fault, but—”

“I spend a billion years getting the place ready for you. Oceans full of fish, rivers and lakes brimming with all the water you could possibly want, vast plains of fertile soil where you can grow food enough for everyone. And air to breathe. Do you know how long it took me to make just the right type of air for you to breathe?

And what do you do? You take this round ball of perfection and turn it into a war zone. I send to you someone who speaks about peace, and you nail him to a cross. I send to you someone who speaks about his Dream, and you shoot him with a sniper’s rifle. Never once, never *once* when I made the world for you, did I think that you would be mad enough to destroy this Cradle of Life. Never once did I think you would be mad enough to destroy each other with this perversion called war. I should have stopped with the elephants. I should have stopped with the whales.”

“Boss, they’re shooting the elephants. And the whales are tangled in their nets. That’s why I’m asking . . . Couldn’t I just stay here where things are peaceful. I don’t really want to be born in somebody’s war zone.”

“I know about the elephants. I know about the whales and the dolphins and the turtles drowning in their nets. That’s why I’m practicing with plagues. One carefully targeted plague, impervious to their puny vaccines, and then we’ll start fresh.”

“So . . . couldn’t I wait until after the apocalypse? Then you could send me down as a wild horse galloping across the prairie.”

“You want to be a horse?”

“Well, that’s better than to be a political prisoner tortured in prison.”

“Yes, but after you get out of prison—if you survive—you can finish law school and become a human rights lawyer. You can spend your lifetime—unless they shoot you—trying to bring to fruition all that I had in mind in the first place. I worked for over a million years to give you such an extraordinary brain. I had great hopes for all the progress you would make in your beautiful, peaceful and perfect world. So, do I just give up and make you a horse?”

“Boss, I’m not sure I want to be a human rights lawyer.”

“You know, I’m not sure any more that I want to be the Creator. I could just let physics take over. The stars would burn for a billion years while I take a long nap.”

We paused, surrounded by the great celestial silence, until the Creator asked, “Would you like to be a composer of music? I could give you the talent for writing symphonies that open their minds to the possibilities of human progress. I could give you a gift for writing music that is divinely inspired. You and I together, we could lift up their spirits.”

“Would I . . . find a woman and fall in love? We could start with love songs, and then move on to lifting the human spirit.”

“Of course. But will you appreciate her? I gave to mankind, *mankind*, such an exquisite creature, but your eyes are blind.”

“And could we have children? I would be glad to write songs for the children.”

“Of course. But you care not for the next generation, for they shall inherit your wreckage.”

“Look, I like your idea about starting fresh, but I’m not sure I’m the one who could enlighten them. I’m just an ordinary sort of person—I mean, after I’m born, I would be just an ordinary sort of guy—not some hero on the world stage.”

“Enlighten. Light! That’s the key. I said, ‘Let there be light,’ and you said, ‘Let’s burn so much oil that we wrap a cloak of darkness around our planet.’ I never anticipated such ingratitude.”

“So, maybe I could wait here in heaven until you administer the perfect plague, and then you could send me down as a dolphin leaping in a clean and peaceful sea.”

“Hmmm, maybe.”

We were quiet during another long pause while the Creator pondered, and behind me a million other souls waited impatiently to be born.

“Listen, Boss—“

“Wait,” he said, cutting me off. He stared at me, his eyes probing into the absolute depths of who I was. “We need an economist. John Maynard Keynes took you folks only part way. He didn’t know about the sun. He didn’t know about the wind. And he certainly never paid any attention to little hydrogen.”

“Hydrogen? Wasn’t that your first element?”

“Yes, an economist. Who does *not* do the bidding of the bankers and the brokers, but who greets the rising sun each morning with a prayer of gratitude, then turns his attention to a mother and her child.”

“Well, you would have to teach me the jargon of economics, so that no one can understand me while I cut the taxes for the rich stockholders who—”

“And ooooooh, the child! Each one a bundle of multiple talents, all waiting to blossom. I remember when I created their laughter, and their bright eyes looking with wonder at the world.”

