

Clear Water was lying in darkness, at the base of a large tree. The trees around him were swaying madly from the howling wind. Dead leaves scurried along the forest floor. The air was cold.

Clear Water had been blown into a high speed collision with a tree. His head had hit the tree hard, and for a moment he had lost consciousness. At that moment, the wind suddenly stopped, and he fell, still wrapped in his bearskin robe, through a crack between two large tree roots and came to rest on a dead leaf.

When Clear Water realized what had happened, he also realized that he had been injured in the collision. There was a sharp pain in his left wing. He was too cold and tired to know if it was serious. He was also very hungry. But there was nothing he could do now. He thanked God that he was still alive.

The howling wind could not reach Clear Water where he was under the tree roots, and for the moment he was safe. I have to remember to keep track of the days, he thought. I am now at the end of my first day away from the tribe, so today is December 26, 1985. Then, with what remaining energy he had, Clear Water adjusted the bearskin robe so that he was completely covered, and soon he felt warmth coming back to his body. He still felt the pain in his left wing, but tired as he was, this did not keep him from falling fast asleep.

The next morning the wind had died down and there was hardly a breeze in the air. The sun was shining, and the sky was a deep shade of blue, but the air was very cold. When Clear Water awoke, he immediately felt the pain and stiffness in his left wing. Slowly he unwrapped the bearskin robe that was around him. He then pushed himself up into a kneeling position. The collision had bent his left wing, but it was not broken. I may

be able to use it in a few days, he thought, but it will be weak... and it will be painful. Still, he thought, feeling the cold, cold air, I can not fly in cold air like this anyway. I would freeze to death.

Clear Water looked around the place where he was at. It was small and dark. Here I have protection from the wind, thought Clear Water, but no protection from rain or snow. If I could find food and a good shelter, I may regain some strength in my left wing. Clear Water knew that the squirrels would have made collections of acorns in certain places, and thought it would not take long for him to find these places. And so he climbed out through the crack in the tree roots and began to look around.

He saw that he had been blown into some woods on a mountain ridge. From where he was he could see no signs of big people, no lodges, no roads. And he heard nothing in the air. All was quiet.

Clear Water then began his search for food. He needed to fly to look around, but his flying was awkward and painful, and he could only fly very short distances. His left wing was very stiff.

But soon he found what he was looking for. A dead tree stump. And in between two roots at the base of the stump, a hole. The hole went under the tree stump, and when Clear Water explored it, he found a collection of acorns, enough to supply him with food for many days. And once inside the hole and under the tree stump, he was protected from wind, and snow, and even rain....

Clear Water came out of the hole and spoke to the spirit that all the little people of Yopitlaag believed in. "Please," said Clear Water, "gift the squirrel as he has gifted me."

Then he went back inside his new temporary shelter.

Clear Water kept track of the days, and soon four days had passed, but his left wing was still stiff, and was still painful. Clear Water did not even think he could fly himself over the tree tops with the wing injured like it was. Still, the weather had been very cold for four stright days. Not weather for traveling by the wind anyway, thought Clear Water.

He had cut through the hard acorn shells with his knife, hacking at the shell with the long blade until it cracked and splintered. The nut meat inside was good food for him, and he had eaten well. And, after he blocked the entrance to the hole with leaves and acorns, there were times when he did not even need his bearskin robe to stay warm. But Clear Water knew his grip on life was precarious, and after four days of lying in a dark hole thinking, a feeling of despair began to take hold in his mind.

As night approached on December 31st, 1985, Clear Water was sitting in his tree stump shelter, reviewing his situation... Here I am, thought Clear Water, with a near broken left wing, in some dark hole God only knows where, and right in the middle of the cold winter season. If I didn't have my knife and my bearskin robe I'd be dead by now. And what will happen when I become visible to other living things? Tommorrow I become visible to other living things. What will happen then? I'll be eaten for sure. How can I escape with a broken wing? Even if I was able to fly and reach a wind to travel by, I'd freeze in this cold. And if I hit a tree then, I'd crack like a piece of ice. Is this then my fate? How did I ever choose this path? I'm going to die for sure... who can help me now?

