THE WIND WILL KNOW YOUR NAME

By Patricia Calvert

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AS SHE RAN down the narrow path into Crazy Horse Coulee, Katie saw Grandmother hanging the wash over two strands of barbed wire, the remnants of a pasture that once held a few horses and a couple of cows. The wind—it always blew in the coulee—flattened the old woman's faded blue dress against her stick-thin body and teased strands of hair from the silver braid hanging down her back.

"I'm home, Grandmother!" Katie called. Grandmother didn't turn to greet her. Katie hadn't expected she would.

The old woman's hearing was so poor that most of the time she was a prisoner in a silent world. She never heard the songs carried by the wind or a redtail's sharp cry as it circled overhead. If you looked straight at Grandmother when you spoke, though, you could make yourself understood. Only when Digger dashed past the old woman and charged up the slope, his red tail raised like a ragged banner over his skinny back, did Grandmother turn to see who was coming.

Katie waved. Grandmother raised one arm straight into the air in reply, five fingers spread wide against the hard blue prairie sky. The question rose up in front of Katie, as it often did lately, "What will happen to me when something happens to her?"

Deep in her bones she knew it wasn't a matter of *if* something happened to Grandmother. It was only a matter of when.

Katie darted around the answer as if it were a *sinte*, a snake, coiled and ready to strike. The social-worker people from the Bureau of Indian Affairs would descend on Crazy Horse Coulee like grasshoppers, that's what would happen.

They would take one look at the barbed-wire fence with its scraps of faded wash, at the rusty tin roof on the shack huddled near the creek, at the skeletons of dead cars along the rim of the coulee, then they'd take her away. "For your own good," they would say. As if people who worked in offices with records in their computers knew

what was best for everyone else. Long ago, the Lakotas didn't have to ask permission from anyone—not government officials or the chief of any other tribe—to go wherever or do whatever they wished. That was a time only someone as old as Grandmother could remember.

"Taya, taya!" Katie cried. "Hello, hello!" She ran to hug Grandmother. The old woman's shoulders poked up as sharp as antelope antlers under her cotton dress. Beneath Katie's fingers, the knobs of her grandmother's spine felt as smooth as river pebbles. Age had creased the old woman's brown cheeks so deeply they looked more like the hide of a lizard than human skin.

Grandmother smiled, showing a round, dark hole in her face. She'd lost her teeth long before Mama died, before Katie came to live at Crazy Horse Coulee. The dentures the government clinic gave her fit poorly, so she wore them only a few times. She put them on a shelf next to the stove, where they grinned cheerfully at friends and strangers alike.

"Oh, Grandmother, I wish there was a way to buy some colored pencils and drawing paper!" Katie exclaimed, holding the old woman at arm's length and speaking directly to her. "Then I could practice drawing even when I'm not in school." She'd meant to bring up the subject later, when Grandmother was making fry bread for supper, but the wind peeled the words off her lips and tossed them into the air before she could snatch them back.

"Pencils? Paper?" Grandmother echoed, her voice as faded as her dress.

"Mr. Finch says I have talent, Grandmother. There's going to be an art fair in Bismarck, and he told me I should—"

"Talent?" Grandmother repeated the word slowly. "We hardly have money for food," she reminded Katie.

It was true. Katie knew it as well as Grandmother. She turned away, sorry she'd brought it up, and headed for the shack. As she stepped through the door, she felt Grandmother's cool, thin hand rest lightly on her arm.

"I have saved something," she announced in a voice suddenly not thin or faded at all. "Maybe you could sell it. It might bring you enough for those things you want, those pencils and that paper."

Katie looked around the single room she'd shared with Grandmother for the past four years, ever since Mama died in the government hospital. Tuberculosis, the doctor had called it. Katie knew perfectly well Mama died because she didn't want to live anymore. (The government people didn't have an official word for broken hearts.) With Papa dead long before, then Mama gone, it meant she was an orphan, a *wablenica*. Grandmother had been the only one to turn to. The shack in Crary Horse Coulee was the only place left to call home.

Katie knew every square inch of the room. She felt her mouth go dry. There wasn't anything here anyone would buy.

