

VOWS



A Novel

Also by
ANNA LEE WALTERS

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VOWS



A Novel

By

Anna Lee Walters


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PUBLISHING

Vows

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Although Quanah Parker and James Mooney are historical figures, this is a fictional work. Any resemblance of characters to actual people, living or deceased, is coincidental. Also, origin stories alluded to in this novel have historical references but the entirety of this work, with the exception of the music, is fiction and comes from the author.

Dedication



I dedicate this work to the memory of the late Truman Dailey and to so many others like him. Of course through time there have been hundreds, far too numerous to mention individually, but all are remembered for their vision and ways of life.

Acknowledgments



The music appearing at the beginning of each part in this manuscript was recorded by Frances Densmore and is preserved in her book, *Cheyenne and Arapaho Music*. It was first published by the Southwest Museum (Southwest Museum Papers, Number 10) in 1936. That she had the foresight to study and record this part of Native American life is fortunate for later generations.

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PART ONE

New Fire



Opening song

RECORDED BY KISH HAWKINS

The musical score consists of five staves of music, all written in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The time signatures vary throughout the piece:

- Staff 1: Starts with a tempo marking of *J. 108*. The time signature is $\frac{3}{4}$ for the first measure, then changes to $\frac{6}{4}$ for the second, $\frac{3}{4}$ for the third, and $\frac{3}{4}$ for the fourth.
- Staff 2: The time signature is $\frac{6}{4}$ for the first measure, then $\frac{3}{4}$ for the second, $\frac{6}{4}$ for the third, $\frac{3}{4}$ for the fourth, and $\frac{3}{4}$ for the fifth.
- Staff 3: The time signature is $\frac{3}{4}$ for the first measure, $\frac{6}{4}$ for the second, $\frac{3}{4}$ for the third, and $\frac{3}{4}$ for the fourth.
- Staff 4: The time signature is $\frac{3}{4}$ for the first measure, $\frac{6}{4}$ for the second, $\frac{3}{4}$ for the third, and $\frac{3}{4}$ for the fourth.
- Staff 5: The time signature is $\frac{6}{4}$ for the first measure, $\frac{3}{4}$ for the second, $\frac{6}{4}$ for the third, $\frac{3}{4}$ for the fourth, and $\frac{3}{4}$ for the fifth.

The notation includes various rhythmic values such as quarter notes, eighth notes, and sixteenth notes, along with rests and dynamic markings.

Lily



EARLY STREAMS OF light strike the house and she appears outside. She's wearing bulky work clothes, watching others in the distance lift long slender poles upright until it's all done. The tipi stands up and a solitary eagle feather flutters gently above. Much later, in sun's afterglow, she enters the empty white pristine tipi to sit in a solitary pose on clean, swept ground, her long soft white floral skirt tucked loosely around her bent legs. New fire strums at the center of the tipi, throwing out welcome and solace all around.

Serenity...

Taut muscles soften, melt in her face and body, slowing her breath until it becomes an imperceptible thread, and then a low sigh breaks the evening quiet. Her eyes follow the smooth poles skyward, looped together securely at the smoke hole; next her gaze traces a gentle curve of the earthen altar rising off ground and moves on toward bursting, popping, twirling flame. Then words, at rest in her mind, stir and revive like very ancient teachers unvisited for a while.

Breath... Words... Story...

Red flames whoosh, crack! Murmurs of long departed storytellers open her up to an unbroken rhythm of life

around with a wave of arm, slowly turning their sleek bodies in a full circle and looking up.

Standing together, they call for strength in pacts made before earth and sky, binding these in songs and prayers. Hailing forces in ground and air, camps overflow with other people open to their way of continuance. Flashes of those gatherings whisk by. Flame becomes flame and Lily closes her eyes. Waiting.

Trails leading here...

Flicking fire makes her look to it once more, at long-ago life revealing itself there, radiant, aglow.



Revelation... It came to a woman... A WOMAN... They say...

Among her own people, she was always one of them. Growing up, she merged easily into any group of children, young people, and women, vanishing there, shielded in camp life and by the earth's cloak as moons died and were reborn, and snows softly sifted down to become other things, sinking into or rising off the ground.

All the while, she was part of that, new moons and pelting snow, yet was becoming more herself, more distinct each season, going into maturity, toward destiny.

Late one sun, out she stepped from earlier seasons of invisibility and stood clear in the foreground of that place; mingled sights and sounds of her people moving about filled her up and she responded. An echo of children's voices rose behind a string of tipis where small boys played on both sides of narrow swishing water, and other voices bubbled at its edge, floating under budding trees with new bark. There, she listened to the voice of each thing; evening light cast upon her. Not too young or old either, she walked

toward her brother's tipi standing on a smooth rise of pale green surrounded by fragrant ground, and her life turned.