Then he thought of Dancing Bird, and the last time he saw her... and the way that she handed him that cup of water on his last night with the tribe. Ah, Dancing Bird, he thought, I need more than a cup of water now... but who can give me what

I need now How could anyone even find me, when I don't even know where I am? And how, how, can I ever know where I'm going? He began pounding his head with his fist. How can I ever know where I'm going, when I don't even know where I am?... Surely, the only thing that I do know is that I don't know where I'm going... but... but... Oh my God! That's it! The answer to the quest! I've got it now!... Wait a minute... Can that be it?... Let's see... Question: Where am I going? Answer: I don't know where I'm going... hmmm... Is that it, Dancing Bird? Tell me now, is that it? Then he saw her face again, and the way that she handed him that cup of water... Ahhhh! I must've been blind! Blind! Of course. I don't know where I'm going, but I know the way. Oh my God! So simple! For twenty six years I live the way: "give what I can, keep what I need"... of course they would ask me "Where am I going?" Why leave a way that works? They tried to show me... they tried to show me what I knew... but... where am I going? I thought I could find that out. Oh, my God. What have I done?

But wait! No time for despair now. I've got to think. Maybe there is a way... Ha... maybe there is a way I can get back....

And now, even as Clear Water thought, he heard the wind outside. What now? thought Clear Water. I'll have a look. He moved the acorns and the leaves away from the entrance to his hole, and cautiously peeked out. The wind was blowing again. For days the wind had been silent, and the cold, cold air had remained still. Now, wind again. But now, Clear Water felt that the air was not quite as cold. What's this? Another wind from the south? Could it be? Clear Water felt feelings of hope and love come back into his mind. He felt stronger. He knew he had God's gift, the gift of the spirit, something he could not create, but never lose. His body might perish, but his spirit would live. The spirit of love, something that does not die. He was ready for anything.

Still, his left wing was stiff and painful, and nearly useless... but I can try, thought Clear Water. I can still try....

He now looked into the sky. He saw some stars in the sky; but the moon, which had been full only a few days ago, had disappeared behind some clouds blowing in from the south. A chance. It's a chance. And it's a chance I'll have to take. Clouds or no clouds, the air is warm enough for me to survive at least a few hours in the air. And by midnight tonight I will be visible to other living things. With one more try, I could land near enough to some big people to get help.. And I can try....

Clear Water was ready. He did not need to think it over any more. He flapped his wings to test his left wing. He could move it. He couldn't move it much, because it was weak, and he knew he would feel pain whenever he used it. But he could move it enough to fly into the sky. And after that, he would not need to move his wings. His path would be decided by the wind.

Already the wind seemed to be getting stronger, but at the same time it was becoming harder to tell which direction the wind was coming from. I'm going to fly right up into a snowstorm, he thought. A blizzard. I'll be flying in a blizzard. But that's okay, thought Clear Water, because I don't know where I'm going anyway. Clear Water laughed. "Okay, wind," he said, "it's going to be you and me, one more time. I need to find big people, and I'm asking for your help. Please, if you know the way, give me what you can."

Having said these words, Clear Water folded up his bearskin robe and tucked it under his arm. Then he began to fly. At first his left wing moved only slightly, and he had trouble steering. He glanced lightly off a tree, and spun sideways.

But he regained his balance, and leaned a little to favor his right wing. Then his left wing began to move a little more. He rose in the air. A breeze began to carry him. He leaned and tilted trying to steer and narrowly missed flying back first into a large tree branch. Another breeze came. Then a strong updraft. He quickly folded his wings and curled into a ball, covering his head. Five or six times he glanced off small branches and twigs, but then, suddenly, he was in the clear. He was again above the tree tops and in the sky. Once more, this time at night, and heading into a blizzard, he was traveling by the wind.

