Carriers of the Thunder Stick

Catherine Aiken
Something was going to happen today, one of the elders told me. I nodded and smiled. I thought she meant that my brave would ask for my pledge of love. I left our camp in search of my sister eventually finding her by the river with her legs in the water. As I neared her I saw she was with her brave; they had secretly pledged their love to one another. He was in the water resting his head on her knee and they both were looking across the river intently at something I could not see.

I walked up to them and gently called her name. They smiled as I wrapped my arms around her shoulders. I looked towards where their gazes were directed. I knew then what it was they were captivated with: the silent beauty.

In the next instant explosions like thunder followed by screams broke the silence. We looked fearfully in the direction of camp. Before we realized we had even stood up, we found ourselves at the edge of camp hiding in the bushes. People we knew and loved lay all over the ground, pools of blood, open eyes, terror-stricken faces everywhere.

My sister’s brave saw the body of his mother and ran to her. My sister stood to follow him but I held her back. Something was not right, something was wrong. As we peered through the bushes we heard a crack of thunder. My sister’s brave screamed as his body twisted in agony. He fell to the ground and was surrounded by men with pale faces. My sister rose and ran to her brave screaming. They turned and stared. She ran up to her brave and held his head as he took his final, ragged breath. She fell over his body and sobbed.
I sat in shock. It was as if my body and my soul had been severed. I had no control over my body; I had tried to stop my sister and yet could not move a muscle to do it.

A young man with yellow hair knelt beside my sister and spoke to her in a language alien to my ears. The words themselves were strange and harsh yet the tone in which he spoke was amazingly soft. She did not look up but when he put his hand on her shoulder I saw her back go rigid. She sat up and looked at her lover with tender eyes then looked at the yellow-haired man with such intense abhorrence in her eyes that he had to look away.

She looked in my direction and began the death wail. I shivered in the warm heat. I sat there not knowing what to do. I desperately wanted to go to my sister but my body was still restraining me. I looked around for my brave but in my heart I knew I need not look: I could not feel him. I rose and walked to my sister. The men did not notice me until I was next to them. They raised their thunder sticks and watched me intently. I could feel their eyes burning through my skin.

The man with yellow hair stood as I knelt beside my sister and embraced her. We wailed together for our village, our people.

My sister and I were led to a camp that bore no resemblance to any other camp we had ever seen before. The first few weeks we were watched closely by the pale men. They believed we would run off to our home, but what home did we have? There was nothing our home had to offer to either of us.

The men were friendly to us and they respected us, which we found strange after what they had done to our people. The man with yellow hair, or the fair one as I began to call him, paid extra attention to us, tried to understand and please us.

He and I began to understand each other better. They were so strange in their ways and their tongue. My sister became more reclusive though. She spoke only when I was around and even then it was with great pain. She heavily mourned the loss of her lover and she wished to be with him.

One morning I woke up just as the sun was sifting through the treetops. I looked at the sleeping form of my sister then headed to the nearby river for a swim.
I walked into the slightly chilled waters and disappeared beneath the surface. I rose up with my eyes looking towards the shoreline silhouetted against the morning.

I saw a man's figure wading towards me. It was the fair one. He stopped a short distance from me and asked in my language if he could come near me. I nodded.

We returned to camp to find the men waiting for us with frightened looks on their faces. I ran to my sister worrying that something had happened to her. I found her curled up in a warm, secure ball. I sighed in relief and put my hand on her back. I recoiled in fear: her back did not rise. I rolled her over just as a hand was placed on my back. I screamed and threw myself into my fair one. He looked over my shoulder at the body still clutching the knife.

I began to crawl into a shell; I hardly spoke, ate little and became lost to myself. My fair one did everything for me; I no longer cared. I wished for death to steal me away. I became more detached as the men began talking of return to their home across the water. My fair one knew I would not go. I had neither desire nor reason.

The day of their departure came quickly. I watched them load the ship and said good-bye to each man as he boarded. Last was my fair one. He held me close and lowered his face to mine. I watched him walk up to the ship, then I turned around. I felt arms clasp themselves around me. He turned me and told me he could not leave me.

There was nothing that either of us wanted more than the other. We watched the ship sail off into the blue and embraced each other, embraced life and our love.