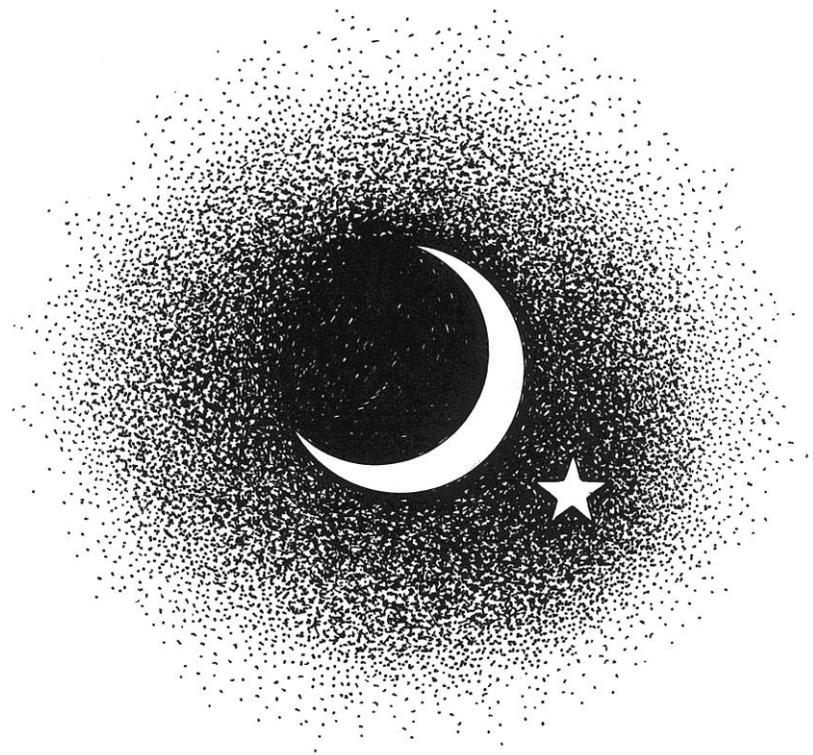




Little Fox and the Golden Hawk

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Little Fox and the Golden Hawk

The hunt is over. There is meat for all. And when the feasting is done, the old men and women draw the younger Indians to the fire — and the stories begin.

There are many stories, many legends. Each tribe has its own stories and its own traditions. But there is only one that ends with a promise.

Once long ago before time existed, in the valley of the rainbows lived a tribe of Indians. They were a peaceful people who lived in harmony with themselves, the land, and its creatures. Their chief, Gentle Bear, was known for his wisdom and courage.

Gentle Bear had two young daughters — Silver Doe and Little Fox. Silver Doe, the elder, was pretty and lively and interested in all the things girls are supposed to be interested in.

And then there was Little Fox. Little Fox was quiet; she kept to herself. But in that quietness dwelt a love of freedom, a fierce love of life. Little Fox was like the ponies that run wild on the prairie or like the eagle that soars overhead. Little Fox was different.

The days passed quickly for the tribe. The men spent their time in hunting and riding. The women

cooked, wove, and farmed. The boys spent the mornings learning the men's work while the girls learned the chores of the women.



As soon as Little Fox finished her morning duties, she would run out to the prairie. She loved the prairie. She knew the names of all the creatures and all the plants. And they knew her. The birds would perch on her shoulder. The moose and deer did not run at her approach but would graze nearby. The wild herds of ponies would let her walk among them and pull their manes and tails.

For Little Fox, there was always something new to discover, something wonderful to learn.

In those days the Indians lived according to the Way. The Way was not a set of laws or rules that were written or even passed down by word of mouth. But somehow each child grew up knowing how to behave according to the Way.

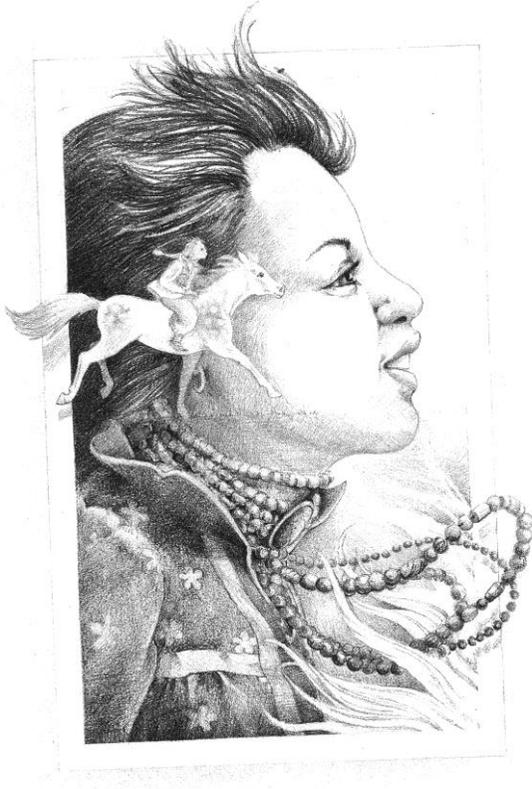
The Way was rarely violated. It had never happened in Gentle Bear's time or even his father's or grandfather's time. But there were stories from the distant past telling of Indians who had dared to violate the Way.