After everyone finally decided to give up trying to finish playing Ha-Ha, they all broke up into small groups, and settled into conversations about many different things. Kate and Laura took the two little ones, Dylan and Story, upstairs to Dylan's room and put them to bed, and then lingered in the kitchen to snack on potato chips, and talk about games they played with their kids. The professor went into the laundry room and got more firewood for the fire in the front room, and then he and Stanley got together near the front door, to watch the snow fall, and ended up getting into a long psychological discussion of fairy tales. The one bottle of champagne finished, they opened another bottle of wine, and continued to drink. Mary had first took her painting back up to Kate and the professor's bedroom. Then, sensing that everyone was planning on making it a slumber party, as well, she had called home and told her parents that everything was fine, and that she was going to spend the night there. Then she and Tom and Grandpa Jack started talking about painting-- and ended up talking about beautiful places in the country that they had been to. They stood in the middle of the front room near the fireplace, and they also continued to drink, having opened the last bottle of the dry white wine. Jennifer sat on the floor in the front

room, leaning back against the armchair away from the wall, occasionally looking at the New Year's Eve celebration going on in Times Square that was on the TV, but mostly watching everyone else in the room, and listening to their conversations. She liked to watch the expressions on Grandpa Jack's face when he was telling a funny story, and she also liked how Stanley's voice changed according to how excited he was. Mostly though, she noticed the different ways she could tell that Tom and Mary were in love.

Finally, Jennifer informed everyone that it was ten minutes to the New Year, and Grandpa Jack got Kate and Laura to come into the front room. Kate and Laura sat on the couch and continued talking, and Grandpa Jack took a seat in the armchair closest to the wall. Tom had the last bottle of champagne, and he was over near the front door with Stanley, ready to go outside and pop the cork to ring in the New Year. The professor and Mary were standing between the armchair away from the wall and the couch, talking about late night snacks. A record, selected by Grandpa Jack, was on the stereo in the dining room. "Let it Snow," by Steve Lawrence and Edie Gorme, was the song playing at that moment.

"Wow," said Tom, peeking out the front door, "We got a blizzard going on out there...."

"Let's still go outside and pop the cork, okay?" said Stanley. "You got the wire almost undone?...."

"Yep. You be at the door, and let me know when to pop it," said Tom.

Then the countdown began. "10-9-...." Everyone was counting....

"Go!" said Stanley. They had the main door open. Now Tom opened the storm door, which swung out to the left, and went out onto the front porch, going over about five steps to the right to avoid hitting the porch light. The snow was coming

down so thick and blowing so hard that some blew into Stanley's face while the storm door was open. He shut it quickly. He could barely see Tom on the porch because of the fog on the storm door glass.

"6-5-4--"

Stanley rubbed his hand over the storm door glass to clear his view of Tom, but the glass just smudged and streaked. He had shook up the champagne bottle real good, but Tom didn't know it. He had brought two more bottles of champagne anyway-- that were stashed away for late drinking-- but he wanted to see this one go off....

"2-1 HAPPY NEW YEAR!"

Stanley opened the storm door and yelled "Now!" to Tom, and then held the storm door open just wide enough to see, and just long enough to watch.

At that exact moment, a great gust of wind and snow blew from Tom's right to his left and into the front porch of the professor's house, almost causing Tom to lose his balance. And being carried by this great gust of wind and snow, Clear Water, who was curled up like a ball with his bearskin robe wrapped around him. Clear Water didn't have the faintest idea where he was, or where he was going.

When Tom popped the cork of the champagne bottle, Clear Water was in the process of getting blown, at a dangerously high speed, under the roof of the front porch of the professor's house. If he had continued getting blown in a straight line, he probably would have passed in between Tom and the front door, collided with the side of the house, and fallen unnoticed on to the front porch. But when Tom, in the process of nearly losing his balance, popped the cork of the champagne bottle,



the bottle was almost aimed at the porchlight above the stairs, and the cork shot out at the precise time and in the exact direction necessary to nick Clear Water in the side before it continued upwards and ricocheted off the base of the porchlight fixture, jarring it, but leaving it intact. The near hit on Clear Water stunned him, and sent him, at an even faster speed than he was going, on an entirely different course. Instead of colliding with the side of the house, Clear Water whizzed over Stanley's head, through the open storm door, over Grandpa Jack's head, and into a collision with the miniature felt cloth Santa-- who was in the process of boarding his sleigh on the fireplace mantel-- and the toy sack that was hoisted up on Santa's back.