“Well, *I’ll* be a child, when I’m born. Maybe if you give me some degree of talent at music, I could start taking piano lessons when I’m ten years old. But economics requires a talent in mathematics, which sounds a bit boring to me.”

“And you know, I love the children even when they’re teenagers. They’re trying so hard to figure out who they are. They’re so shy, so fragile, and yet so determined to flap their wings.”

“Hard to flap your wings in a war zone.”

“Precisely.

“Hard to flap your wings when drought has parched the land.”

“A war and a drought which the children have *inherited*, at no fault of their own.”

“And so you want me to be an economist?”

“A 21st century economist. You can’t do it alone. You’ll have to build a team.”

“I don’t want to get involved with politics. I’d rather be a giant squid.”

“You’ll be involved with the voters, simply by bringing the sun and the wind into every classroom around the world.”

“Even in refugee camps?”

“Especially in refugee camps.”

“This is getting interesting. I can feel something new tingling in my fingertips.”

“Now let’s see. I’m going to make you indigenous. Born where the buffalo once thundered across the golden rolling prairies.”

“Well, that’s better than on the flood plain of Bangladesh.”

“And yes, with a talent for music. You will be very quick to feel the spirit of a song that springs from the sacred land.”

“Ah, no need for the piano then. Just a deep resonating baritone will do fine.”

“A bit of mathematics, a bit of organizational skills, but primarily you will need something called *vision*. The ability to see beyond the clamor and claptrap around you. The ability to imagine what *could* be. As I once had vision, before I created life. Think, in the midst of such vast emptiness, I had the vision to imagine *life*! And a magnificent world. And you.”

“Vision is fine, Boss, but I hope you’ll stay in touch. I’m going to need your guidance if I’m to become a visionary economist. I don’t think they teach that in biz school.”

“Oh, is it my guidance that you want? Then you must have the ability to listen. And to learn. In that case, we must make one more final adjustment.”

I felt a powerful wave of energy pass through me, filling me with an immense vitality. I could hear music, distant, but exquisitely beautiful. And I felt blessed with a special wisdom, rooted in a reverence for life.

But I was no longer who I had been a moment ago. I had suddenly become someone entirely different.

“Hey Boss, who am I?”

“Thou art a woman, fulfillment of my earliest dream.”

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Chapter Two

And so it came to pass, that on December 3, 1989, I was conceived during a blizzard howling across the plains of South Dakota.

Nine months later, on the fifth of September, 1990, my mother gave birth to a little girl, who, given her socioeconomic conditions, did not look forward to a future of any great promise, but who was none the less welcomed with great joy by the large extended family.

The little girl showed an early talent for replicating the sounds of the songs which many people, but especially her grandmother, sang to her during her first years.

She had a habit of waking up early, and insisting, despite the grumbles of her sleepy parents, on stepping out the door into the yard so that she could watch the sun rise over the vast rolling prairie, green with grass in the summer, and covered with a blanket of white snow in the winter. By the time she was five years old, she was singing her own elaborate songs to the sun.

In school, she was a bright and happy child, especially intrigued by multiplication tables when the other children were still learning to add and subtract. She admired the logical axioms of Euclidean geometry, and explored the dependable ratios in the endlessly flexible triangles of trigonometry. By the age of ten, she was working with a high school mathematics teacher as together they

studied the correspondence between curves on a graph and the equations which encapsulated those curves.

While she explored the revelations of calculus, Prairie Wind read a biography about Sir Isaac Newton. (The high school librarian ordered the book from the University of South Dakota in Vermillion.) Newton was an Englishman who, during the 1600s, developed calculus so that he could better understand the world around him.

Working at the desk in her bedroom—an old table from the kitchen which had been replaced by a larger table for the growing family—Prairie Wind would quietly sing her songs while she marveled that the course of the stars sailing over the vast prairie at night, and the course of the electrons in atoms too small to see, were all guided by the same mathematical laws which encompassed every aspect of her world. Though she was increasingly troubled by the conditions in which her Lakota Sioux people were forced to live, at a higher level, the world made sense.

