

## Chapter 1

I am more than life. I am spirit as well. I taste, I see, and I learn in ways that you can not understand. I am rooted deep into the earth and my arms stretch high to the heavens. Now for the first time in almost a thousand years I fear, for I can hear you coming.

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It was the season of heat and long days. When the rain from heaven shuts off, the earth becomes parched dry tinder, waiting for moisture and hoping for no fire. How long I lay dormant I have no idea. How many others like me lay underground, I do not know. We are cast forth to live or to die on our own, with no help, except for what we fear. Only through death and destruction can come birth and I was part of that new life. I know that to live one must be born but I cannot remember mine.

I also know that in the time of great heat and no rain the earth fears fire, all life fears her for she comes with no mercy, no regard for what she takes. She appears as a wisp on the air to grow into the horror that she becomes. All that live with me fear her, some more than others. She is all that I have ever feared, until now, but that is for later.

It was getting close to dusk, the air was still and the earth groaned under another heated day. In the west the sky grew dark, not from the setting sun but from the rising storm, a summer lightning storm. The earth seemed to take a deep breath collectively, as if all could wish this coming storm away. Large and small, those that could flee and those that must stand and face whatever comes, all held their breath. Out from the sea the storm came, with increasing winds that seemed to suddenly strengthen by the minute. The clouds raised their heads high, touching the heavens. They seemed to grow darker as they billowed forth, looking heavy with the promise of rain and the curse of fire.

The first lightning bolt hit far from where I lay. I never noticed. If I could see above the rest maybe I could have seen the smoke. It would have seemed so small at first, a touch of grey upon the wind. All that were near the lightning strike could smell it, could taste it, and they all feared it. The fire started over forty-five miles away from me. With one crack from the heavens a bolt of lightning hotter than the surface of the sun exploded into the dry mountainside. A mighty Doug Fir tree two hundred feet tall and over three hundred years old took the lightning's blast directly. The top of the tree blew into a thousand shards of burning embers. The power of the lightning descended through the tree and exploded out when it reached the earth. The ground, and all that was near, instantly ignited into a huge circle of flames twenty feet wide. The earth was dry and fire was hungry, it didn't take her long to turn her appetite outward.

It took three weeks for the flames to reach me as I lay dormant in my cocoon of hardened shell. The fire raged, consuming all that was above ground, except for the mighty cedars and huge Doug fir, all died. The hemlock exploded into flames and became like dust. The madrona shrieked in agony as its beautiful dry red bark burned and its branches and dry leaves curled into an inferno before dying to the fire. I was buried under earth and debris. I felt no fear. I felt no heat. I wasn't yet born.

It took a week for the fire to completely burn past where I lay. It continued its attack upon the earth unchecked for another month before the rains came and ended its appetite. It was the rain that gave me life. The flames awakened my innerbeing but the water brought me forth, brought us all forth.

By now the season of heat was gone; it was the beginning of winter, as it is called. The time when earth goes inside herself, becomes still and looks only to her own needs after a season of heat and growth and new life. The first thing I remember is the cold. A wet cold as the rain made its way down into the earth, and seemed to wake me from a deep slumber. I awoke already knowing that my struggle for life had begun. I burst forth from the earth into a strange world. My journey started with energy and a desperate attempt to reach upward and away from the cold earth into the warmth and life of the light. The mighty red cedar tree that had survived the fire was the closest thing to me, and it was over seventy-five feet away.

The alder, hemlock, and madrona that would have covered the earth's floor were gone. The forest floor was but ash after fire had her way. Day after day through the cold and dark days I reached ever higher, toward the light. I was born, I am alive, and I can now remember.

The grizzly bear was old and huge in size. He stumbled through the forest, blood flowing from the wounds about his head and neck. He had lost his domain, forced out of the fishing area that had been his for years. Now he struggled down from the high rivers, toward the sea. It was instinct that led him on. Food was easier to find at the ocean's edge. He slumped against the red cedar that was near me. It sounded like he gave a deep long groan before collapsing against the tree. His energy was about gone. Life was fleeing from him and there was little that he could do. The ocean and the promise of food called him, but it seemed so far away. The bear laid against the mighty red cedar for a day and a half, conserving his energy, trying to gain precious life to continue the journey. The wolf and the badger both came upon the bear by smelling its blood trail, yet neither attempted to get close. After a day and a half the huge bear forced itself up and started walking again. It made only another sixty feet or so before it collapsed over on its right side, gave a soft low growl, and gave up its spirit, as all life must do. It didn't take long for the wolf and badger, eagle and magpie to find the feast. The death of the mighty grizzly gave life to so many. Soon the scattered carcass had little left to feed the land and air dwellers, so the little creatures of the earth came to feed. A million little creatures started to consume and breakdown the remains of this mighty giant.

