

THE

NIGHT

WATCHMAN

A NOVEL

LOUISE ERDRICH

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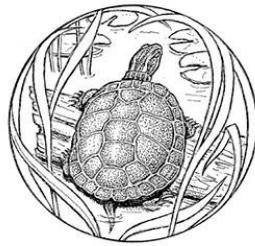
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Dedication

To Aunishenabay, Patrick Gourneau; to his daughter Rita, my mother; and to all of the American Indian leaders who fought against termination.

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About the Publisher

Author's Note

On August 1, 1953, the United States Congress announced House Concurrent Resolution 108, a bill to abrogate nation-to-nation treaties, which had been made with American Indian Nations for “as long as the grass grows and the rivers flow.” The announcement called for the eventual termination of all tribes, and the immediate termination of five tribes, including the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa.

My grandfather Patrick Gourneau fought against termination as tribal chairman while working as a night watchman. He hardly slept, like my character Thomas Wazhashk. This book is fiction. But all the same, I have tried to be faithful to my grandfather's extraordinary life. Any failures are my own. Other than Thomas, and the Turtle Mountain Jewel Bearing Plant, the only other major character who resembles anyone alive or dead is Senator Arthur V. Watkins, relentless pursuer of Native dispossession and the man who interrogated my grandfather.

Pixie, or—excuse me—Patrice, is completely fictional.

September 1953

Turtle Mountain Jewel Bearing Plant

Thomas Wazhashk removed his thermos from his armpit and set it on the steel desk alongside his scuffed briefcase. His work jacket went on the chair, his lunch box on the cold windowsill. When he took off his padded tractor hat, a crab apple fell from the earflap. A gift from his daughter Fee. He caught the apple and put it out on the desktop to admire. Then punched his time card. Midnight. He picked up the key ring, a company flashlight, and walked the perimeter of the main floor.

In this quiet, always quiet expanse, Turtle Mountain women spent their days leaning into the hard light of their task lamps. The women pasted micro-thin slices of ruby, sapphire, or the lesser jewel, garnet, onto thin upright spindles in preparation for drilling. The jewel bearings would be used in Defense Department ordnance and in Bulova watches. This was the first time there had ever been manufacturing jobs near the reservation, and women filled most of these coveted positions. They had scored much higher on tests for manual dexterity.

The government attributed their focus to Indian blood and training in Indian beadwork. Thomas thought it was their sharp eyes—the women of his tribe could spear you with a glance. He'd been lucky to get his own job. He was smart and honest, but he wasn't young and skinny anymore. He got the job because he was reliable and he knocked himself out to do all that he did as perfectly as he could do it. He made his inspections with a rigid thoroughness.

As he moved along, he checked the drilling room, tested every lock, flipped the lights on and off. At one point, to keep his blood flowing, he did a short fancy dance, then threw in a Red River jig. Refreshed, he stepped through the reinforced doors of the acid washing room, with its rows of numbered beakers, pressure dial, hose, sink, and washing stations. He checked the offices, the green-and-white-tiled bathrooms, and ended up back at the machine shop. His desk pooled with light from the defective lamp that he had rescued and repaired for himself, so that he could read, write, cogitate, and from time to time slap himself awake.

Thomas was named for the muskrat, wazhashk, the lowly, hardworking, water-loving rodent. Muskrats were everywhere on the slough-dotted reservation. Their small supple forms slipped busily through water at dusk, continually perfecting their burrows, and eating (how they loved to eat) practically anything growing or moving in a slough. Although the wazhashkag were numerous and ordinary, they were also crucial. In the beginning, after the great flood, it was a muskrat who had helped remake the earth.

In that way, as it turned out, Thomas was perfectly named.

