

# PAST IMPERFECT

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### THE OTHER SIDE

Once the holiday was over, there were still two weeks to go before the schools started back, but now the weather turned and it began to rain. That meant that the park was out and both Sarah and Joe were confined to their houses. Joe and Andy bickered and Dad started decorating, so having Sarah round was difficult. The decorating bug infected Sarah's parents too and they began to paint and paper so both houses were in a mess. It was therefore a relief to Joe, Sarah and their parents when Aunt Fifi invited the children round to her house for a whole day.

There were no strange signs in the sky, no odd shapes appearing in everyday objects, but all the same, it was two rather thoughtful children who met up near Aunt Fifi's and walked the rest of the way together. It was still raining on and off and the sky was gloomy and grey.

"Seen anything anywhere since we've been back? In the sky or anywhere else?" asked Joe.

"Well, Dad put some paper up on the ceiling and it fell down and made rather an odd shape round Tom," giggled Sarah. "But I don't really think that was particularly unusual. What about you?"

"Mum dropped a pot of paint and it ran all over the floor, but I can't say it made any mysterious shapes, especially after Dad stepped in it and went flying," replied Joe, "although I did have a very nasty dream last night. I don't usually remember my dreams but I certainly remembered that one! It gave me the shivers!"

"Why? What happened," asked Sarah, a bit hesitantly. She had a nasty feeling that she knew what Joe was going to say.

"I seemed to wake up in my bedroom and there was red smoke drifting under the door," replied Joe. "It was like the smoke of the Shaman's cloud and I could hear him on the other side of the door, hissing to let him through. I was trying to get to the door to turn the key and lock it but I couldn't for some reason - I couldn't walk properly, it was as if . . . as if . . .," he stopped, hesitating as he searched for the right words.

"As if you were walking through treacle?" suggested Sarah with a shiver. "That's what it was like for me, anyway."

"You mean . . .?" began Joe.

"That I had the same dream? Yes, I did," said Sarah. "I woke up in a cold sweat and was so scared I couldn't even scream! I was terrified of going back to sleep again and having the same dream."

"So was I," nodded Joe. "But I must have been still asleep, because I heard a voice; it was very quiet . . . it's difficult to describe it, really."

“That’s right!” said an astonished Sarah. “I heard it too! It was . . . gentle, calming . . . I can’t remember exactly what it said but it certainly calmed me down and I didn’t feel afraid anymore. Then whoever it was began to sing.”

“Yes!” remembered Joe. “That’s right! I remember now! It was a strange song, that seemed to take you along with it into the clouds and over the sea . . . or at least that’s how I felt. I must have gone off to sleep again after that or perhaps I was asleep all the time.”

“Like me,” agreed Sarah. “So how come we both had the same dream?”

“Beats me,” replied Joe. “I wonder what it means? We’ll have to ask Aunt Fifi.”

“Speaking of Auntie,” said Sarah, “You do realise that going round to visit her might cause some problems. We could wind up anywhere!”

“So long as there isn’t any decorating going on, I’ll be happy!” replied Joe.

However, perhaps if Joe had known just where they were going to end up, he might have preferred a bit of decorating!

“Anyway, I hope that if we do end up going anywhere, it isn’t raining and it isn’t too exciting,” said Sarah. “I’m not sure I can take arrows through my hair, sea-serpents trying to take bites out of me, or the Shaman hissing around. Mind you, until that dream, I thought we had seen the last of him after that sea-serpent took him down with it into the sea.”

“I wouldn’t be too sure,” said Joe. “I’ve got a nasty feeling about him, and it’s not just because of that dream either.”

“Don’t say that you can see into the future too,” giggled Sarah. “Do you think you’ve got second sight?”

“I didn’t have yesterday when I opened the front room door and fell into a bucket of wallpaper paste,” replied Joe with a grin.

They had arrived at Aunt Fifi’s purple front door now. Sarah pressed the bell; Aunt Fifi answered the door and greeted them, ushering them into her front room. It was the first time that Joe had been in this room and it was quite a surprise.

