



## CHAPTER ONE

*On the night of the spring equinox 1840, three rituals took place.*

**T**HE FULL MOON CALLED FORTH shadows from the earth. They arose and danced like demons. Their images distorted and wavered in the bonfire's competing light. The shadows were fixed to the feet of twelve painted warriors wearing animal masks and fetishes. Though just past midnight, the drums would pound relentlessly until dawn. The ritual's swelling frenzy intoxicated the dancers and drummers. The intensity surged in anticipation of the climactic song, the cry of terror, and the sacrifice: an invocation of powerful spirits.

The spring equinox meant the celebration of new life for most Arapaho, but not for this renegade band. They sought the power to kill and curse their enemies—the tribe that had expelled them and the white men who had invaded their land.

In the invisible realm of the spirits, tension grew in the form of hatred, violence, and control.

Dark Wolf stepped forward. The restless drums halted. Wiry and bony, shrouded with a wolfskin, he lifted a buffalo horn high above his head and turned to the four winds. He shouted words,

his sharp voice piercing the night. He turned and flipped the contents of the horn into the fire. It flared, shooting flames and sparks.

The dancers shouted and yipped. The drums throbbed again. Dark Wolf, the witch doctor, deftly coerced the fire at just the right moments to increase the ceremony's drama. He summoned a host of demons that would fill his men with the power to steal, kill, and destroy.

"It is time," he said.

Kicking Lion, a chieftain, dragged a girl into the circle. She had been kidnapped for this very occasion. It did not matter that she was from his village. She was an unspoiled sacrifice. Terrorized into silent submission, she awaited her doom at the hands of the wicked men. The sudden flash of a dagger ended her torment. The wound rendered its dark wine, which they guzzled and grabbed from each other. The fire became her transport to a peaceful world as the warriors resumed their intense dancing and received the infilling of evil spirits.



It had been a good dance. Two Rivers, the village holy man, was satisfied with the order and unity. Of the many spring dances, this was among the best. His heart assured him it had been honorable to the spirits. The Arapaho village had celebrated the circle of life in a dance that included women and children. The traditional ceremony to honor the end of winter and the coming of spring had for generations appeased the Giving Spirits. It would bring forth the fruit of the land for the tribe.

Dozens of men wore buffalo hides on their backs and horns on their heads. They crouched low, dancing and weaving around the circle formed by hundreds of spectators. Other men—the hunters—wore breechcloths and feathered headdresses, carried lances decorated with feathers and strips of fur, and held gourd rattles.

White and vermilion striped their faces and chests. They filed around the circle in search of buffalo. Pounding drums encouraged them as the song made a plea to the spirits to send the herds.

The spellbound children watched and moved their feet in rhythm. Old women hummed the familiar song and prayed for a plentiful year. Even in the reverence given to tradition, the villagers made room for laughter and pride. The costumed dances depicted the heroic exploits of braves and the interaction of the ancient ones with the spirit world. Men, women, and children humbly offered the symbols of their families through gifts of beadwork, pottery, and food to stay in harmony with Earth.

While the village celebrated, part of Two Rivers's heart grieved for the many losses the tribe had suffered in the past few months. Children had disappeared, women had been violated, and hunting parties had been attacked. Somehow, like a deer alert to a predator, he sensed that evil would be perpetuated that very night. While most tribes danced according to the custom, his rival, Dark Wolf, would be offending the Giving Spirits and seeking power from the destructive ones.

Two Rivers closed his eyes, and the disturbance in his soul created images in his mind—spirits clashing, maneuvering, and setting traps. The visions revealed mounting turmoil for the Blue Cloud People, the Arapaho, and all other tribes. The spirits told of a coming flood that would change their way of life. Two Rivers sensed that Dark Wolf saw it also, but instead of preparing the People, he devised schemes to feed his insatiable greed for power and revenge.

Under moonlight, Two Rivers hiked over a few hills, away from the pounding rhythms of the village. He needed to be alone to seek the wisdom of the wind and would continue moving until he received a sign. Then he might understand the gray cloud that covered his heart.

What was to be done about the increasing power that left fear and destruction in its wake? Dark Wolf had recruited many rebels

who responded to his every command to inflict damage on innocent families and travelers. Two Rivers worried that his own power would weaken against the spreading poison. He was withdrawing now to protect his tribe and to seek the wisdom to fight.

Deep down, though, he perceived the answer had already been given to him in previous visions. He recalled the vision of a white seed planted in the earth, which sprouted and grew into a great tree that protected many birds and animals. But what did it all mean?

Two Rivers raised his hands to the full moon. "My fathers, I will fast and sing until you give understanding to your son. What is your wisdom?"



Bearded men in black suits and women in long black or gray skirts filled the sanctuary even after the service had begun. The rented pews were full, as were the common pews in the back, and many people stood against the walls.

The Methodist Church of Buffalo, New York, was hosting a congregation that had gathered from throughout the Genesee Conference to witness the commissioning of Reverend Bannister's missionary band.

After the glorious hymns and the inspirational sermon, twelve men and women moved forward to kneel at the altar. There the superintendent, the mission secretary, and Pastor Gilbert read scriptures from the *Book of Discipline*, laid hands on each missionary, and commissioned them in the name of Jesus Christ.

By the time they reached Allen Hartman, the repeated words had become monotonous. But as the mission secretary laid hands on Allen's head and said, "Take authority to preach the gospel," vibrating energy surged through Allen's body. Another wave rushed through him at the words "I commission you to live and minister among the Indians, in Jesus's name."

An image flashed into Allen's mind: the Lord Jesus towered above a mountain range, holding a shepherd's staff and watching over his people. Warmth coursed through Allen's heaving chest like an ember fanned to flame.

Following the service and reception, Allen strolled out of the brick church onto the cobblestone street with his parents, Reverend Arthur and Ruth Hartman.

"It looks like it's going to clear up," his mother said. "Those clouds have been so gloomy."

"I hope so." Allen's father slipped on his black flat-brimmed hat and settled it into position. "It would be nice to have a few days of sunshine."

Allen gazed up at the western sky and spotted the full moon through a break in the clouds. *I wonder if the Indians are looking at the same moon.*