Lard on Bread

Pixie Paranteau dabbed cement onto a jewel blank and fixed it to the block for drilling. She plucked up the prepared jewel and placed it in its tiny slot on the drilling card. She did things perfectly when enraged. Her eyes focused, her thoughts narrowed, breathing slowed. The nickname Pixie had stuck to her since childhood, because of her upturned eyes. Since graduating high school, she was trying to train everyone to call her Patrice. Not Patsy, not Patty, not Pat. But even her best friend refused to call her Patrice. And her best friend was sitting right next to her, also placing jewel blanks in endless tiny rows. Not as fast as Patrice, but second fastest of all the girls and women. The big room was quiet except for the buzzing light fixtures. Patrice's heartbeat slowed. No, she was not a Pixie, though her figure was small and people said wawiyazhinaagozi, which was hatefully translated to mean that she looked *cute*. Patrice was not cute. Patrice had a job. Patrice was above petty incidents like Bucky Duvall and his friends giving her that ride to nowhere, telling people how she'd been willing to do something she had not done. Nor would she ever. And just look at Bucky now. Not that she was to blame for what happened to his face. Patrice didn't do those kinds of things. Patrice would also be above finding the brown bile of her father's long binge on the blouse she'd left drying in the kitchen. He was home, snarling, spitting, badgering, weeping, threatening her little brother, Pokey, and begging Pixie for a dollar, no, a quarter, no, a dime. Even a tiny dime? Trying to pinch his fingers and his fingers not meeting together. No, she was not that Pixie who had hidden the knife and helped her mother haul him to a cot in the shed, where he would sleep until the poison drained out.

That morning, Patrice had put on an old blouse, walked out to the big road, and for the first time caught a ride with Doris Lauder and Valentine Blue. Her best friend had the most poetical name and wouldn't even call her Patrice. In the car Valentine had sat in front. Said, "Pixie, how's the backseat? I hope you're comfortable."

"Patrice," said Patrice.

Nothing from Valentine.

Valentine! Chatting away with Doris Lauder about how to make a cake with coconut on top. Coconut. Was there a coconut patch somewhere in a thousand square miles? Valentine. Wearing a burnt orange-gold circle skirt. Pretty as a sunset. Never even turning around. Flexing her hands in new gloves so that Patrice could see and admire, though from the backseat. And then with Doris exchanging tips on getting a stain of red wine from a napkin. As if Valentine had ever owned a napkin? And drank red wine except out in the bush? And now treating Patrice like she didn't even know her because Doris Lauder was a white girl new to the jewel plant, a secretary, and using her family car to get to work. And Doris had offered to pick up Valentine and Valentine had said, "My friend Pixie is on the way too, if you . . ."

And included her, which was what a best friend should do, but then ignored her and refused to use her real name, her confirmation name, the name by which she would—maybe embarrassing to say but she thought it anyway—the name by which she would rise in the world.

Mr. Walter Vold stepped down the line of women, hands behind his back, lurkishly observing their work. He left his office every few hours to inspect each station. He wasn't old, but his legs were thin and creaky. His knees jerked up each time he took a step. There was an uneven scratching sound today. Probably his pants, which were black and of a shiny stiff material. There was the squeak of shoe edge against the floor. He paused behind her. In his hand, a magnifying glass. He leaned his sweaty shoebox jaw over her shoulder and breathed stale coffee. She kept working, and her fingers didn't shake.

"Excellent work, Patrice."

See? Ha!

He went on. Scratch. Squeak. But Patrice didn't turn and wink at Valentine. Patrice didn't gloat. She could feel her period starting, but she'd pinned a clean folded rag to her underwear. Even that. Yes, even that.

At noon, the women and the few men who also worked in the plant went into a small room where there was supposed to be a cafeteria. It contained a full kitchen, but cooks had not yet been hired to prepare lunch, so the women sat down to eat the food they had brought. Some had lunch boxes, some had lard buckets. Some just brought dishes covered with a flour sack. But usually those were to share. Patrice had a syrup bucket, yellow, scraped to the metal, and full of raw dough. That's right. She had grabbed it going out, so rattled by her father's raving that she'd run out the door, forgetting that before breakfast she had meant to cook the dough into gullet bread using her mother's frypan. And she hadn't even eaten breakfast. For the past two hours she'd been sucking in her stomach, trying to quell the growls. Valentine had of course noticed. But now she was of course talking to Doris. Patrice ate a pinch of dough. It wasn't bad. Valentine looked into Patrice's bucket, saw the dough, and laughed.

