

give it. Our way: give what you can, keep what you need. You may all stay for as long as you like. You decide."

None of the big people who were now little knew what to say at first.

Then Grandpa Jack spoke: "I was wondering if we could introduce ourselves, and learn your name, and maybe the names of...." and he looked over at Clear Water and Dancing Bird.

And so the big people that were now little people learned the names of Dried Up Creek, Clear Water, and Dancing Bird, and when Old Crow returned with healing supplies, they learned her name. And those four little people learned the names of the people who had brought Clear Water back to the tribe.

"Is Clear Water going to be all right then?" Laura asked Dried Up Creek.

"Yes, he'll be fine," replied Dried Up Creek, "maybe that knock on the head even did him some good."

They all laughed. The big people that were now little began to feel more at ease. Then they noticed that the air was warm where they were, and they didn't even need sweaters. Those who had sweaters on took them off.

"Dried Up Creek, could you, uh... tell us where we are now," asked Kate.

"We are in a small cave inside the mountain," said Dried Up Creek.

"But how did we get in here?" asked Tom

"The whole tribe must have all agreed at the same time to let you come," said Dried Up Creek.

"And that did it?" asked the professor.

"Well, we don't understand the whole process. But the whole tribe agreeing at once is surely a great part of it."

"Can we fly with these wings?" asked Jennifer.

"Only if you want to."

"Can the whole tribe... uh, decide us back outside, and make us big again?" asked Mary.

"Only if you want them to."

"But they can do it?" asked Laura.

"Yes," said Dried Up Creek.

"Hmmm...." said Stanley.

The big people now little had many questions on their minds. Tom asked Dried Up Creek how long the tribe had been there, and Dried Up Creek said, "As long as anyone can remember." Then Mary asked, "How is it that no one ever sees little people?" And Dried Up Creek explained how the little people were not visible to any other living things except when the great returning comet was within the orbit of the earth. Then the professor asked, "Have you all ever thought of making contact with big people?" And Dried Up Creek replied, "Most of us are content as we are."

Then Grandpa Jack asked Dried Up Creek how the tribe survived: What did they eat? How did they get it? And Dried Up Creek had answered that the tribe preferred animal meat and roots during the cold months, and nuts, seeds, and greens during the warm months. During the summer months, nuts, seeds, and greens were everywhere, and all the little people had to do was gather up what they needed. Roots were also everywhere, but they gathered up roots to store for the winter. As for animal meat, when an animal died or was killed by another animal, the little people simply helped to harvest the remains. Sometimes they ate meat during warm months, but mostly meat was dried and stored for the winter. Occasionally they had fresh berries.

Clear Water also had a question for the big people now little: how did they know to bring Clear Water to this place in the mountains? All the big people helped to tell the story.

When they got to the part about Root Man Charlie's map, the little people could only gasp in astonishment. "In our version of that story, there is no map," said Dried Up Creek. And when they got to the part about sawing the locks to open the closed gates on the parkway, Dried Up Creek laughed and said, "Travel for big people sometimes hard too."

Then the professor asked Dried Up Creek, "How is it that most of the little people are content as they are?"

"I am not sure...." said Dried Up Creek, laughing.

Everyone laughed.

"...but," he continued, "I can tell you what I know."

"I would like to hear it," said the professor.

Everyone, including Clear Water, Dancing Bird, and Old Crow then became quiet.

"This lodge here," began Dried Up Creek, pointing to the wooden frame house covered with animal skins that they were all in front of, "is the tribal center lodge. It is here because the people of Yopitlaag have a way of life that everyone agrees on. Everyone grows up learning this way of life, which is: 'give what you can, keep what you need.' And here at the tribal center lodge, a place to discover if something you have to give is something someone else needs. All kinds of needs are posted on the bulletin boards, needs for material goods and needs for personal care. Also any surplus of material goods or energy for personal care is posted on the bulletin boards. The manager of the tribal center lodge then tries to connect existing resources with existing needs."

Here Dried Up Creek paused. "The person you brought back, Clear Water, he was the manager of the tribal center lodge before he left."

They all looked at Clear Water. He smiled.