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Yes, she could have attended the University of South Dakota, and thus she could have stayed closer to home, but in January of 2008, when she was a senior at Rosebud High School, she received a letter in the old battered mailbox from Stanford University in California, inviting her to apply as a student in September, 2008. Astonished, she took the letter to school the next day and showed it to Mr. Maxwell, her mathematics teacher. He told her that he himself had written to Stanford, recommending her as a student who would greatly contribute to the university community. He helped her to fill out the online application, and wrote a letter of recommendation for her, as did the high school principal, and the priest of her church. All three letters emphasized the need for financial support.

And so in September of 2008, she celebrated her eighteenth birthday by attending classes all day—in mathematics, economics, world history, and marine ecology—as a student at a vibrant university which offered her not only fascinating courses, but also, as she already understood, a key to the world.

She celebrated her birthday that evening in her dormitory with a group of new friends—one from China, one from India, one from Brooklyn—who were genuinely interested in the Rosebud Reservation of South Dakota and its long and troubled history.

Then she phoned home and cried when she told her family how much she missed them. Her grandmother began to sing to her. As they sang together, Prairie Wind remembered her strength, which was the strength of the land, and the strength of her people.

The next day, she bought three postcards, each with a picture of the Quadrangle at Stanford, a large open rectangle at the heart of the university, bordered by the original classroom buildings, and the Church, around the four sides. The postcard picture showed the graceful Spanish arches that already she loved, and a red tile roof and the bright blue California sky. On the back of the postcards, she wrote her deepest thank you to Mr. Maxwell, and to her principal, and to her priest.

After she bought stamps at the post office and dropped the cards through the slot of a red mailbox, she walked to the sunny Quadrangle, her favorite spot on campus, where she savored the warm security of the brown sandstone arches that wrapped around her.

Then she stepped into the Church, where a few scattered people sat quietly in the pews. She sat in an empty pew, folded her hands, and felt a powerful wave of energy pass through her, filling her with an immense vitality. She could hear music, distant, but exquisitely beautiful.

She whispered, "Hey Boss, I'm here. And I think I'm ready. I just . . . want to thank you. For believing in me."

"Sweetheart, you make my old heart happy. I've watched you every step of the way. And I want to thank *you* . . . for believing in *me*."

"Just as you requested, I'm taking a course in Introductory Economics. I sit right up in the front row."

"Very good. Very good. And I'm glad you signed up for marine ecology. That will be helpful."

"I'm going to learn in a swimming pool how to use a scuba tank. Our class will take a field trip to Monterey Bay, where we'll swim in the kelp forest with the otters. The ocean is so cold that we'll have to wear wet suits."

"Ooooh, I remember when I created those kelp forests, and all the remarkable fish that swim through them. Ha, I still remember the day I created the first octopus! With suckers on his tentacles, and skin that turns pink and blue, and a big eye that stares at you, and a tube that shoots water so that the octopus *jets* through the kelp and disappears out of sight. When you see your first octopus,

Prairie Wind, think of the Boss and send me up a prayer with your scuba tank bubbles.”

“I will, I promise.”

Then she sat quietly for a while, and felt blessed with a special wisdom, rooted in a reverence for life.

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Chapter Three

Five days later, George, her friend from Brooklyn, gave her a most thoughtful birthday present.

She heard Lo Ha Hes before she saw him. A burst of laughter coming into the dormitory dining hall drew her attention as she was sitting down with her tray at a nearly empty table. The man walking with George made her think immediately that the Boss had really outdone himself when he created a guy with so much muscle in his shoulders and so much happiness in his face.

She stood up again and called across several tables, “George, I’ve got a question for you.”

He looked at her and called back, “Save me a seat.”

She set her Economics notebook on the table in front of the empty chair directly across from her own chair, where she hoped He would sit. She placed her Economics textbook in front of the empty chair where George would sit.

Her heart thumping, she sat down and buttered a potato.