"I forgot to cook it," said Patrice.

Valentine looked pityingly at her, but another woman, a married woman named Saint Anne, laughed when she heard what Patrice said. Word went out that dough was in Patrice's bucket. That she'd forgotten to cook it, bake it, fry it. Patrice and Valentine were the youngest girls working on the floor, hired just out of high school. Nineteen years old. Saint Anne pushed a buttered bun across the table to Patrice. Someone handed an oatmeal cookie down the line. Doris gave her half a bacon sandwich. Patrice had made a joke. Patrice was about to laugh and make another joke.

"All you ever have is lard on bread," said Valentine.

Patrice shut her mouth. Nobody said anything. Valentine was trying to say that was poor people food. But everybody ate lard on bread with salt and pepper.

"That sounds good. Anybody have a piece?" said Doris. "Break me off some."

"Here," said Curly Jay, who got her name for her hair when she was little. The name stuck even though her hair was now stick-straight.

Everybody looked at Doris as she tried the lard on bread.

"Not half bad," she pronounced.

Patrice looked pityingly at Valentine. Or was it Pixie who did that? Anyway, lunchtime was over and now her stomach wouldn't growl all afternoon. She said thank you, loudly, to the whole table, and went into the bathroom. There were two stalls. Valentine was the only other woman in

the bathroom. Patrice recognized her brown shoes with the scuffs painted over. They were both on their times.

“Oh no,” said Valentine through the partition. “Oh, it’s bad.”

Patrice opened her purse, struggled with her thoughts, then handed one of her folded rags beneath the wooden divider. It was clean, white, bleached. Valentine took it out of her hand.

“Thanks.”

“Thanks who?”

A pause.

“Thank you damn well much. Patrice.” Then a laugh. “You saved my ass.”

“Saved your flat ass.”

Another laugh. “Your ass is flatter.”

Crouched on the toilet, Patrice pinned on her new pad. She wrapped the used one in toilet paper and then in a piece of newspaper that she’d kept for this purpose. She slipped out of the stall, after Valentine, and thrust the rag pad down deep into the trash bin. She washed her hands with powdered soap, adjusted the dress shields in her armpits, smoothed her hair, and reapplied her lipstick. When she walked out, most of the others were already at work. She flew into her smock and switched on her lamp.

By the middle of the afternoon, her shoulders began to blaze. Her fingers cramped and her flat ass was numb. The line leaders reminded the women to stand, stretch, and focus their eyes on the distant wall. Then roll their eyes. Focus again on the wall. Once their eyes were refreshed they worked their hands, flexing their fingers, kneading their swollen knuckles. Then back to the slow, calm, mesmeric toil. Relentlessly, the ache returned. But it was almost time for break, fifteen minutes, taken row by row, so that everyone could use the bathroom. A few women went to the lunchroom to smoke. Doris had prepared a precious pot of coffee. Patrice drank hers standing, holding her saucer in the air. When she sat down again she felt better and went into a trance of concentration. As long as her shoulders or back didn’t hurt, this hypnotic state of mind could carry her along for an hour and maybe two. It reminded Patrice of the way she felt when beading with her mother. Beading put them both into a realm of calm concentration. They murmured to each other lazily while they plucked up and matched the beads with the tips of their needles. In the jewel plant, women also spoke in dreamy murmurs.

“Please, ladies.”

Mr. Vold forbade speech. Still, they did speak. They hardly remembered what they said, later, but they talked to one another all day. Near the end of the afternoon, Joyce Asiginak carried the new boules out for slicing and the process kept going and kept going.

Doris Lauder also took them home. And this time Valentine turned around to involve Patrice in their conversation, which was good because Pixie needed to take her mind off her father. Would he still be there? Doris’s parents had a farm on the reservation. They had bought the land from the bank back in 1910 when Indian land was all people had to sell. Sell or die. The land was advertised everywhere, for sale, cheap. There were only a few good pieces of farmland on the reservation, and the Lauders had a tall silver silo you could see all the way from town. She dropped Patrice off first, offered to drive her down the iffy path to the house, but Patrice said no thanks. She didn’t want Doris to see their crumpled doorway, the scrim of junk. And her father would hear the car, stumble out, and try pestering Doris into giving him a ride to town.