I also started to pull forth the nourishment that this giant had left behind. As I continued to reach skyward my roots tapped deep into this gift of life. Upward I grew, casting long shadows on others who competed for the precious sunlight that I coveted. The other trees and shrubs, bushes and berries couldn't compete against my growth. I became dominate. I reached toward the heavens and soon I dwarfed all those around me.

The giant red cedar tolerated me, I was no competition for him. He could have sent his roots my way to choke life from me, but he didn't. We shared the earth and the sky, the warmth and the cold. We became friends.

I will always remember that old man who entered into my domain. I could sense his every step. He was a kind, wise man, I could tell. He walked with the help of a wooden stick to give his body support. He reminded me of the old grizzly, but he was not dying. I knew he was on a mission, a holy quest. He had purpose in his stride, and his mind was

sharp, focused, he was searching for something. He stopped and looked at me, walked around me and spent ten minutes in silence, as if in prayer, before he turned his back on me and walked to the mighty red cedar tree. He stopped in front of the cedar and I knew that his quest had ended. He knelt down in front of my friend and started to sing in a soft voice. I couldn't hear his words, he was too far away, but I knew their meaning. He was praying to my friend, asking permission to take its life.

The old Indian was named Shakiawaii, which means *he who sings to the wind*. He was the spiritual leader of the village that lived by the sea two miles away. Shakiawaii had spent three days in solitude, in a small cedar house that was set apart from the village. He had eaten no food and had little water. He prayed to his gods that they could give him wisdom, guide his feet to the tree that would become the next totem for the village. He sought a holy tree, chosen not by man, but by the heavens, one that was blessed by the gods and kissed by the earth. Only a tree such as this could stand before the sea as the village totem. The old man had walked for two days once he left his solitude. Now as he stood at the base of my friend, he had found what he desired. I knew all of this because I have wisdom beyond what mortal men can understand.

Shakiawaii built a small fire carefully surrounded by stones. As night started to fall he gathered more wood and continued to pray. All through the night he kept the fire going. He often stood and walked around the tree looking up as if studying every small detail. I wondered if he could imagine in the darkness the totem already completed, each family member's crest and where it would be carved.

The next morning he departed as the sun rose. I knew that he would return soon and he would not come alone. So did the cedar. It knew that the humans would take it. Its time was coming to an end. It did not grieve. It feared death, but it looked forward to becoming a new creation, one that was revered by so many.

The entire village came when Shakiawaii returned. Over three hundred gathered around my friend. The reverence that these people offered the huge red cedar brought emotions to all of us that we didn't know we were capable of. The village prayed through an entire night, a small fire casting comforting shadows for all who were there. In the morning Shakiawaii said more words as his people stood in silent respect. Once he had finished, he reached into his leather bag and took out a black stone, razor sharp obsidian, and made one small cut at the base of the tree. Once he had completed his cut, he handed the stone to the village chief who made his cut. Then he passed the stone on until every member of the village had held the stone and had placed a small cut into my friend.

The village left and all was quiet, but we knew not for long. In a few days six men returned, set up a camp and started to cut the cedar down. They used sharpened rocks on long wooden handles. It took four days before the mighty giant fell to the earth. It took another five weeks before the totem was roughly carved and carried down to the village by over a hundred men from three different villages. The great red cedar was gone. I was now the great red cedar of the forest.

Time has no meaning to me. I watch as things change, but I know no time. I saw the village people grow and prosper, surely from the blessing of my friend. They lived in harmony with all that was around them. The salmon came and fed them when they were hungry, the deer, and the plants as well. All of nature did a delicate dance with man. Life flourished and all felt blessed.

Then I saw the white men come. He treated all things that lived without any reverence, and I knew that wolves had descended upon us. I watched in horror as the village was destroyed—by a disease that caused the people's bodies to explode with a sickening white scab and puss. It caused the people to drop dead in such great numbers

that it reminded me of autumn leaves falling to the ground. I saw the building of towns and then cities, of roads and then highways. I could taste how poisoned the air and the water became.

It was in the springtime, when life unfolds for another season, that I started to fear. I hadn't feared anything in over eight hundred years, but now once again, I know fear. I know the scream of your chainsaws and the tears of my friends that you leave behind. I am the giant red cedar of the forest, the tree given to the people by the gods in heaven. I rule all that I see, and now I am terrified. Yes, I can hear you coming.

## Chapter 2

The wind was cold as it blew through the morning sky. The weather forecast had promised a wonderful spring day and it might turn out that way, but as Mondo sat with his coffee in hand overlooking the inner harbor of Victoria, British Columbia, he felt chilled to the bone. He knew it could be more than just the weather. A hell of a lot more...