The violations were usually the result of greed or envy or hatred. As punishment, the wrongdoers were called renegades and forced to leave the tribe. This exile usually meant death, for an Indian alone could not survive.

But now there came one among the tribe who began to violate the Way. Only this time it was out of innocence. It was Little Fox.

One morning after her chores, Little Fox raced out to the prairie. She was particularly excited that day because she sensed that a new herd of ponies had entered the valley. When approaching a new herd, Little Fox never rushed right in. She always gave the

ponies time to get to know her. This time, she stood about a hundred feet from them and just watched.



After some time she noticed a small grey pony on the edge of the herd. His coat was all grey swirls, some dark, some light. He had his head down, grazing.

Then into her mind came a name — Storm. And she said it out loud.

“Storm.”

The pony lifted his head and looked at Little Fox. Again the thought came to her. “Storm.” The pony once more turned to look at Little Fox. This continued for some time until Little Fox sensed that the herd was ready to move further out onto the prairie.

But she couldn't stop saying, “Storm, Storm.”

As the herd moved off, the pony stood his ground. Slowly Little Fox took one step toward the pony, and the pony took one step toward Little Fox. Soon she was standing right in front of him. She reached out and stroked his mane.

Storm followed her home that day.

There was great confusion as Little Fox and the pony entered the village. The Way had been violated. Only men could own horses, not women.

After the confusion died down, the Council met. It was dawn before a decision was reached. They had two choices.

The first was to kill the pony. But that would have been a violation of the Way, for the only animals allowed to be killed were those needed for food or clothing and those too sick or too weak to survive on their own.

Was the tribe to violate the way in order to preserve it? They took the second choice.

Little Fox would be allowed to keep the pony, but no one would help her to train it. So the pony might follow her around like a dog, but she would never ride it.

Well, Little Fox had watched the fathers and brothers help the young men train the wild ponies, so she began. Within two weeks she and Storm were riding out on the prairie. She rode without bridle or blanket. She gripped Storm's mane and off they flew.

The tribe was surprised to see Little Fox and Storm riding across the prairie. Once again the Council met. They talked until dawn but no decision was reached.

With time, there was born an acceptance and partial understanding of Little Fox, and everything else went according to the Way. Thus the days passed peacefully and joyfully for Gentle Bear, his children, and the tribe.

As the years went by, Little Fox and Silver Doe became young women and the time came to choose husbands for them. Silver Doe was the eldest, so she would be the first.

One quiet spring day, a handsome young brave rode into the valley. Little Fox saw him long before he entered the village. Her heart was drawn to him, but he didn't notice her.

His name was Dark Moon. He spent many days in the village hunting with the other braves and winning the hearts of the prettiest maidens. Silver Doe caught his eye and kept him near, while Little Fox was unable to win even a smile.



One day, her heart breaking, Little Fox ran to Gentle Bear crying, "I love Dark Moon, Father.

Every day I send my love out to him. It goes out from my heart on a thin golden thread. It enters his heart, but he doesn't send anything back. I don't understand.

“I send my love to you and the others and it comes back. Even the ponies and the trees send back to me. Dark Moon must love me, Father, or he wouldn't accept my love. I don't understand.”

She began to sob and sob. Gentle Bear held her close and rocked her in his arms. He wanted to tell her, “Dark Moon doesn't see who you really are, Little One, and even if he did, he could not love as you do.” But in his wisdom Gentle Bear only said, “Dark Moon loves another, Little Fox. Let him go.”

Little Fox cried for days. But finally the tears lessened and she could hear Storm and her other prairie friends calling her to come out again. So she mounted Storm and together they rode out from the village onto the prairie.

The years passed, and their passing brought times of prosperity for the tribe. Silver Doe married Dark Moon. Many of the others also married and began families.

And still Little Fox roamed the prairie. Gentle Bear would watch her ride out every morning and ride back at dusk. He watched her innocently violate the Way time and time again. And he knew why.