Patrice walked down the grass road, stood in the trees to watch for her father’s presence. The

lean-to was open. She walked quietly past and stooped to enter the doorway of the house. It was a simple pole and mud rectangle, unimproved, low and leaning. Somehow her family never got on the tribal housing list. The stove was lighted and Patrice's mother had water boiling for tea. Besides her parents there was her skinny brother, Pokey. Her sister, Vera, had applied to the Placement and Relocation Office and gone to Minneapolis with her new husband. They got some money to set up a place to live, and training for a job. Many people came back within a year. Some, you never heard from again.

Vera's laugh was loud and bright. Patrice missed how she changed everything—bursting through the tension in the house, lighting up the gloom. Vera made fun of everything, down to the slop pail where they pissed on winter nights and the way their mother scolded them for stepping over their brother's or father's things, or trying to cook when they had their periods. She even laughed at their father, when he came home shkwebii. Raving like a damn boiled rooster, said Vera.

He was home now and no Vera to point out his sagging beltless pants or the shaggy mess of his hair. No Vera to hold her nose and twinkle her eyes. No way to pretend away the relentless shame of him. Or fend him off. And all the rest. The dirt floor buckling underneath a thin layer of linoleum. Patrice took a cup of tea behind the blanket, to the bed she had grown up sharing with her sister. They had a window back there, which was good in spring and fall when they liked looking into the woods, and terrible in winter and summer when they either froze or went crazy because of the flies and mosquitoes. She could hear her father and mother. He was pleading hard, but still too sick to get mean.

"Just a penny or two. A dollar, sweet face, and I will go. I will not be here. I will leave you alone. You will have your time to yourself without me the way you told me you want. I will stay away. You will never have to set your eyes on me."

On and on he went in this way as Patrice sipped her tea and watched the leaves turning yellow on the birch. When she had drunk the faintly sugared last sip, she put down her cup and changed into jeans, busted-out shoes, and a checkered blouse. She pinned up her hair and went around the blanket. She ignored her father—lanky shins, flapping shoes—and showed her mother the raw dough in her lunch bucket.

"It's still good," said her mother, mouth twisting up in a tiny smile. She gathered the dough from the bucket and laid it out in her frying pan, using one smooth motion. Sometimes the things her mother did from lifelong repetition looked like magic tricks.

"Pixie, oh Pixie, my little dolly girl?" Her father gave a loud wail. Patrice went outside, walked over to the woodpile, pulled the ax from the stump, and split a piece of log. Then she chopped stove lengths for a while. She even carried the wood over and stacked it beside the door. This part was Pokey's job, but he was learning how to box after school. So she went on chopping. With her father home, she needed something big to do. Yes, she was small, but she was naturally strong. She liked the reverberation of metal on wood on wood along her arms. And thoughts came to her while she swung the ax. What she would do. How she would act. How she would make people into her friends. She didn't just stack the wood, she stacked the wood in a pattern. Pokey teased her about her fussy woodpiles. But he looked up to her. She was the first person in the family to have a job. Not a trapping, hunting, or berry-gathering job, but a white-people job. In the next town. Her mother said nothing but implied that she was grateful. Pokey had this year's school shoes. Vera had had a plaid dress, a Toni home permanent, white anklets, for her trip to Minneapolis. And Patrice was putting a bit of every paycheck away in order to follow Vera, who had maybe disappeared.

The Watcher

Time to write. Thomas positioned himself, did the Palmer Method breathing exercises he had learned in boarding school, and uncapped his pen. He had a new pad of paper from the mercantile, tinted an eye-soothing pale green. His hand was steady. He would start with official correspondence and treat himself, at the end, with letters to his son Archie and daughter Ray. He'd have liked to write to his oldest, Lawrence, but had no address for him yet. Thomas wrote first to Senator Milton R. Young, congratulating him on his work to provide electricity to rural North Dakota, and requesting a meeting. Next he wrote to the county commissioner, congratulating him on the repair of a tarred road, and requesting a meeting. He wrote to his friend the newspaper columnist Bob Cory and suggested a date for him to tour the reservation. He replied at length to several people who had written to the tribe out of curiosity.