Grandmother's bed, its crooked metal headboard scaly with peeling white paint, stood in one corner. Her own cot—a lumpy mattress laid on top of an old door that had been rescued from a shed out back and propped up on wood blocks—stood in the opposite corner. A wire suspended between the beds held some of the clothes she and Grandmother owned—another thin dress and a jacket for Grandmother, an extra pair of jeans and two shirts for herself.

The kitchen table, one of its four legs a quarter-inch shorter than the others, making it wobble like Grandmother herself, sat in the middle of the room. A fire hadn't been built yet in the black iron stove against the west wall, because the May sun on the tin roof had made the shack almost too warm for comfort. When summer came, the heat would be unbearable; then she and Grandmother would sleep outside under the star-pocked dome of the black prairie sky.

Nothing here to sell. Nothing.

Katie's shoulders collapsed like folded wings around her heart. It had been delicious to imagine winning a blue ribbon, its edges crisp and pleated, at the art fair Mr. Finch had talked about. Yet even as she'd dreamed the dream, Katie knew it was only that—a dream that couldn't come true.

"I have kept this a long time," Grandmother murmured, tottering on swollen feet to the side of her bed. She lifted up the worn *sina*, the quilt, and reached into a hole in the side of the mattress. She took out something flat, wrapped in brown paper, and held it against her chest.

"I meant to give this to you someday, Katie. Now is the right time." Grandmother's narrow black eyes were hard as flint in their nets of wrinkles.

"The *wasichus*, the whites, wish to buy such things. They crave to own pieces of our history, then tell themselves they know all about us." Her words were as sharp as a rabbit stick as she held the parcel out to Katie. "Someone will give you good money for this, enough to buy the things you need."

Katie loosened the brown paper. The frame around the photograph was made of deerskin and embroidered with porcupine quills dyed yellow, black, red, and white, the sacred colors of the Lakota. Katie stared at the girl in the picture. She was a stranger. Younger than Katie was herself, maybe only eight or nine years old. She wore a doeskin dress, fringed at the hem. A bone necklace hung around her neck, and she held a turkey-feather fan at her side. She returned Katie's stare across time and space with a steady gaze.

"This is *my* grandmother," Grandmother said. "That means she's your great-great-grandmother. Long ago, when we of the *Otchenti Chakowin*, the Seven Council Fires, came to live on places called reservations, a white man came with a camera. He took many pictures, and my grandmother's was one of them." Grandmother touched the face of the girl in the picture with a finger twisted by arthritis.

"When you were born, I asked your mother to give you my grandmother's name. I didn't want it to be lost, as so many things have been lost to us. If the name became yours, I knew the wind would remember it."

"She was called Katie, too?" Katie whispered, unable to take her eyes from those of the girl in the picture.

"Not in the beginning. Back then, she was called Blue Thunder, a name filled with good medicine," Grandmother said. "The old ones believed if thunder was heard when the sky was blue it meant the spirits were keeping watch." The old woman inspected the picture more closely.

"It was when the whites sent my grandmother to the mission school that they added the name Katie. After that, she was always called Katie Blue Thunder."

Katie Blue Thunder.

Moments ago, Katie's heart had felt so *asilya*, so sad. Now it filled up with something sweet and rare. Grandmother had held the picture against her heart; Katie did the same before she gave it back.

"Put this away, Grandmother. We will never sell it," she vowed. "Not to anyone. Not for food, not for pencils or paper either. If we get hungry, I'll help you gather prairie turnips. We'll make soup out of sage leaves and wild onions. I'll hunt for birds' eggs. I'll learn to throw a rabbit stick, like Grandfather did—but we won't sell our past."

Without wrapping the photograph in the brown paper, Grandmother slipped it back into its hiding place. Then she smoothed the wrapping paper out on top of the wobbly table. "It isn't the kind you wanted, but can you use this to practice on?"

"Yes," Katie said, partly to make Grandmother happy, mostly because it was better than no paper at all. There even was enough to make more than one picture. Before she began to draw, Katie went out to the yard and found a small, flat stone to put under the table leg to keep it from wobbling. It didn't matter if the table jiggled when they ate supper, but it needed to be steady if a person wanted to make pictures. She fished a three-inch stub of drawing pencil out of the pocket of her jeans and sat down.