The force of this collision knocked the miniature felt cloth Santa out of the sleigh, through the air, and into the brick above the mantel. Santa then fell and came to rest lying face down on the mantel. Santa's toy bag, having become separated from Santa by the collision, went flying through the air, bounced off the label of the empty bottle of dry white wine that Tom had set on the mantel, and skidded into the three wise men in front of the manger scene, knocking all three of them over, and spilling miniature felt toys everywhere.

Clear Water's collision with the miniature felt cloth Santa and his toy bag, meanwhile, deflected Clear Water's path just slightly upwards, so that when he struck the empty wine bottle he ricocheted up and off to the left. He then glanced off the brick above the manger, and fell into the Sleeping Beauty scene, knocking the miniature felt cloth heralds and the King and the Queen to the ground. He finally came to rest not more than an

inch away from the miniature Sleeping Beauty; and he came to rest on his back, and lying on his bearskin robe, in a manner that was strikingly similar to his miniature felt cloth counterpart.

At this moment, the needle on the record player skipped once, and then stuck at the part where Steve Lawrence and Edie Gorme were singing "... all the way home I'll be warm...."

On the TV, there were crowds of people and streamers all over the place... "We're now at the beginning of a New Year...." said an announcer... Some band was playing "Auld Ang Syne" in the background....

"Stanley, close that door!"

Stanley closed the door. Grandpa Jack began brushing cold snow off his head and the back of his neck.

"Stanley, what's Tom doing?" asked Mary.

"He'll be right in," replied Stanley.

Suddenly the door opened, and Tom scurried inside, shutting the door quickly behind him. "What a storm!" he said, brushing snow out of his hair. "Almost all the champagne sprayed out when I opened it-- it must have been shook up." Then he took a hit out of the bottle.

Meanwhile, Stanley was rummaging around in the closet.

"A New Year...." said the professor, thoughtfully.... And then he said, "Don't I hear a record stuck somewhere?" He went into the dining room to check.

Stanley then revealed the two bottles of cold champagne he had left in the closet. "A late birthday present-- extra stash."

"All right!" said Tom.

"Don't open any on our account," said Kate, indicating her and Laura.

"Where's that fire?" said Tom, and he stepped over to the fireplace, putting his hands out to warm them up.

"Well, I think I'll open one...." said Stanley, moving towards the front door.

The professor returned from the dining room. He had just turned off the stereo. Grandpa Jack and Jennifer were watching the TV, and showing signs of getting sleepy. Mary went over and leaned affectionately on Tom. Kate and Laura were discussing

who would sleep where....

Suddenly, Tom said, "Hey, look, the wind blew down some of these little people up here....!" He and Mary were looking at the knocked over little people on the fireplace mantel.

"Huh..." said Tom. "That's interesting...."

Stanley had his hand on the front door knob, but....

"Hey, uh, professor," said Tom, "I don't remember seeing this one over here...." He turned around slightly to look at the professor. "Where does this one go?" He was pointing at Clear Water.

"Oh, my God!" gasped Mary. "There's blood! It looks so real!"

The professor hurried over and looked. "Wha...." He looked closer. Tom and Mary crowded in and they all looked.

"Let me see." said Jennifer, getting up.

"Alan, what's going on?" asked Kate, feeling a little alarmed.

"I, uh...." said the professor.

Kate and Laura got up from the couch, and backed away from behind the professor. Stanley came over to where they were. Grandpa Jack got up from his armchair.

"Hey, what's going on?" asked Stanley.

"Alan!" said Grandpa Jack, firmly.

"Well, I don't know what it is...." said the professor.

"It looks like it's alive." said Tom.

"Hey, Jennifer--" said Kate.

Jennifer had found the stool Kate had used earlier, and set it to the left of the professor. She got on it and looked.

"It's an elf," she said.

"But what's it doing there?" asked Mary.

"It looks like it's hurt." said Tom.