After his official letters were finished, Thomas turned to Ray's birthday card and letter. *Can it really be another year? Seems like no time at all since I was admiring a tiny face and tuft of brown hair. I do believe the first moment you spied me, you gave me a wink that said, "Don't worry, Daddy, I am 100% worth all the trouble I just caused Mama." You kept your promise, in fact your mama and I would say you kept it 200%. . . .* His flowing script rapidly filled six pages of thoughts and news. But when he paused to read over what he had written, he could not remember having written it, though the penmanship was perfect. Doggone. He tapped his head with his pen. He had written in his sleep. Tonight was worse than most nights. Because then he could not remember what he had read. It went back and forth, him writing, then reading, forgetting what he wrote, then forgetting what he read, then writing all over again. He refused to stop himself, but gradually he began to feel uneasy. He had the sense that someone was in the darkened corners of the room. Someone watching. He put his pen down slowly and then turned in his chair, peered over his shoulder at the stilled machines.

A frowsty-headed little boy crouched on top of the band saw. Thomas shook his head, blinked, but the boy was still there, dark hair sticking up in a spiky crest. He was wearing the same yellow-brown canvas vest and pants that Thomas had worn as a third-grade student at the government boarding school in Fort Totten. The boy looked like somebody. Thomas stared at the spike-haired boy until he turned back into a motor. "I need to soak my head," said Thomas. He slipped into the bathroom. Ducked his head under the cold water tap and washed his face. Then punched his time card for his second round.

This time, he moved slowly, shifting forward, as if against a heavy wind. His feet dragged, but his mind cleared once he finished.

Thomas hitched his pants to keep the ironing crisp, and sat. Rose put creases in his shirtsleeves, too. Used starch. Even in dull clay-green work clothes, he looked respectable. His

collar never flopped. But he wanted to flop. The chair was padded, comfortable. Too comfortable. Thomas opened his thermos. It was a top-of-the-line Stanley, a gift from his oldest daughters. They had given him this thermos to celebrate his salaried position. He poured a measure of black coffee into the steel cover that was also a cup. The warm metal, the gentle ridges, the rounded feminine base of the cap, were pleasant to hold. He allowed his eyelids a long and luxurious blink each time he drank. Nearly slipped over the edge. Jerked awake. Fiercely commanded the dregs in the cup to do their work.

He often talked to things on this job.

Thomas opened his lunch box. He always promised himself to eat lightly, so as not to make himself sleepier, but the effort to stay awake made him hungry. Chewing momentarily perked him up. He ate cold venison between two slabs of Rose's champion yeast bread. A gigantic carrot he had grown. The sour little apple cheered him. He saved a small chunk of commodity cheese and a jelly-soaked bun for breakfast.

The lavishness of the venison sandwich reminded him of the poor threads of meat between the thin rounds of gullet that he and his father had eaten, that hard year, on the way to Fort Totten. There were moments in the hunger he would never forget. How those tough threads of meat salvaged from the deer's bones were delectable. How he'd torn into that food, tearful with hunger. Even better than the sandwich he ate now. He finished it, swept the crumbs into his palm, and threw them into his mouth, a habit from the lean days.

One of his teachers down in Fort Totten was fanatical about the Palmer Method of penmanship. Thomas had spent hour after hour making perfect circles, writing left to right, then the opposite, developing the correct hand muscles and proper body position. And of course, the breathing exercises. All that was now second nature. The capital letters were especially satisfying. He often devised sentences that began with his favorite capitals. Rs and Qs were his art. He wrote on and on, hypnotizing himself, until at last he passed out and came awake, drooling on his clenched fist. Just in time to punch the clock and make his final round. Before picking up the flashlight, he put on his jacket and removed a cigar from his briefcase. He unwrapped the cigar, inhaled its aroma, tucked it into his shirt pocket. At the end of this round he would smoke it outside.