His tipi was distinct, marked with vibrant streaks of color. His youthful wife greeted her. "Horses," she said, indicating nearby corrals but motioning to a place beside her.

Soon, a tall blue silhouette separated from sinuous drifts of orange haze. Gait and torso were recognizable.

Come! He beckoned. She followed a circle he cut around camp, walking deliberately at turtle's pace, noting everything. Clouds ascending, pulling away, breaking apart, fading. Wet plants pushing out on banks. Figures moving to and from narrow trickling water. Motion on land. Swirling in sky. Piercing calls in trees, flicking grass.

His walk, physique, and voice held no hint of old age, but face to face, his long braided hair slightly laced dark and silver threads and fine scratches encircled his brown eyes and his set mouth. The depth of his eyes, shrewd eyes, revealed maturity and flinty hardness, experience acquired only in deadly battles, and from witnessing strong men fall, not to rise again.

With night hovering, they returned to his tipi. He said "Sister! Four suns shall cross. Twelve men shall depart then. South, they'll ride, toward barren, rough ground far away. To a place of scarcity. Over there, water sometimes conceals itself as do plants and game. Nearly one moon's cycle shall pass. Then our travelers shall arrive."

His voice, full of gravel from streambeds the people had followed and drank in earliest times, he kept down so as not to disturb darkness and meditation darkness brings. She leaned in to hear.

"Sister!" his voice dropped even more, "Lead! They said. For you have led before! They said that to me. And I agreed! Now we prepare.

wondrous he was! He looked at her, gesturing, beckoning.

She responded timidly and yet willingly; her birdlike heart and self tingled in his presence. She heard a voice, his voice, but he didn't speak in her way.

Daughter!

What you need is here!

Medicine!

Nourishment!

Strength! Endurance!

This will show you the way home!

Unexpectedly, he sprung into a standing position, as if he, too, had power of flight. Beneath, and all around him, a plant in various sizes and shapes pushed out of rocky soil.

Daughter, take these!

They will help!

They will care for you!

Before she could reply, that radiant pastel light softened, diffused. The wonderful being of light faded before her eyes.

But then hundreds of flinty sparks appeared and trembled around her. Trembled. She moved effortlessly toward her sleeping body, gazing down at it. Suddenly, she was inside it again, feeling its weighty trunk and her limbs. She draped her arms across her stomach. She felt warm wind inside herself.

Divine universe...

×

Her story... From her own lips... Other versions... On and on...

Dawn. Her child tugged; his face was alarmed. When she opened her eyes, he was so relieved he squealed.

"I can't find water!" he admitted. "Can you walk?"

Now it had unwound again like a long strap, distant from where it happened, four or five generations earlier. Present to past.

At the end of the story Lily sees herself sitting in the tipi and she draws a deep breath at where that humble woman's experience led. Past to present.

Story's way... Fire flicking, flicking...

The tipi curves around Lily; she sits in its embrace. Fire dances in the center, bringing comfort. She rises, looks around. Everything is here. Everything is in order. Waiting.

Sanctuary...

PART TWO

Melting Snow



Midnight song

RECORDED BY KISH HAWKINS

The musical score consists of seven staves of music. The first staff begins with a tempo marking of *♩. 116* and a key signature of one flat. The time signature starts as 2/4, then changes to 3/4, and finally to 3/2. The second staff continues with a 3/4 time signature, followed by a 3/2 time signature. The third staff features a 3/4 time signature, then a 3/2 time signature, and ends with a 3/4 time signature. The fourth staff maintains a 3/4 time signature, with a 3/2 time signature appearing in the second measure. The fifth staff is in 3/4 time, with a 3/2 time signature in the second measure. The sixth staff is in 3/4 time. The seventh staff is in 3/4 time and concludes with a double bar line.

Cody



FIRST TIME HE picked up medicine was a long time ago—in the 1930s—when it made its way west. Afterward, he was outside the law for a while simply by accepting the new ceremony.

I don't forget it...

One breezy sundown he rode horseback with Little Man up to a secluded *hogan* in the *Lukachukai* mountains to see what it was really about. He'd heard enough second-hand and went up there to discover truth for himself.

He and Little Man were faint jostling figures riding quietly into blue folds of the soft looming mountain. They didn't talk like some do.

Earth and sky speak... It's enough...