Laura and Kate moved up close. Grandpa Jack moved up close. Stanley hung back as the safety.

"Don't touch it." said Laura.

"Are you sure it's alive?" asked Stanley.

"Stanley, could you turn off the TV?" asked the professor.

Stanley turned off the TV. As he did, some musicians began setting up on the table in the dining room. Once their equipment was all set up, they began playing a reggae version of "Johnny B. Goode."

"I wonder how it got there...." said Tom.

"Well, it probably came in when the door was open," said Kate.

"I don't blame it one bit," said Grandpa Jack.

Everyone laughed, but just a little laugh.

"What if it needs a doctor?" asked Mary.

"What kind of a doctor do you call for elves?" said Stanley, half joking.

"Are we all thinking that it's real, then?" asked Kate.

"Because...."

Everyone looked at her for a moment.

"... I think I'm going to make some coffee...."

"Good idea," said Laura. "I'll help." Kate and Laura went off to the kitchen. Tom and Mary stepped back to where Stanley was. Stanley moved up to the mantel to look. Jennifer, the professor, Stanley, and Grandpa Jack stood at the mantel, looking.

"I wonder why it was out in the blizzard...." said the professor.

"Maybe it's cold." said Jennifer.

"But we don't want to try touching it yet," said Grandpa Jack.

"Look at what it's wearing," said Stanley, "Looks like he's prepared for cold weather.... And what's that he's lying on... a rug?.... Is that his? Do you think that's his?"

"He looks kinda cute," said Jennifer.

"I've read old Indian legends about little people that lived inside of mountains, but... really...." said the professor.

"And remember that story I told you about the prospector," said Grandpa Jack.

"What story?" asked Stanley.

Mary was getting tired. She sat down in the armchair furthest from the wall. Tom sat on the arm of that armchair. As Tom sat down he noticed Muffin, the resident cat, who had been in hiding most of the evening. Muffin had just rounded the corner from the hall into the front room, near the couch, and had paused looking around, her tail twitching oddly.

"Professor, here's your cat," said Tom.

"Oh, no...." said the professor.

"Where?.... Here, kitty...." said Stanley, as he moved slowly towards Muffin.

Muffin looked up, blinking.

"Gotcha. Where should I put her, professor?"

"In the laundry room. And put a sign on the door.... And stuff the crack under the door with a towel...."

Stanley went down the hall to the back of the house carrying Muffin. Kate, who was in the kitchen, helped Stanley put Muffin in the laundry room. Meanwhile, one pot of coffee had already been brewed, and Laura brought four coffee mugs and the hot pot of coffee into the front room.

"Here's coffee," she said, "I'll be right back with more mugs, and cream and sugar." Then she paused. "Has it moved yet?" she asked.

"No," said the professor, "And it may be badly hurt...." He stepped back from the mantel and looked around at the miniature felt cloth figures. "It seems the wind blew it through the door and into the brick above the mantel here...but I don't remember the wind...."

"Can you tell if it's breathing?" asked Laura.

"Well..." said the professor, looking closely at Clear Water, "it's so small... it's really hard to tell...."

"Couldn't we call someone to come over and look at it?" asked Laura.

"Well," said the professor, "we could. But...."

Grandpa Jack finished his thought. "...but then it wouldn't be long before everyone in town found out about it... and if it lived, it probably would never again be free."

"You mean we can't tell anyone?" asked Jennifer, looking at her father.

"We don't know what we're going to do yet." said the professor.

At that moment, Kate and Stanley returned to the front room. Kate had brought a few more coffee mugs, some cream and sugar, and two spoons.

"Has it moved yet?" Kate asked.

"No," said the professor. He was beginning to feel tired. "I think I need some of that coffee. Let's all sit down-- except Stanley, could you watch it to see if it moves?"

Everyone except Stanley, and Jennifer, then went over and poured themselves some coffee, and found a seat. Laura brought Stanley a cup of coffee with cream but no sugar. Jennifer stayed standing on the stool, looking at Clear Water.