When George arrived with his tray, accompanied by a man with tired eyes and pale skin, but a ready smile, she stood up and gestured to the two empty seats across the table from her. Then she picked up her notebook and textbook.

The man set down his tray where her notebook had been, then he looked at her, deeply looked at her. He said, “George tells me that you are Lakota Sioux. I am Oneida, from northern New York State. I have met some of your people at the annual gathering which the Oneida people host every summer.” He grinned as he told her, “The western tribes always bring buffalo steaks, and sage for seasoning.”

Then his face became serious, the way her father’s face would become serious. “The Oneida people,” he paused, “look upon the Lakota Sioux with great respect.”

“I am sure,” she told him, “that the Lakota Sioux look upon their Oneida friends with great respect.”

He held out his hand across the table. “I am Lo Ha Hes, after my father, and after his father, all the way back to the first Lo Ha Hes. It means ‘His Long Road’, and I guess,” he smiled faintly, “I am still on that road.”

Yes, she recognized the pain in his eyes.

He added, “My *normal* name is William. William is a first year student at Stanford Medical School. William’s specialty will be community health. Because nobody is really healthy unless the community is healthy.”

She reached out and shook his hand, his strong but very pale hand. “My name is Thínmakhočhe Thaté Thánka , which means Prairie Wind. My father gave me this name. He told me that despite all that has been done to our people, despite all that has been done to the buffalo and the wolves and the rivers and the land, the prairie wind still sweeps over the land as strong as ever.”

Gently but firmly, he squeezed her hand. Gently but firmly, she squeezed his hand.

Then the three of them sat down, quiet as they began to eat their dinners, until George asked if they had heard Barack Obama’s latest campaign speech on television a couple of days ago. William said that the fact that a Black man was running for President was something extraordinary. Prairie Wind, and then William, both said that they would vote by mail in October, sending their ballots to their home districts. The three of them agreed that finally—after eight years when all the worst instincts in America had boiled over once again—they were now entering a time of hope.

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When they had finished dinner and a cup of coffee, William asked Prairie Wind if she would join him for an evening at the library. He had a thick book with him—he showed her the cover, **Human Anatomy**—and said with a smile that he had to study the muscles and bones of the hand. “And the blood vessels, and the nerves. We are enormously complicated, you know.”

Prairie Wind said that she would be very glad to join him, but that she had only her Economics book with her. She would have to run up to her room to fetch her other books.

When she met him on the steps outside the dormitory door, she was carrying her usual stack of heavy books in two hands, ready for at least a couple of hours in the library.

“May I help you?” he asked, reaching to take three of the books—since he had only one book, and a notebook—leaving her with her Economics text and four bright red Stanford notebooks.

“Thank you,” she said, very glad to have met a gentleman.

He gripped her books in two separate hands, very handsome hands, filled with muscles and bones and blood vessels and nerves, and thus already, on their first library date, he was helping her to carry the heavy load which she would maintain—with a steady flow of new books—for many years.

One of her favorite things at Stanford were the benches, almost always near a garden of fragrant California flowers, where she could sit in the sunshine during the day, and in the glow of a lamp on a pole in the evening, reading a book.

As they approached the Undergraduate Library, she spotted one of her favorite benches. She asked William, “Shall we sit down before we go inside? The air is so fresh.”

She had sat across the table from him in the dining hall. She would probably sit across a table from him in the library, where they could speak only in whispers. So she wanted now to sit beside him on a bench, where they could talk.

They sat in the glow of a lamp as the turquoise sky above them darkened at dusk. William set her books on top of his own thick book on his lap, then he asked her, “Prairie Wind, what courses are you taking?”

She picked up the book on the top of the pile. “**World History**, starting with our ancestors in Africa. In the lecture today, we learned about their migrations north into what is now the Middle East, and then westward into Europe, and eastward into Asia. Our folks, William, eventually crossed the strip of land between Siberia and Alaska, during the ice age when the sea level was low because the water was trapped as frozen ice. My crew settled on the Great Plains, whereas your crew kept moving east to the green hills of what became New York. Some of us traveled all the way down into Central and South America. We were an industrious people, back then.”