“This is my consulting room,” said Aunt Fifi. “Do sit down and make yourselves comfortable. I try to encourage an atmosphere of mystery and anticipation in my clients!”

Joe looked round and wasn’t too sure just what kind of atmosphere the room conjured up. It was certainly a strikingly decorated room. Along one wall, running the whole length of it, and hanging from floor to ceiling, was a deep purple velvet curtain. Similar curtains hung in the front window. The wall paper had a wild Oriental pattern with lots of gold, deep red and indigo in it. The thick carpet was of a deep blue with a swirls of mauve in it and looked rather like a frozen ocean. The furniture consisted of two heavily padded armchairs and a settee upholstered in material of a similar pattern and colour as the wallpaper and several small tables of dark, deeply carved wood with ornaments of vaguely Indian or Chinese origin on them along with lots of candles of all colours. Looking round, Joe thought that the curtain hanging along one wall made it look as if there was a stage the other side and thought that it was like being in a theatre.

“What’s the other side of the curtain, Auntie?” asked Sarah.

“The telly and my hi-fi system,” replied her aunt. “I like to put on a bit of music to help me get off into trance and when the clients have gone I like to put my feet up and watch something relaxing on TV - like wrestling or the rugby. Now, have either of you brought anything to do?”

The children shook their heads. In both their houses, things were in such a mess and so much had been put away to make room for the decorating that it was difficult to find anything and in any case, neither of them had known what to bring, really.

“Right!” said Aunt Fifi purposefully. “Now, I’ll tell you what I suggest we do. Do you remember all those strange signs we kept seeing in the sand and everywhere else on holiday?” The children nodded. “Well,” she continued, “I want to get to the bottom of it all and I’m going to have a go at visiting the Other Side. The books haven’t helped at all and I really don’t know what else to do. You’ve both seen the signs as well and you’ve been on those strange adventures where everything just didn’t seem quite right, so I thought you might like to come along as well. I’ll quite understand if you don’t want to. After all, you’ve both had enough adventures last you a while. What do you think?”

The children looked at each other and Joe looked out the window; it was raining again. Sarah followed his gaze and made a face.

“It’ll be better than decorating,” said Joe.

“And it’s raining so we can’t go out and do anything,” agreed Sarah.

“Looks like we’re going with you,” said Joe to Aunt Fifi, who smiled.

“Er, do you know exactly where you’re going, Auntie?” asked Sarah.

“Well, I’ve only been to the Other Side a couple of times,” admitted her aunt. “I’ve had a word with Thunder Head and he’s going to help us. He’s looking forward to showing you his home.”

“The Chief’s home? Is that where we’re going?” asked Joe.

“Yes,” nodded Aunt Fifi. “It’s as good a place to start looking for answers as any. I just hope our visit is more successful than the last two I made there. The first time Thunder Head had been at the firewater again and wasn’t doing a very good job as guide. We wound up in a forest with him half-way up a tree, upside down, and me, wearing my new high heel shoes, up to my knees in a bog! The second time was when we were trying to find out where you had gone after that daft Roman took you to ancient China by mistake. That was when the Chief fell into that muddy puddle he calls the Mystic Lake of Spotted Creek. I didn’t stay long enough to have good look around on either occasion.”

“And Thunder Head’s going to be guiding us again, is he?” asked Sarah, a little dubiously.

“Yes, I know what you’re thinking,” said her aunt. “He’s not famous for being reliable, is he? Well, yes, he is going to act as guide but I’m going to take responsibility for the travel arrangements, as you might say. I’m going to control the cloud. With your help, we should manage.”

“Our help!” said Joe. “What do we know about controlling the cloud?”

“Well, between you, you did very well when you got through to the Khan to ask for help,” Aunt Fifi reminded him. “We - that is, the Chief and me - think that either one or both of you have got the gift that I’ve been lumbered with.”

Neither Joe nor Sarah were exactly over the moon at this idea and neither of them said anything.

“Well, if you’re going with me, I’ll make a start and put us in the mood,” said Aunt Fifi briskly. “Now, first a bit of music, then I’ll draw the curtains, dim the lights and we can close our eyes and think cloud! All right?”