"In this way," continued Dried Up Creek, "the people of Yopitlaag encourage the love spirit in each person in the village, and each person's love together grows a beautiful Yopitlaag.

"We live this way because it works. And it works because few people ever forget that the love spirit is a gift from God. And God's gift, something people cannot create, but never lose."

Dried Up Creek became silent. Everyone was silent.

Then the professor cleared his throat. "Ahem... now, uh, if I'm prying into personal affairs, Clear Water," said the professor, "please say so, and I will ask no more, but... but I can't help wondering then, what you were doing out in that blizzard...."

"It's a long story," said Clear Water, smiling.

"But..." said Stanley, "uh... could you just tell me one thing: did you choose the professor's house to fly into... or... was it just...."

"Pure coincidence," replied Clear Water. "By that time I didn't have the faintest idea where I was going." He smiled. Everyone smiled.

Then the big people now little all noticed that people were beginning to come back out of their lodges, where they had all gone.

They also noticed that, while they had been talking, a pile of wood had been started not far from where they stood. As they now watched, many people now added wood to the pile, and it grew and became quite big.

Dried Up Creek spoke: "More than a month ago, Clear Water chose the crystal ball quest. The principal spirit healer gave him a question to answer. He did not answer the question correctly within a months time, so he was asked to leave the

tribe. But somehow, he came to know the correct answer. And as you say, you were able to bring him here.

"When a person answers the question correctly, the spirit healer informs the rest of the tribe--" Dried Up Creek smiled, "-- and all participate in a ceremony called the Dance of a Child's Heart Playing. We now prepare for the ceremony called the Dance of a Child's Heart Playing."

"Is it okay for us to be watching?" asked Grandpa Jack.

"You can participate if you like," said Dried Up Creek.

"But we're not part of the tribe...." said the professor.

"We think you are," said Dried Up Creek.

The professor looked around at the other big people now little.

"How long is the ceremony?" asked Mary.

"The Dance of a Child's Heart Playing will last the rest of the day," said Dried Up Creek. "Then there will be three days of trading."

"Hmmm...." said the professor.

"Alan," said Kate, "We've got to go back. Mary's parents are already going to be worried."

"And we still may be able to leave the parkway without getting caught," said Laura.

"Can't we at least stay for the dance?" asked Jennifer.

There was a moment of uneasiness among the big people that were now little.

Then Stanley said, "Dried Up Creek, if the whole tribe together can agree and transport us from the clearing to here and make us small, couldn't the whole tribe also agree and transport our cars...."

Dried Up Creek thought this one over. "Well," he said, "if that is something that you really need... we could try it."

"We could try just transporting them in here," said Stanley, "and if it worked, then maybe we could stay until the end of the dance, and then the tribe could transport us home...."

"Hmm," said the professor, "I like that. We would definitely leave the parkway and not get caught that way."

"It would be a safer way to travel," said Kate.

"And if we drove we wouldn't be home until late tonight anyway," said Tom.

"It's okay with me," said Mary.

"Could you ask the tribe if they would try it?" Grandpa Jack asked Dried Up Creek.

"Surely I can ask," said Dried Up Creek.

By now the whole tribe had formed a large circle around the tribal center lodge.

Old Crow had gone and gotten her spirit totem, and the spirit totems of Dried Up Creek, Dancing Bird, and Clear Water. She now handed them to who they belonged to. The big people now little noticed her handing out small circular pieces of flat wood with pictures painted on them.

"First," said Dried Up Creek, "I will ask the tribe about your cars. Then we will see what happens. If you can stay, you may participate in the dance, or watch. If you go, you must go before the dance starts."

Then Dried Up Creek took off his clothes, and walked out just past the woodpile. He stood near the center of the great circle of little people. Then he spoke to the tribe.

"The big people who brought Clear Water back to the tribe have a need. They wish to stay for the Dance of a Child's Heart Playing. But they cannot stay unless we, as a tribe,

can agree to transport them and their cars home, after the Dance is over. I do not know if cars will transport, or whether the tribe wishes to do this thing. But if the tribe can give this to the big people, and the cars will transport, let them come here now."

Suddenly the two Toyotas, that had been in the parking area for Sam's Knob, appeared next to the tribal center lodge.