“Hmmm,” he said, with no further comment.

She set the book down on the bench beside her, then picked up the second book on the pile. “**Marine Ecology**, so that the girl who grew up on the Great Plains can learn about the oceans that wrap around our planet. Like World History, it’s a two-semester course, autumn and spring. Starting with the oceans, and then moving onto the continents, we’re going to study global warming: the mess we humans have made on our beautiful planet.”

He nodded. “The climate crisis. You know, I’d be very grateful if you could give me a sort of mini-course as you go along. I’ve been so buried in organic chemistry and molecular biology that I haven’t had a chance to read about what’s going on in the world. I feel bad about that, but—” he shrugged, “I just *had* to get myself into medical school.”

“Of course, William. We’re studying the ocean currents now, the way they flow like enormous rivers around the planet. Much of the heat trapped by our polluted atmosphere is absorbed by the oceans, and then the currents carry that heat north to the Arctic, and south to the Antarctic, and even down to the cold black bottom of the ocean basin. When we burn our oil, we end up changing both the temperature and the chemistry in the oceans. In the Cradle of Life.”

He looked at her, studied her, cocking his head in the glow of the lamp with a look of admiration.

She set the second book on the bench beside her, then showed William the book that she had carried. “**Introductory Economics**, so that the girl who grew up on the Rosebud Reservation can begin to understand the system that works against us. And the system that is destroying our entire planet. I’m spying on their world, William. They call it ‘supply and demand’, but it’s more a poker game in which the sharks hold all the cards.”

William nodded, listening.

She continued, “When Wall Street plays with our mortgages, and the housing bubble bursts, and people by the millions lose their homes and lose their jobs—as is happening in the great land of America right now—then you know that the deck of cards is rigged. And I want to understand both *how* it is rigged, and how to fix it.” She added, for she wanted William to know what she was setting out to do, “How to fix it *big* time, on a planetary level. There has got to be a better way than plundering the oceans, burning the rainforest, and swindling your neighbor.”

“And so you’re taking a course in Introductory Economics. Not just to fulfill a graduation requirement, but to change the world.”

“Right. I sit in the front row in class. The professor does not know that I am a spy. He shows us graph after graph of how the economy works, while I take notes on how the economy very definitely does *not* work.”

She set her economics text on the growing pile of books on the bench beside her, then she pointed at her fourth book, still on his lap. “What else?”

He picked up the book and read, “**Astrophysics: A Mathematical Approach.**” He shook his head with a laugh. “Prairie Wind, what sort of mathematics department do they have on the Rosebud? Are you really ready for Astrophysics? And *why*? Why on Earth is a beautiful young woman who just turned eighteen years old reading a book about Astrophysics?”

“William, by the time I graduated from high school, I had worn out every university math teacher in the state of South Dakota. Mathematics is my fun course. And I love the stars over the prairie on a summer night. Part of the reason I came to Stanford was because of the great math department. The kid can finally get on a horse and gallop.”

“Mathematics is your fun course? Prairie Wind, mathematics was one of the required premedical courses, as a prelude to physics, as a prelude to biochemistry. Oh, how I struggled!”

She took the heavy book from his hands and held it with reverence.

“William, mathematics is my Bible. Because mathematics explains how the universe works. The laws of mathematics govern every star, every planet, every drop of rain falling from the sky, every glass of water that you drink.”

She paused, then explained a bit further, “Mathematics holds everything together. Some people look for the Creator in church, but I look for him in

calculus, and Einstein's theory of relativity . . . which I do not quite understand yet. William, mathematics tells the truth, whereas economics has, shall we say, other purposes. So when I read this book," she patted her hand on her Astrophysics text, "I'm in a world that makes sense. And without that world," she shook her head, "I don't think I would have survived the Rosebud."

