

The Enchanted People

A
Humanitarian
Fairytale



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*Written in honor of my mother and her mother.
To Yuri, Julian, Finna & Sutton.
And to Rivaldo, My Horse.*



Some day the earth will weep, she will beg for her
life, she will cry with tears of blood. You will make
a choice, if you will help her or let her die, and
when she dies, you too will die.

—*Chief John Hollow Horn Bear*

Horses lend us the wings we lack.

—*Pam Brown*





Chapter 1

Wawatay

A long time ago, in the land we now call North America, there was an enchanted village where Enchanted People lived. The villagers were called the Enchanted People because they each had a special gift. The leader of the Enchanted People, Chief Moon Bear, could jump over cliffs and rivers, which made exploring easy for him. His wife, Night Flower, was blessed with swift, skilled hands, and she could bead moccasins, leggings, and sashes in the time it would take others to thread a single needle.

Many of the village boys could swim underwater for long periods of time, and this made them agile fishermen. Some of the girls and women could outrun the horses, and even in winter, when it was too cold for the men to swim for fish, the villagers never went hungry because these women could chase after wild game. The Enchanted People were powerful because all of them were blessed with an enchanted power—all except for one—and her name was Wawatay.



Wawatay was born at night, underneath a winter sky draped in colour from the solar winds that circle the earth and enchant the darkness. She was born to a father who could smash boulders and cliffsides with his fists, a mother who could smell berries and roots growing from many hills away, and six older brothers, all of whom were very strong and could lift trees from their roots and carry houses on their backs. Wawatay was named after the enchanted winds she was born under, but as she grew, there was nothing special about her.

Her parents grieved for seven days and seven nights when she grew from a small child into a big one and still showed no sign of great power. She was sent to Eagle Strong Bow who was close to medicine and the spirits of the ancestors, but he could not draw nor conjure a power from her. Ashamed and aggrieved, Wawatay's parents cast her out of the family lodge. They did not want her because she did not fit with them. They thought Mother Earth was punishing her for some grave sin and would curse the rest of the family if she stayed, although she had no other place to go because the entire enchanted village shunned her, too.

A man of ancient wisdom and careful discernment, Chief Moon Bear could not fathom a sin so grave that Mother Earth would deprive Wawatay of power. He knew Mother Earth to be tolerant and Wawatay to be pure of heart and kind in spirit. He resolved that Wawatay was not cursed, but simply overlooked, and so, he took pity on her and offered her refuge at the far end of the village where an old lodge was built to shelter the enchanted horses in winter.



Chapter 2

The Horse Lodge

For two seasons, Wawatay lived in the horse lodge and was very lonely. Eventually, the horses came in from their grazing lands when the weather turned cold, and then she had companionship. The horses kept her warm and happy. They, too, grew fond of her and were reluctant to leave the lodge, even when the sharp winter wind stopped blowing. None of the Enchanted People noticed the horses had chosen to stay there longer than usual that winter season, and when the horses did finally leave in search of the early spring grasses, Wawatay was sad and lonely once again. She quickly grew listless from her sorrow, but it was not easy to rest.

When the horses left, noisy sparrows moved in, and they made hurried nests in the rafters overhead. The birds squawked and screeched as their eggs began to hatch, and not long after, hungry birds emerged from them, pleading hysterically for food. Their parents shouted back as they struggled to fill each baby's beak with



enough to eat. Wawatay was accustomed to the quiet whispers of the horses—the constant shouting of the sparrows made her ears hurt and the chaos of their frantic work turned her stomach.

Eventually, Wawatay lost her temper with the sparrows. She stomped the ground with her feet and pounded the lodge walls with her fists, but the sparrows ignored her. Wawatay curled up in a corner with her hands against her ears and began to cry. The sparrows and their babies did not care about her temper. They went on shouting at each other, just as they always had, until Wawatay became so exhausted by her anger that she finally fell into a slumber.

“Plop.”

Wawatay startled from her sleep, though her eyes remained closed. She frowned at the strange noise. It sounded very different from the shouting of the sparrows above.

“Plop. Plop. PLOP!!!”

The last “PLOP” was very near. Wawatay opened her eyes, and there, before her, was a tiny, transparent, milky-looking creature—it was a baby sparrow. It wriggled and wobbled and writhed with spooky eyes and visible insides that looked very strained. Wawatay felt sorry for the baby bird, so she scooped it up into her hands and began to warm it. She looked around for the sources of the other “Plops,” and

when she found them, she grew ill. Tragically, the other baby birds had not survived their falls.

Wawatay gazed up at the nests they had come from and frowned. Their parents did not seem to show any concern. She also saw that the rafters of the lodge were too high for her to reach or climb, so she could not return the living baby bird to its nest. Wawatay's frown deepened.

“PLOP! PLOP!”

Two more babies dropped at her feet. Wawatay was overcome with disbelief, because this time, she saw why the babies fell—the parent birds pushed them from their nests! Each pair of parents pushed one or two babies out and over the edge of their nests to make room for the rest. Wawatay's chest swelled with confusion and anger, though she quickly settled when the faint, distressed chirps of the helpless baby birds met her ears. Wawatay felt so sorry and sad for them, for she knew what it was like to feel rejected and unwanted. She scooped the babies up from the ground and warmed them in her cupped hands, along with the first baby bird she had found. Near her cooking fire, she gathered dried cornhusks and placed the baby birds there, hoping their parents might fly down to get them. Surely, they would come.

But their parents did not come, and all of the baby birds—except for the first small sparrow—died. After many more hours of waiting,

a father bird finally flew down to inspect the survivor. The father bird cocked his head and hopped about as he observed the baby bird. Wawatay breathed a sigh of relief and felt hope for it, but those feelings did not last. Suddenly, the father bird snatched the baby by the nape of its neck and wrestled it onto its back, making it easier for death to find it. A snake slithered out of the shadows just then with a ravenous intent to snag the weakened life. Wawatay could not sit back and watch any longer. She jumped to her feet, shooed the snake, and took the baby bird into her hands. She knew what it was like to be born into a big family and then be turned out—lonely and helpless—and left to die. She would not allow the same fate to claim another.

“Do not despair, Small Friend. I will take care of you,” she whispered. The baby bird shuddered weakly within the cusp of her soft, warm hands.

Wawatay had never cared for a baby bird before, and she was afraid this one would die if she did not learn well and quickly to tend it. She carefully approached her village to look for someone to teach her, but most of the Enchanted People would not let her close to them because they were still certain she was cursed. Some were just arrogant, and they taunted her. The bird was just a common sparrow, they said to her as they spat, and only a fool would waste time caring for a bird that lacks the prestige of an important one, like a hawk or an eagle. Others simply said it was impossible to try to raise a baby bird, for only birds can raise birds.