"Christ," said Stanley, in amazement, "they even parked 'em for us."

Then Dried Up Creek came back to where the big people now little were standing. "Will you participate," he asked to everyone, "or will you watch?"

The big people now little all looked at each other, and then they all looked at Grandpa Jack.

"Thanks," said Grandpa Jack, "but we think we'll just watch this time."

"Then please," said Dried Up Creek, "let me offer the front porch of the spirit healer's lodge as a good place to watch." He pointed to where that lodge was.

"Do we have time to get some food from our cars?" asked Stanley.

While Stanley, Kate and Laura were getting food from the Toyotas, the professor asked Dried Up Creek what the small circular piece of flat wood he had in his hand was. "This is my spirit totem," said Dried Up Creek, "Everyone has one." Then the professor asked, "What's going to happen in the dance?" And Dried Up Creek had replied: "You will see."

The big people who were now little walked up to the spirit healer's lodge. Then they sat comfortably on the front porch of the lodge and watched the Dance of a Child's Heart Playing.

When everyone in the tribe was ready, all the people in the village were standing in the great circle around the tribal center lodge and the large pile of wood-- except for four people who were outside the circle, and who were evenly spread apart around the outer edge, and Dancing Bird and Clear Water, who were near the large wood pile. Everyone had their spirit totem on the ground in front of them.

Clear Water was still lying on the cot. Dancing Bird was kneeling with a stick in her hands, doing something. Suddenly a small fire started in front of Dancing Bird. She had lit a torch. She picked up the torch and stood up. Then she went to the side of Clear Water's cot and knelt down. She leaned over and kissed Clear Water. Then she leaned back. He sat up. Then he got out of the cot and stood up. Then Dancing Bird handed the torch she had to Clear Water.

He took the torch and walked over to the woodpile. He used the torch to light the woodpile, and soon a big flame was burning in the center of the large circle of people. Then Clear Water waved his arm above his head. Apparently this signaled the four people sitting outside the circle, and they began to play music. Two of them had congo drums, and they sat opposite each other. The other two had an instrument that sounded like a recorder, and they sat opposite each other. The persons playing the congos sounded out a deep steady rhythm with only minor variations. The persons playing the recorders however, sometimes played high on the scale and sometimes played low on the scale, and in general seemed to play anything that came into their head.

Then Clear Water handed Dancing Bird something like a piece of string with a little ball fastened on the end. She then walked to the inside edge of the great circle of people, and began dancing slowly around the edge of the circle, in

front of the people in the circle, and in a counterclockwise direction. She held one end of the piece of string and swung the little ball over her head so that it seemed to circle around her.

Then Clear Water went to the edge of the great circle of people and began walking around it, clockwise, touching certain people as he walked around. When a person was touched, they would also begin to dance slowly around the inner edge of the great circle of people in a counterclockwise direction. Soon everyone in the tribe, including Clear Water, were dancing in a great circle around the blazing fire in the center.

The congos and the recorders played for a long time, and the people danced and danced and danced....

Suddenly, the congo players beat out a quick drum roll, and then the music stopped. All the dancers stopped, but remained standing. There was a long silence as the congo players and the recorder players met at the center of the circle near the fire and exchanged spirit totems. Clear Water and Dancing Bird also came to the center of the circle near the fire and exchanged spirit totems. Then everyone in the great circle bent down and picked up the spirit totem that was nearest them on the ground.

The congo players and the recorder players then returned to their places, and began playing music again. Clear Water and Dancing Bird joined the rest of the tribe in the great circle, and they all began dancing again, in a counterclockwise direction.

Then, one by one, and with no apparent order, people began leaving the dance circle. When a person left the dance circle, they walked or flew over to a small stream of water that ran through the mountain not far from the edge of the village and

near what seemed to be the entrance to the cave. There, each person lay in the running stream water for a moment. Then they appeared to wash themselves.

After a person left the stream, they then picked a spot, apparently at random, somewhere in the village and sat there, or lay down.

Eventually, all five hundred of the people in the tribe were scattered around the village, either sitting or lying down. The music then stopped. There was no noise, except the stream water running in the far background, and occasional crackling noises from the fire, which was now much smaller.