"What will you make a picture of?" Grandmother asked as she sifted flour to make fry bread.

Katie studied the room, the two beds, the table, the stove. Digger lay in the doorway, asleep, his tail a limp red flag. Beyond the open door—there was no screen, so flies and Digger came and went as they pleased—she saw the rim of Crazy Horse Coulee, the carcasses of old cars, the sandhills in the distance. She watched as Grandmother stuffed willow twigs in the stove and started a cook fire.

"Of you," Katie said. She began to draw. The pencil stub flew across the paper with a mind of its own. Grandmother came to life: Her dress fell in folds around her body, her single braid trailed down her back, her swollen feet overran her slippers.

Grandmother came to lean over Katie's shoulder. "Is that what I look like?" she asked, surprised.

"It is how I see you, Grandmother," Katie said.

"That woman is *old*!" Grandmother exclaimed, indignant.

"You are old, Grandmother."

"I know, I know." Grandmother sighed, her voice drifting away. "Once, when my hair was as black as yours, Blue Thunder told me stories about the time of no fences, no roads, no place called a reservation. The people of the Seven Council Fires went

freely everywhere, as did the deer and the antelope. Blue Thunder told me—" Grandmother paused and was silent.

"What did she tell you, Grandmother?" The best thing about living in Crazy Horse Coulee was listening to Grandmother's tales about how things used to be. Grandmother poured cooking oil in a fry pan and began to roll out the bread. As she worked, she began a story about the day Blue Thunder put on a doeskin dress the color of milk, mounted a fine painted pony, and rode to meet Eagle Catcher, her beloved. Katie listened, let the words and names wash over her, and savored the rich smell of frying bread.

After art class, Mr. Finch studied the picture of Grandmother for so long that Katie's palms got slick with sweat. if only she'd had better paper, not old, crackly brown wrapping paper. She should have drawn a picture of Digger, or even of the bare sandhills, not of a lean old woman with a braid hanging down her back. Mr. Finch must think the picture of Grandmother—the thin dress hiding none of her scrawniness, her cheeks hollow because her teeth smiled down from a shelf—was so ugly he couldn't think of anything to say.

"It's a fine piece of work, Katie," he said at last.

"It was the only paper I had," she explained.

"That's part of the charm of this portrait," Mr. Finch said with a smile. He called it a *portrait*, not a mere picture. "Who is this lady?"

"My grandmother," Katie said.

"The paper you used is as thoroughly itself as your grandmother is. Some artists would say it was a lucky accident it's all you had."

Strange! To think an accident could be lucky. The ones Katie knew about—Papa drinking too much at the Crossroads Bar six years ago on a bitter January night, falling into a ditch beside the road, then freezing to death before morning—weren't the lucky kind.

"I have an old box of colored pencils in my desk," Mr. Finch said. "I haven't used them in a long while. Would you like to take them home and experiment with them? I have some paper you can have, too."

Katie's face felt hot. She bent her head so Mr. Finch couldn't see the bright spots she knew had bloomed on her cheeks. "That would be *ayuco,*" she whispered. "That would be very good."

Mr. Finch collected the pencils from his desk. Several were like the piece she already had, hardly more than stubs, but the colors were still bright. "Here's a sharpener, too," he said, adding a blue plastic one like little kids used in first grade. He found several sheets of paper in another drawer, a few tinted pale blue, peach, yellow, or gray. "Sometimes a colored ground—you know, a tinted background—can add a special effect to an artist's work," he said.

An artist's work. Mr. Finch said it as if he considered she was one already. Only three words, but Katie tucked them away to be taken out later. She'd polish them, as she'd polished the agate she found in the creek last summer. She'd rubbed it

until it gleamed and kept it in a tin can next to her bed. She'd do the same with Mr. Finch's words, polish them until they gleamed.

When Katie leaped down the slope into Crazy Horse Coulee after school, Digger ran to meet her, more eager than usual. The sky was still blue, but overnight the prairie weather had turned sharply cold. Katie was surprised to see that no smoke curled up from the crooked chimney poking out of the tin roof of the shack beside the creek.

She ran in, breathless, to find Grandmother standing at the fly-specked window next to the unlit stove.