One day Little Fox was out exploring the prairie, something which she loved to do. But this day she happened to look up to the mountains.

The prairie was surrounded on all four sides by mountains. The Indians never ventured into those mountains, though, for they were sacred. The legends said that the mountain goddess loved her solitude and that any Indian's step within her domain would bring her displeasure.

There were stories that long ago one or two had gone up into the mountains. But they had never returned. So now there was fear in the tribe and no one went forth. Except for one.

As Little Fox watched the mountains day after day, she wondered what they were like. What color were the flowers? What songs did the birds sing? What trees and plants lived in those beautiful mountains? Her desire to know the mountains and her love for them grew.

One bright summer's day Little Fox turned Storm's head toward the highest of the mountains and began to ride, higher and higher. The air was sweet, and the wind whispered through the pines, caressing her cheek like a mother's touch.

Soon she came to a brook, crystal clear and sparkling. She got off Storm to let him drink. When

she looked across the stream, she saw a handsome young chieftain mounted on a dappled grey horse. His headdress was of golden feathers; his eyes were black and shone like brilliant gems.

He spoke her name, “Little Fox, welcome. Your mother and I have been waiting for you.”

Little Fox was startled. “How do you know my name? I have no mother, only Gentle Bear.”

She jumped onto Storm's back. But before she could ride away, he spoke once more. “Little Fox, know me by my true name. I am the Golden Hawk. Call me if ever you are in need.”

Little Fox jerked Storm's head around and together they raced down the mountain to the village. Gentle Bear saw her ride in. He waited for her to come to him.

She ran into his arms crying, “Gentle Bear, I rode into the mountains today. I know it is forbidden, but I had to know. I came to a stream and there was a brave there with a headdress of golden feathers. He knew my name. He said I had a mother. But I don't have a mother. I just have you.” She began to cry.

Gentle Bear held her again. Then he lifted up her chin with his hand, looked into her eyes and said,

“Little Fox, my precious Little Fox, the time has come to tell you of your beginning.

“I have guarded the secret for many years. Now you should know. It was from the mountain you came, and it is to the mountain you will return.



“It was the summer solstice, many years ago. The moon was full and high in the sky. The village slept. And the silence was so deep that the valley itself seemed asleep.

“I awoke to the sound of soft hoof beats entering the village. I stepped outside and saw her. She was the most beautiful maiden I have ever seen. Her long black hair fell to her waist. She wore a white doeskin. On her shoulder sat a golden hawk and by her side stood a great red fox. In her arms was a sleeping child.

“She looked at me for a long time and then, as if satisfied, laid the sleeping babe in my arms, saying: ‘Gentle Bear, this is my child. I give her to you to raise. Teach her the way of the valley; and when she has learned her lessons well, I will call her home. She will hear that call as the wind whispering through the forest pines. Name her Little Fox for she will have that same curiosity, the desire to learn, for which the mountain fox is known.’

“I looked down at the sleeping child, and when I looked up, the maiden was gone. No one knows her name but the mountain is her home. She rules there — the Mountain Goddess.

“So, Little One, it seems the time has come to meet your mother and the Golden Hawk. You will find that both are dear to you.

“I have heard stories of the Hawk. It is said he is wise and strong and brave. They say he has waited centuries for a bride, for a woman who could match his wisdom and his courage. And you, my Little Fox,

have become such a woman. So when you are ready, you will go. Until then, this valley is your home and it will always be so.”

Little Fox lay awake that night. When the dawn first streaked the sky, she rose and went to Gentle Bear. She kissed him softly as he slept. Then she and Storm rode out of the valley and into the mountains.



At first she rode slowly, for the valley still tugged at her. But as she rode higher, the pull lessened. The silence deepened. And the wind in the forest pines whispered her name.

When she came to the stream, Golden Hawk was waiting. Little Fox got off Storm and held out her hand. Golden Hawk lifted her across the stream. They mounted their horses and rode up into the mountains. They were never seen again.

The valley was not forgotten though. For it is said that on the summer solstice when the moon is high in the sky, a child may see a red fox walking in the shadows and a golden hawk flying low. But there is more, for this is the only legend that ends with a promise.

The Mountain Goddess promised Little Fox that every soul that Little Fox loved would find a way home. To ensure this, the legend says that deep in the mountains by the stream of crystalline waters wait Little Fox and her Golden Hawk.

They wait by the stream of crystalline waters, and they call each name. So when the moon is full, listen. Listen and you may hear them whisper your name. And, finally, you may go home.