Then, as the big people now little looked around, someone who was sitting near the spirit healer lodge stood up. The person that stood up was Clear Water. He then walked around and touched people on the head. When a person was touched, they then got up and walked or flew to a lodge in the village. The two people who flew to the spirit healer's lodge turned out to be a small boy and a small girl. They giggled as they walked past the big people now little that were on the porch, but they said nothing. They went inside the lodge. Finally, there was no one left sitting or lying in the village that the big people now little could see. Then they saw Clear Water. He was walking towards the spirit healer's lodge.

He walked up to the spirit healer's lodge, and then on to the front porch. [REDACTED] All the big people now little looked at him.

"There is something I need to tell you," he said. His face looked serious.

They waited.

Then he smiled.

"I am no longer Clear Water," said Dancing Bird. "My spirit totem is now Dancing Bird. And so I live where she lived, and I am now the principal spirit healer for the tribe."

"Then," said the professor, smiling, "the two children now in the lodge-- are they Dried Up Creek and Old Crow?"

"Yes," replied Dancing Bird.

"Well I'll be...." said the professor.

"Dried Up Creek mentioned something about three days of trading after the dance," said Stanley. "What happens then?"

"During the next three days," said Dancing Bird, "trading will take place. Anything can be traded: lodges, totem spirits, parents, children, clothes, special tools-- anything. At the end of the third day, the tribes newly established life is declared accepted when there are no reports left in the tribal center lodge indicating material or personal need. This is declared by the manager of the tribal center with a loud yell, which is followed shortly by a yell from the whole tribe. Then the tribe begins another era."

"Wow," said Tom.

"I like that," said Stanley.

All of the big people that were now little liked that.

Then Dancing Bird spoke again. "The Dance has tired out the tribe, and many will sleep soon. If you want to have the whole tribe agree to send you home, we better ask now."

The professor looked at his watch. "But... it's only 7:00 p.m. What if someone sees the cars pop into the driveway?"

"Hmmm," said Stanley. "Say, uh, Dancing Bird, I think there's something we ought to ask before we go back."

"What's that?" asked Dancing Bird.

"Is it okay with the tribe if we tell other big people where you all are, or should we keep it a secret?"

Everyone was quiet on the front porch.

Then Dancing Bird answered. "Let Nature take its course."

"And," said Grandpa Jack, "could any or all of us come back at another time, and become part of the tribe?"

"If the whole tribe agrees, then yes," replied Dancing Bird.

"All right then," said Kate, "we really better go now. If someone sees us pop into our driveway, then it was meant to be. We've got to get Mary home."

All the big people now little agreed, and they were all now ready to go, except Jennifer.

She looked at the professor and then at Kate.

"Can I fly down to the car?" she asked.

The professor and Kate looked at Dancing Bird.

"It's all right. It's really easy," said Dancing Bird.

So they all flew down to where the Toyotas were parked next to the tribal center lodge.

When they had all folded their wings behind them and gotten into the two Toyotas, Dancing Bird left them, and walked to where the large fire had been. It was a small fire now, but it was still burning.

Then he spoke, in a loud voice, to the people of Yopitlaag.

"Hear me, everyone," he said. "The big people who brought me here have a need. They need us to transport them and their cars back to the driveway where they began their journey. If the tribe can give this to the big people, let it happen now."

There was a long silence. Nothing happened.

And then suddenly, the two Toyotas were gone.

Two Toyotas suddenly appeared in the professor's driveway at 7:30 p.m. on the night of January 2, 1986. The professor's house was dark. The big people, now big again, looked around. There were no cars driving by on Green St., and no one out taking a walk that could've seen them pop in.

"Whew!" said Tom.

They got out of the Toyotas and stood together. They looked around. All was quiet. The calm early evening air was cool but not cold.

"That was nice of them," said Kate.

"What do we do now?" said Laura.

"I think," said Grandpa Jack, "that we should all walk over to Mary's house, and help her explain where she's been."

Everyone agreed.

"But should we tell them what really happened?" asked Mary.

Everyone looked at each other. Grandpa Jack started laughing. Then everyone laughed.