She set the book on her pile of four thick books. Then she held up her four red notebooks. "My job is to listen to the lectures, take careful notes, and find my way to a plan for building a better world. Because we have a choice. We either figure out how to do it right, or we are doomed on a dying planet."

She paused, then she told him, "I can't do it alone. I'm going to need a team."

She looked at him. She waited.

Staring at her with admiration, he finally said, "Prairie Wind, does anybody here at Stanford know who you are?"

"My grandmother knows. She taught me to count to ten. And she taught me the names of the stars."

She hesitated, then she told him, "The Boss knows too."

"The Boss?"

"Well," she said, standing up, "I think we ought to get to work in the library. We're on scholarship, you know. Can't spend the whole night loafing."

Just before they walked through the door into the library with their books, Prairie Wind glanced back at the empty bench in the glow from the lamp.

She whispered, "Thank you, Boss."

And so it began with respect, which soon blossomed into friendship, which steadily deepened into love. In the day to day world, they called each other Prairie Wind and William, which had a nice ring to it. But when they were alone together, his spirit and her spirit honored each other as Thínmakhočhe Thaté Thánka and Lo Ha Hes, spoken with respect, spoken with friendship, spoken with humor, spoken with love, spoken with passion.

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Chapter Four

Prairie Wind and William wove their worlds together. She invited him to join her and the rest of her marine ecology classmates as they learned, two evenings a week, to breathe underwater with scuba tanks in the deep end of a well-lit outdoor swimming pool. She loved to see his dark eyes, filled with humor, as he looked at her through his mask while exhaling a burst of noisy bubbles.

William did so well in the class that their instructor agreed he could accompany the marine ecology students when they took their first field trip in October to dive in a kelp forest in Monterey Bay.

William told Prairie Wind, while walking with her from the pool to her dormitory—the dark evening air smelled of eucalyptus trees—that he was very grateful to her, because he had done nothing during the past four years but “study, study, study endless premedical courses” at Syracuse University so that he could get into a good medical school.

“Miracle of miracles, I was accepted by Stanford. But now I study *twice* as hard. So to spend a Saturday with you out in the kelp forest will be,” he shook his head with disbelief, “the first time off since high school.”

That was why his hands were so pale. The man needed some sunshine.

Twenty-five students and one guest gathered on a sandy beach at the edge of the blue-gray expanse of Monterey Bay, puffed and struggled and laughed as they pulled on their tight-fitting wet suits, with boots, gloves and hoods. Worst of all were the long black flippers which turned them all into awkward ducks able to walk only backwards.

The students donned bright orange inflatable vests, and lead weight belts.

William held Prairie Wind’s heavy steel tank at the right height close to her back while she slipped her arms through the straps of the harness and fastened the buckles. Then she held William’s tank while he slipped his arms through the straps and fastened the buckles.

Rocking back and forth like an overweight penguin, William pivoted in his long black flippers until he faced her, then he held out his black rubber arms and asked her, “May I have this dance?”

The instructors made sure that each of the students could breathe easily from the mouthpiece that was attached by a tube to the pressure regulator atop the tank. Both Prairie Wind and William took a few breaths of the cool dry air and nodded that the flow of air was fine.

Then an instructor tied one end of a coil of rope to Prairie Wind's wrist, and the other end to William's wrist, with twenty feet of rope between them. "You two are diving buddies," he told them. "You can signal to each other with a quick tug. And you won't lose each other in the kelp. All right?"

The two buddies nodded, All right.

Then students and instructors shuffled backwards into the knee-high breaking waves, fitted their masks over their faces, shuffled until they were waist-deep, fell backwards into the water, rolled over so that they were now looking down at the sandy bottom . . . and began to kick with their flippers away from shore.

Immediately the cold Pacific water, no warmer than fifty degrees, began to seep through the collar, filling the jacket and then the arms with a bath of ice water.

"Ooooooooooh!" cried William as he stared at Prairie Wind. He tried to formulate words, but with the mouthpiece in his mouth, he could articulate no more than a wide-eyed howl.

"Ooooooooooh!" cried Prairie Wind, her howl mixed with laughter.