Winter showed up early that year, gliding down from dark peaks farther north. Dry brown oak leaves felt the freeze first, dropping slowly down into crunchy slippery beds making up forest ground. Cody pulled his faded wool jacket a little closer with a gloved hand in blasts of icy air, tucking his jutting chin further down into the fleecy collar; its fabric stretched taut across his shoulders and around his forearms. His hat brushed the collar now and then, and that occasional brushing was about all he heard on the ride up.

Our trail spiraled from ground to sky... Ahead our path was twilight...

An early star hung over tall fragrant pines. Wind sifted through them, making raspy sounds. Limbs whisked Cody's shoulder with their needles and scent as the horses wound around.

He followed Little Man until pale amber lights bobbed ahead.

Someone greeted, "Put the horses in the corral."

Cody and Little Man climbed off in early starlight and slung their saddles over the fence where a few horses snorted and bunched together on one side, their eyes gleaming in thickening dusk. Behind them forest and sky were spacious. Beyond that was something even more limitless.

The figure greeting them moved around a woodpile, picking up an armload of firewood and carrying it inside. Soon the same husky figure led Cody and Little Man into a small *hogan* where an oil lamp burned weakly on the north side in front of a tiny low window, casting dingy light on gathered curtains. Only a handful of people were there.

It started out that way...

Crossed logs marked the center of the dwelling. There, a young man made a quiet skinny stream of faint blue smoke rise; flame came alive in an abrupt high leap, crackling, popping. A spray of tiny orange sparks shot up in little arches before sprinkling cold ground. As it grew brighter, indistinguishable shapes of people separated from dusky log walls, visibly softer and more rounded. Before that, they were shadowy lumps against the wall. Cody didn't recognize anyone. A stranger on the west side who used foreign speech, sounds of *bilagaana* language, was not familiar at all.

I never use foreign language... Though I know hello, good-bye, and ho-kay...

All his life he avoided foreign words because they were clumsy on his tongue, and didn't sound right in his own ears, and earlier as a boy when he used them, someone near him broke into a wide grin, eyes twinkling mischievously.

The stranger gestured toward himself, saying quite a bit. He sat on dirt, with lower legs crossed in front of him, heels tucked under his thighs. Indian was the only word Cody understood. The stranger paused a few seconds to let it sink in but Cody already knew from the stranger's bones and skin, the way he sat and his unmistakable hand gestures. Then the stranger pointed to the fire, the *hogan* walls, the ground and smoke hole before saying more.

Someone brought store tobacco to Cody and Little Man and they rolled smokes while the stranger used an interpreter and sometimes threw in a word from Cody's own language, though awkward and unclear.

He began, "My relatives, I traveled far to carry something good out here. I did it because it's what you said you wanted."

I was mindful though I didn't know his words...

Later, someone told them to Cody and described how slowly the stranger talked because the language he used wasn't really his either.

A poker passed to light all the smokes in the circle and then the stranger said his first prayer that night. He prayed in two languages, switching back and forth. Cody sucked on his smoke, its tip glowing bright orange in his long fingers. Afterwards, smokes were collected and medicine went around the circle. That's how it all began, this part of Cody's story.

Forty-six winters behind me..... Melted snow now.... Two, three generations...

A New Perspective on Navajo Prehistory

BY HARRY WALTERS

EXCERPT FROM THE INTRODUCTION:

Navajo history is a story of a great migration of prehistoric people over the vast North American continent. This migration of Athapaskans began in the Arctic northern hemisphere and ended in the Southwest as the Navajo and Apache people. Comparative studies in linguistics and physical anthropology have established links between the Navajos and Apaches with the people of the Arctic North, Northwest Canada and the U.S. Pacific Coast. Broader studies of these similarities also point to a possible connection with the people of Siberian East Asia in a not-too-far past.

...A large part of present Navajo culture is of Southwest origin and dates to the Southwest Acculturation Period. The present ceremonial system began to evolve when the ancestral Navajo settled into a social structure based on the matrilineal clan system. The acquisition of agriculture served to strengthen this new order, and when domesticated animals (sheep and horses) were acquired, Navajo life became an agricultural-pastoral society...

Examination of early Navajo stories preceding the ceremonials period (before the Fourth World) illustrates that the Navajo once lived in a hunter-gatherer patrilineal society. But with the adoption of agriculture, ceremonialism (as it is recognized today) began to emerge, and the people's lives evolved into a matrilineal society. This transition was finalized with the coming of ceremonial known as the "Blessing Way." Today, Blessing Way is the backbone of Navajo ceremonialism and society.

Harry Walters is semi-retired teacher of Navajo culture, tradition, and art, with a background in Anthropology. He is a respected Navajo Elder and consultant on traditional Navajo teachings and has co-authored papers in this field with other writers.