"This story is wilder than the wildest one you ever told, Jack," said the professor, "who's going to believe it?"

They all laughed some more.

"Even if people started believing it," said Grandpa Jack, "those little people can take care of themselves alright. C'mon, let's go."

And so they all walked down to Old Bristol Rd., and then over to Mary's house.

Soon they were all in the family room at Mary's house. Mary's parents had called around looking for her that afternoon, but were only starting to get really worried when, by 6:00 p.m., they hadn't seen or heard anything about where Mary was. If they had heard nothing by the next morning they were going to call the police.

Still, Mary's parents were greatly relieved to see her safe and alive, and they were also relieved to know who she had been with the whole time. And they knew Mary, and knew that if she decided she needed to be gone like that, well, it must have been important to her. So they invited everyone into the family room to sit down, and then asked: "So... what have you all been doing?"

Well, Mary began the story. But, as she went along, everyone chipped in a little here and a little there, so that by the time she finished, everyone who had been involved had told just as much as she did.

Mary's parents, John and Louise, were quiet for a moment after Mary finished. Louise looked at John. He had his pipe in his mouth, and was looking at the family room rug, thinking. Then Louise looked around at everyone else.

"I think they're serious," said Louise. But, as she looked around a second time, she saw that Stanley and Grandpa Jack were having a hard time keeping from laughing.

John looked up at everyone. "You made it up, didn't you?" He was not smiling.

Stanley and Grandpa Jack got serious.

Everyone was silent.

John looked around at everyone one more time.

Then he looked at Tom and smiled. "Why couldn't you just have had a nice simple teaparty on the ceiling?"

Tom started laughing and held his head with his hands in disbelief. Then he got up and walked over to John, and held out his hand, palm up. "HO!" said Tom. John slapped him five, and Tom slapped it back.

Everyone but Louise and Mary were staggered with amazement at what they saw, but then John said: "I was young once too you know...."

That was it.

Maybe they believed it, maybe they didn't, but they were definitely not angry.

Laura then asked Louise if she could use the phone. By then it was 10:00 p.m., but when Laura called Irene, Irene was still up, and so Laura said they'd be right over to pick up Dylan and Story.

It was time for everyone to go home. They had all had a long day.

Later that night, Stanley lay in bed almost asleep, but still awake enough to be watching Laura. She had been writing something. Now she was looking at the old deer hide in the clear plastic case. The Last Map of Root Man Charlie.

"You found the gold you were looking for, didn't you Charlie?" she said to the map.

Then Stanley said, "Are you thinking what I'm thinking?"

Early on the morning of January 3, 1986, the sun was shining bright, and the temperature was already warm enough at 8:00 a.m. to be melting snow-- and Stanley, Laura, and Story were walking down Green St. towards Tom's house and the professor's house. They went to Tom's house first. After fifteen minutes, Stanley, Laura, Story, and Tom headed over to the professor's house. They knocked on the front door.

Kate answered, and opened the door to let them all in.

"What's up?" she asked.

"We're going back to stay," said Stanley.

"You too, Tom?" asked Kate.

"No. Not this time," said Tom, "We just thought it'd be safer taking both cars."

"Well, it'd be kinda tight anyway," said Kate, "Jack's going back too."

"He is?" said Stanley.

"That's right," said Grandpa Jack, coming down the hall from the kitchen. "I don't need to be hit on the head. That place is for me. And the weather's good. Now's the time. We were going to check with you all before we left...."

Then the professor came down the hallway from the kitchen.

"So Jack's not the only one, huh?" he said.

"We thought we'd go while the weather was good," said Laura.

"I hope we don't have to saw any more locks," said the professor.

"Do you think you guys will come along some time?" Stanley asked the professor and Kate.

The professor looked at Kate.

"Only when I'm sure the story won't be forgotten," said the professor.

"And I'm staying around incase he needs someone to knock some sense into him," said Kate.

"Tom," said the professor, "does Mary want to go along for the ride. Because we're almost ready...."

"I'll call now." He went into the kitchen to use the phone.

"Kate," said Laura, "could you do some things for us?"

"Sure."