"I've been waiting for you," she said. She smiled, the round cavity in her wrinkled face as dark as the entrance of a cave.

"Look, Grandmother!" Katie exclaimed. "See what Mr. Finch gave me—pencils in every color—paper, and a sharpener, too!"

Grandmother shuffled to the table and studied the things Katie had spread out. "Now you have what you need, Katie," she said. "It's because I heard thunder behind the sandhills today. I knew the spirits were looking out for you."

When Katie turned, she saw Grandmother lightly tap her own chest with a gnarled middle finger. She looked past Katie's shoulder, out the door, which was open, as if she saw something coming. Katie turned. Maybe three or four *sungnini*, wild horses, had come to the creek for water. If they had, she'd catch them on paper, their manes and tails thick as ropes, their eyes wild and white-ringed.

She felt Grandmother lean against her and reached out to steady the old woman. Grandmother's breath brushed her cheek as lightly as a butterfly's wing.

"Are you dizzy, Grandmother?" Katie asked. "Let me help you lie down. It always makes you feel better, remember?" She guided her grandmother toward the bed with its peeling metal frame and lifted the old woman's legs onto the quilt. Grandmother's ankles were darker and puffier than usual, and her flesh was cool.

"You'll be all right in a moment, Grandmother," Katie promised. She knew she was speaking more to herself than to Grandmother. "You should have waited for me to haul water from the creek," she scolded gently, "but I will make our supper tonight so that you can rest."

Grandmother sighed, folded her hands across her narrow chest, and closed her eyes. Katie watched as the lines in the old woman's face eased, almost the same way the wrinkles had been smoothed out of the brown wrapping paper yesterday.

"Don't be afraid, Katie Blue Thunder," Grandmother whispered. "No matter where you go, or what kind of pictures you draw, the wind will always know your name."

What will happen to me when something happens to her?

It was the question Katie had darted around for four years, as if it were a rattlesnake coiled under a clump of sagebrush. She knelt beside the bed, rested her hand on Grandmother's arm, and saw the blue fabric of the old woman's dress rise and fall with her shallow breaths. Digger came close, and Katie felt him press his shoulder against her hip. She laid her right hand against the smooth crown of Digger's head.

The light in the room dimmed. A fire should be started soon. She'd make fry bread for supper. She'd remember to haul extra water from the creek so Grandmother wouldn't need to do anything tomorrow.

Katie wasn't sure when the blue fabric covering Grandmother's chest ceased to move, when the shallow breathing stopped. When she realized it had, she stayed right where she was, on her knees beside the bed, one hand on Grandmother's arm, the other resting on Digger's head.

"Don't be afraid," Grandmother had said. Katie swallowed hard. A fly buzzed against the window next to the stove. Cold air slithered across the floor like a *sinte*. Digger whined softly.

"I won't, Grandmother," Katie whispered. But she was.

The social-worker people were almost kind when they came. The tallest one was even Lakota. No one announced—not right away, anyway that they knew what was best for her. "Don't worry. We'll find a place for you" was all they said.

"What about Digger?" Katie asked. He was Grandmother's dog. Without her, he was a *wablenica*, too.

"You won't be able to take the dog with you," one of the social workers answered briskly.

"Of course she can," said the tall one who was Lakota.

When Mr. Finch brought the blue ribbon back from the art fair in Bismarck, it looked just like the one Katie had imagined in her dreams-shiny, its edges crisp and pleated. "This is only the first of many prizes you'll win," he said. Katie felt her cheeks get warm; this time she didn't lower her head.

The picture she'd drawn of Grandmother on a piece of light blue paper was the way she wanted to remember her. Not lying motionless on a bed whose metal headboard was scaly with peeling paint, but a lean woman who stood tall, her hand raised high in the air, five fingers spread against the hard prairie sky, a thin dress pressed flat against her body.

Beyond Grandmother were the skeletons of cars on the rim of Crazy Horse Coulee. Farther away, in the sandhills, were swiftly sketched figures to show that *sungnini* were still out there, running wild and free.

In the right-hand corner of the drawing, Katie had added her name. Katie Blue Thunder. The wind would remember her, even after she'd followed one of the roads that led away from the reservation like the spokes from a wheel.