This was the blackest hour. Night a stark weight outside the beam of his flashlight. He switched it off, once, to listen for the patterns of creaks and booms peculiar to the building. There was an unusual stillness. The night was windless, rare on the plains. Just inside the big service doors, he lighted his cigar. He sometimes smoked at his desk, but liked the fresh air to clear his head. Checking first to make sure he had his keys, Thomas stepped outside. He walked a few steps. A few crickets were still singing in the grass, a sound that stirred his heart. This was the time of year he and Rose had first met. Now Thomas stood on the slab of concrete beyond the circle of the outdoor flood lamp. Looked up into the cloudless sky and cold overlay of stars.

Watching the night sky, he was Thomas who had learned about the stars in boarding school. He was also Wazhashk who had learned about the stars from his grandfather, the original Wazhashk. Therefore the autumn stars of Pegasus were part of his grandfather's Mooz. Thomas drew slowly on the cigar. Blew the smoke upward, like a prayer. Baganogüizhik, the hole in the sky through which the Creator had hurtled, glowed and winked. He longed for Ikwe Anang, the woman star. She was beginning to rise over the horizon as a breath of radiance. Ikwe Anang always signaled the end of his ordeal. Over the months he'd spent his nights as a watchman, Thomas had grown to love her like a person.

Once he let himself back into the building and sat down, his grogginess fell away entirely and

he read the newspapers and other tribes' newsletters he had saved. Subdued jitters at the passage of a bill that indicated Congress was fed up with Indians. Again. No hint of strategy. Or panic, but that would come. More coffee, his small breakfast, and he punched out. To his relief, the morning was warm enough for him to catch a few winks in his car's front seat before his first meeting of the day. His beloved car was a putty-gray Nash, used, but still Rose grumbled that he'd spent too much money on it. She wouldn't admit how much she loved riding in the plush passenger seat and listening to the car's radio. Now with this regular job he could make regular payments. No need to worry how weather would treat his crops, like before. Most important, this was not a car that would break down and make him late for work. This was a job he wanted very much to keep. Besides, someday he planned a trip, he joked, a second honeymoon with Rose, using the backseats that folded into a bed.

Now Thomas slid inside the car. He kept a heavy wool muffler in the glove box to wind around his neck so his head wouldn't fall to his chest, waking him. He leaned back into the brushed mohair upholstery and dropped into sleep. He woke, fully alert, when LaBatte rapped on his window to make sure he was all right.

LaBatte was a short man with the rounded build of a small bear. He peered in at Thomas. His pug nose pressed to the glass. His breath made a circle of fog. LaBatte was the evening janitor, but often he came in on a day shift to do small repairs. Thomas had watched LaBatte's pudgy, tough, clever hands fix every sort of mechanism. They'd gone to school together. Thomas rolled down the window.

"Sleeping off the job again?"

"It was an exciting night."

"Is that so?"

"I thought I saw a little boy sitting on the band saw."

Too late, Thomas remembered that LaBatte was intensely superstitious.

"Was it Roderick?"

"Who?"

"He's been following me around, Roderick."

"No, it was just the motor."

LaBatte frowned, unconvinced, and Thomas knew he'd hear more about Roderick if he hesitated. So he started the car and shouted over the engine's roar that he had a meeting.

The Skin Tent

Someday, a watch. Patrice longed for an accurate way to keep time. Because time did not exist at her house. Or rather, it was the keeping of time as in school or work time that did not exist. There was a small brown alarm clock on the stool beside her bed, but it lost five minutes on the hour. She had to compensate when setting it and if she once forgot to wind it, all was lost. Her job was also dependent on getting a ride to work. Meeting Doris and Valentine. Her family did not have an old car to try fixing. Or even a shaggy horse to ride. It was miles down to the highway where the bus passed twice a day. If she didn't get a ride, it was thirteen miles of gravel road. She couldn't get sick. If she got sick, there was no telephone to let anybody know. She would be fired. Life would go back to zero.