"I have here five letters we've written. But we don't want them sent until we know the little people will take us in. We didn't tell the whole story. We just said 'we followed the Last Map of Root Man Charlie.' Maybe sometime in the future they will find out what that means."

"They will," said Kate.

"Also," said Laura, "could you do something with all the stuff in our apartment? We have some savings, here---": she gave Kate a check, "... hopefully that will cover cost...."

"I'll take care of everything," said Kate.

Then Tom came back from calling Mary.

"What did she say?" asked Stanley.

"She's coming along for the ride. And so is John," said Tom, smiling. "He wants to see this for himself. They'll be right over."

"He doesn't care that he might get caught for damaging federal property?" asked the professor.

"He's willing to take the consequences," said Tom.

Since the only things unpacked from the two Toyotas the night before was food that might spoil, everyone was ready to go when John and Mary arrived at the professor's, so they all got into the two vehicles. Then, for the second time in three days, Tom and Stanley backed fully loaded four wheel drive vehicles out of the professor's driveway. Only this time, of the eight people going, only four were planning on coming back. In one Toyota, there was Tom, Mary, John, and the professor. In the other Toyota, there was Stanley, Laura, Story and Grandpa Jack.

The weather was unseasonably warm for the third straight day in a row, and by now there was no snow remaining on the roads. Even 276 was clear all the way to the parkway. So after only four hours of driving they turned off 276, and began climbing the entrance ramp to the parkway.

"I'm almost afraid to look," said the professor.

But when they drove onto the parkway, they saw that the gate was open.

And the weather had been so warm that the snow on the parkway had melted.

The two Toyotas drove on.

When they got to where the second closed gate had been, right near the entrance road to the parking area for Sam's Knob, they found that gate open as well.

Finally, at a little after 2:00 p.m. in the afternoon, the two Toyotas arrived at the parking area for Sam's Knob.

There was a slight breeze, and some thin wispy clouds high in the air moved lazily across the sky. The sun was shining bright and warm. No one needed a coat.

They had decided to walk down to the clearing and call out to the little people for an hour. If the little people did not respond in any way by that time, they would accept that the tribe had not agreed to let them join. But if the

little people did respond, Grandpa Jack, Stanley, Laura, and Story hoped that the others would at least come by and visit....

They said that they would.

When they all got down to the clearing, they let Grandpa Jack, Stanley, Laura, and Story group together by themselves, and yell out to the little people. They began to yell out: "Little people! Little people! We wish to join your tribe, and live with you for the rest of our lives!" Moments later they were gone.

Suddenly, Grandpa Jack, Stanley, Laura, and Story appeared in front of the tribal center lodge. They arrived in the middle of the first day of trading after the Dance of a Child's Heart Playing, and there was a great amount of activity and commotion around the tribal center lodge. The four big people now little looked around, wondering what to do next. Then they saw Clear Water. But wasn't he now Dancing Bird? Surely, thought Stanley, the next few days will be confusing.

But Clear Water was again Clear Water. He had received his spirit totem back in a trade. And he had given Dancing Bird's spirit totem back to her.

"Most times that's what happens," said Clear Water. "The Dance of a Child's Heart Playing and the trading are really just games that we like to play. After all, with occasional exceptions," and he pointed at his own head, "we're all just a bunch of kids trying to have a good time."

On the front porch of the spirit healer's lodge, an old man and an old woman sat in rocking chairs, watching the village at play. The old woman's name was Old Crow. The old man's name was Dried Up Creek.

"I just got a great idea," said Old Crow.

"What is it?" asked Dried Up Creek.

"Well, I was just thinking... you know if the whole tribe agreeing can transport cars around like that...."

"Don't forget," said Dried Up Creek, "sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. No one understands the whole process.... God, I'll never forget the way that crystal ball rolled on the table when Dancing Bird set it there for Clear Water... who knows what will happen next?...."

Even while Dried Up Creek spoke, a man with a guitar sat down on a chair, on the roof of the spirit healer's lodge. The man's name was Blind Blake. He took a few minutes to tune his guitar and then, when he was ready, he starting singing and playing on the guitar. Singing and playing that "Wabash Rag"....