"Well," said the professor, when everyone was settled, "we now have a real, live elf lying injured on our fireplace mantel. I think it may be badly injured from hitting the brick above the mantel. I'd like to do something for it, but I'm not sure what to do."

"We did think," said Grandpa Jack, "that we would not try calling anyone over to look at it; because then it would get all over town, and if the little guy lived, he probably would never again be free."

"But what about Doc Williams?" asked Kate, looking at the professor. "Don't you think he could keep it a secret?"

No one said anything.

Then Stanley said, "Who could keep a secret about a live elf?"

"But we could let him go once he got better...." said Kate.

"The whole town would be beating down our door to get a look at him," said the professor.

Everyone was silent again.

"Well, we've got to do something...." said Tom.

"Maybe he'll wake up soon," said Mary, "and then he can tell us how to help him."

"But if he's really injured," said Laura, "we really ought to do something soon."

Everyone was silent again.

"If only we knew where he came from..." said Stanley, "... we might be able to take him back...."

"But how could we ever find--" the professor began, but he stopped suddenly. He looked at Grandpa Jack. "What story were you thinking about, Jack? You said: 'Remember that story about the prospector?'"

Everyone looked at Grandpa Jack.

"Well," said Grandpa Jack, "you know the Cherokee Indians have some old stories about little people that lived in mountains, but... I heard one a long time ago about a prospector, who was looking for gold-- oh, I've heard different versions you know-- but, he was looking for gold somewhere in the mountains of North Carolina, and he found some little people with wings... probably quite a lot like the little fella we've got here."

"But...." said Kate.

"But what?" said the professor.



"But... well, I was going to say, 'but that's just a story...' but...."

Stanley finished her thought. "... but now that we have a live little person with wings lying on our fireplace mantel, it looks like one of those old stories was really true."

Everyone was silent.

"This is incredible," said the professor. He stood up from where he was sitting on the couch and looked at Clear Water again.

Then Stanley said, "But Jack, there are lots of stories about little people... how could we ever know which one is talking about where this guy came from?"

Everyone was silent.

"Well," said Grandpa Jack, "you know I've heard a lot of stories in my time... but the people who know this story, they don't tell it to just anyone. Seems the old prospector made a map... and there's people who believe to this day that they're going to find that map."

"What was it, a treasure map or something?" asked Tom.

"It was a map of where to find the little people," said Grandpa Jack.

"But," said the professor, "of course no one knows what happened to the map...."

Again everyone was silent.

"Still," said Grandpa Jack, "it's an interesting story...."

Jennifer looked at the professor.

"Well," said the professor, "why don't you tell it, Jack? After all, we're not going anywhere tonight. Not in that blizzard. And there doesn't seem to be anything we can do for our little friend up there on the mantel right now...."

Now everyone remembered that it was snowing outside, and they heard the wind.

"That's right," said Stanley, "we're snowed in."

"Well then," said Kate, "we might as well relax. And get comfortable. Is there anything I can get anyone?"

"Well," said Tom, "now that you mention it, I kind of feel a little hungry."

"Me too," said Jennifer.

Everyone else was hungry too.

"Would cheese and crackers be alright?" asked Kate.

"Do you have any peanut butter?" asked Tom.

"And could you bring in those nacho chips?" asked the professor.

"Why don't I just make up some nachos?" asked Kate.

This sounded good to everyone.

So Kate went off to the kitchen to make nachos. Laura and Mary followed, to help.

The musicians on the dining room table continued to play a reggae version of "Johnny B. Goode."

Soon the women were back, with two small cookie sheets worth of nachos.

"All right!" said Tom and Stanley together.

Everyone got some nachos and began munching out. After Stanley and Jennifer got some they returned to the fireplace mantel to watch Clear Water. Clear Water was still unconscious, and had not moved. He was still lying next to the miniature felt cloth Sleeping Beauty.

"Well Jack," said Laura, as she munched on a nacho, "let's hear about the prospector and his lost map."

Everyone looked at Grandpa Jack.

"Okay... well now," said Grandpa Jack, "first of all I'll tell you that the title of the story is 'The Last Map of Root Man Charlie.'"

Everyone liked the sound of that.