There were times when Patrice felt like she was stretched across a frame, like a skin tent. She tried to forget that she could easily blow away. Or how easily her father could wreck them all. This feeling of being the only barrier between her family and disaster wasn't new, but they had come so far since she started work.

Knowing how much they needed Patrice's job, it was her mother's, Zhaanat's, task during the week to sit up behind the door with the ax. Until they had word where their father had landed next, they all had to be on guard. On the weekend, Zhaanat took turns with Patrice. With the ax on the table and the kerosene lamp, Patrice read her poems and magazines. When it was Zhaanat's turn, she went through an endless array of songs, all used for different purposes, humming low beneath her breath, tapping the table with one finger.

Zhaanat was capable and shrewd. She was a woman of presence, strong and square, jutting features. She was traditional, an old-time Indian raised by her grandparents only speaking Chippewa, schooled from childhood in ceremonies and the teaching stories. Zhaanat's knowledge was considered so important that she had been fiercely hidden away, guarded from going to boarding school. She had barely learned to read and write on the intermittent days she had attended reservation day school. She made baskets and beadwork to sell. But Zhaanat's real job was passing on what she knew. People came from distances, often camped around their house, in order to learn. Once, that deep knowledge had been part of a web of strategies that included plenty of animals to hunt, wild foods to gather, gardens of beans and squash, and land, lots of land to roam. Now the family had only Patrice, who had been raised speaking Chippewa but had no trouble learning English, who had followed most of her mother's teachings but also become a Catholic. Patrice knew her mother's songs, but she had also been class valedictorian and the English teacher had given her a book of poems by Emily Dickinson. There was one about success, from failure's point of view. She had seen how quickly girls who got married and had children were worn down before the age of twenty. Nothing happened to them but toil. Great

things happened to other people. The married girls were lost. *Distant strains of triumph*. That wasn't going to be her life.

Three Men

Moses Montrose sat calmly behind a cup of bitter tea. The tribal judge was a small, spare, carefully groomed man who wore his sixty-five years lightly. He and Thomas were at their meeting hall, Henry's Cafe—a few booths and a hole-in-the-wall kitchen. Order of business: the one part-time tribal police officer was up north at a funeral. The jail was under repair. It was a small sturdy shack, painted white. The door had been kicked out by Eddy Mink, who usually spent the night singing out there in his fits of drunken joy. He needed more wine, he said, so he'd decided to leave. They talked about a new door. But as usual, the tribe was broke.

"The other night I made an arrest," said Moses. "I locked Jim Duvalle in my outhouse."

"Was he fighting again?"

"Real bad. We picked him up. Had to get my boy to help shove him inside."

"A cold night for Duvalle."

"He didn't notice. He slept on the shitter."

"Got to find another way," said Thomas.

"Next day, I put on my judge shirt, brought him to my kitchen court. I gave him a fine and let him go. He only had one dollar of the fine, so I took his dollar and called it square. Then I spent the day feeling so bad. Taking food from his family's mouth. Finally, I go over there and give the dollar to Leola. I need to get paid. But some other way."

"We need our jail back."

"Mary was mad I put him in our outhouse. Said she almost burst during the night!"

"Oh. We can't let Mary burst. I talked to the superintendent, but he says the money is extremely tight."

"You mean he's extremely tight. In the butt."

Moses said this in Chippewa—most everything was funnier in Chippewa. A laugh cleared out the cobwebs for Thomas and he felt like the coffee was also doing him some good.

"We have to put Jim in the newsletter. So write down the details."

"He's in the newsletter already this month."

"Public shame isn't working," said Thomas.

"Not on him. But poor Leola walks around with her head hanging."

Thomas shook his head, but the majority of the council had voted to include the month's arrests and fines in the community newsletter. Moses had a good friend in the Bureau of Indian Affairs Area Office in Aberdeen, South Dakota, who had sent him a copy of the proposed bill that was supposed to emancipate Indians. That was the word used in newspaper articles. Emancipate. Thomas hadn't seen the bill yet. Moses gave him the envelope and said, "They mean to drop us." The envelope wasn't very heavy.