Frigid water, seeping through the cuffs, bathed their arms and legs with the liquid ice that had flowed south from the Arctic. The water crept up their waist and met the water in their jackets. Water seeped into their hoods. Into their boots, into their gloves.

They kept kicking their flippers with a steady beat, as they had been instructed to do, and gradually felt with great relief that their bodies were warming the water, for that was the principle of a wet suit. Within a couple of minutes, their bodies were wrapped by a layer of warm water, and very little cold water seeped in. Only the skin of their face between the mask and the hood, and especially their lips wrapped around the mouthpiece, were exposed to the cold Pacific brine.

Prairie Wind and William looked at each other and gave each other a thumbs-up, as they had been instructed. Then they continued kicking their flippers as they sailed across the deepening water toward the edge of the kelp forest.

The giant plants, like corn stalks over thirty feet tall, with long amber leaves, rocked back and forth as the swells rolled over them. Prairie Wind and William

swam close together—she held the coiled rope in her gloved hand so that it would not get tangled in the kelp—as they wove their way through the underwater forest. A school of hundreds of silver fish swimming just beneath the surface—they were reflected in the undulating mirror—opened around them and closed behind them as the two explorers passed through the silver cloud.

The other students were diving deeper now, some of them down to the rocky bottom, thirty feet deep. The instructors swam among them, gesturing with a hand—palm down—if someone was breathing too fast, using too much air. Slow down, relax, you're doing fine.

Prairie Wind watched the different kinds of fish as they swam with caution but not alarm away from her into the graceful fronds of kelp. She could identify most of the fish, for the lecture on Friday had prepared her with a list of the species she would likely encounter. But she had not come today with a scientific mind; she stared with the same amazement, and exuberance, and even reverence as when she had so often stared at a summer thunderstorm sweeping toward her with bolts of lightning jabbing down at the prairie. She was not just *observing* this new world where the kelp leaves were so thick that they turned the sunlight amber; no, she was *in* this new world, a sea creature herself, kicking only slightly now, weightless about five or six feet above the rocky bottom, slightly chilled but all the more alive.

She spotted several starfish—the giant pink sunflower starfish with its many legs, and the tiny black brittle stars with its five wiry legs—feeding on the bottom. She was careful not to get too close to the sea urchins with their long black spines. She glanced now and then at William, who was breathing at a slow even pace, his wobbly silver bubbles rising up to the distant surface, as he reached out to touch an abalone with its row of pearlescent holes.

Then she spotted it—yes, an octopus!—skulking across the bottom not more than ten feet away. Letting out the coil of rope, she swam toward it, saw that it was fairly large—with tentacles almost two feet long, lined with suckers—its body and tentacles pink-gray like the rocks. Without hesitation, she kicked her flippers with a burst of speed, reached out her arm unencumbered by the rope and scooped up the octopus with a hug that held it against her chest. It wrapped its tentacles around her arm and chest and squeezed with amazing strength as it turned a pulsing yellow-gray and stared at her with alarm. The more she shook the octopus,

the more it squeezed her, reaching down now to one of her legs and wrapping a tentacle just above her knee.

She loved the way it kept changing shades of color, with flashes of blue now. The tip of one tentacle reached up over her hood. She consciously kept breathing with a slow steady rhythm . . .

Suddenly her wrist with the rope tied around it reached straight up, until her full arm was extended toward the surface. She looked up and saw William at the end of the taut vertical rope, swimming with rapid kicks of his flippers toward the surface. Clearly he was trying to escape the monster.

She laughed, sending a burst of bubbles up to him. Oh, she would kid her Warrior tonight.

And then the octopus squirted a black cloud of ink that fully encompassed its captor, released its grip and shot away with a jet of water, leaving a long black plume that disappeared into the luminous fronds of kelp.

Prairie Wind floated in the moment, overwhelmed with gratitude.

As the rope pulled her slowly upward, she thought, as if he had been right there with her, "Did you see that, Boss? An octopus! He was one of your finest."

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