The children nodded in agreement - Joe felt that he didn’t like to refuse as it seemed that he might be needed and anyway it was raining hard and the thought of going home again to the smell of paint and wallpaper paste was enough to make him stay. Sarah felt much the same so they sat still,

listened to the dreamy music that Aunt Fifi put on the hi-fi and thought cloud. Going through Joe's mind was the thought that with so much cloud outside, the sky being absolutely full of it, dropping rain on him whenever he put his head outside, why on earth was he thinking about calling up more of the stuff inside? Then he heard Sarah whisper excitedly, "It's working!" and Joe half-opened an eye. Wisps of white were drifting around them.

"Concentrate!" commanded Aunt Fifi. "Come on, close those eyes and think!"

They sat in silence, the music filling their minds, and Joe began to feel as if he was floating. He half-opened his eyes again.

"We're in the cloud!" he whispered. The others opened their eyes too, to see, surrounding them, the dense white cloud that they had travelled in before. It wasn't clammy or cold, like Sarah imagined one of the clouds in the sky to be, but it felt warm and comfortable. It also contained the chairs they were sitting on when they began to concentrate, although the swirly blue carpet had been replaced by swirly white cloud.

"Right! So far so good," remarked Aunt Fifi. "Now all we have to do is persuade it to take us where we want to go."

"How do we do that?" asked Sarah, thinking that perhaps it would have been better to work that out before they set off.

"Think Chief's home," suggested Aunt Fifi. "Think Happy Hunting Grounds or something."

"Try thinking tepee!" came a clear voice from above them; it was Leaping Elk. "I've got the coffee on and some maple syrup biscuits ready!"

"Can I think biscuits?!" asked Joe, with his eyes closed. Sarah nodded in agreement.

"You're very close," came Leaping Elk's voice again. "Can you smell the biscuits yet?"

Joe and Sarah opened their eyes and sniffed.

"I can smell something," said Sarah.

"Something delicious!" added Joe.

"I can smell coffee," said Aunt Fifi. "A tepee is a kind of tent isn't it? Ah! Here we are!"

The cloud began to clear and they found themselves sitting on rugs and blankets in a tall tent made of what seemed like yellow leather, painted with bright patterns. The tent was conical in shape, with a wide, round base narrowing towards the top, where the poles that held it up were arranged so that there was an opening sheltered from any rain by a sort of pointed roof. There was a flap forming a door which was tied open to allow light in and the whole floor was covered in furs, blankets and rugs which were brightly patterned.

Sat on a pile of rugs near the door was a large lady wearing a fringed dress made of buff-coloured deerskin sewn with beads forming wonderful patterns. A band round her head was sewn in the same way and held a feather. She had long, dark hair platted into two braids either side of her head and her dark brown eyes twinkled as she smiled at them - but they also seemed to look right into you, or so Joe felt.

"I'm Leaping Elk - and before you say it, I know I look a bit too large to be a leaping anything!" she said and laughed, a light, clear, musical laugh.

Joe and Sarah smiled and Aunt Fifi said, "I'm very pleased to meet you! We've often heard you but it's nice to meet you properly."

"I've wanted to meet you too," said Leaping Elk, "I haven't got the Chief's psychic energy, though, and I can't travel about like he does."

She got up and handed round plates of brown, flat biscuits which tasted absolutely delicious. She passed Aunt Fifi a mug of coffee and the children got mugs of something that was cold and tasted very good.

"Spring water with some berry juice," she said. "I know the Chief can be a problem at times," she continued, "but he's really got an awful lot of psychic powers if he only knew how to use them properly. Are the refreshments all right?"

"Excellent!" said Aunt Fifi and the children nodded their agreements, mouths full of biscuit. "Isn't coffee a bit unusual in an Indian camp?"

"Oh, I got a taste for it when we were in the Wild West Show," replied Leaping Elk. "I get a delivery through from your world occasionally."

"Where is the Chief?" asked Aunt Fifi.

"He's looking after the horses, readying them for our journey," Leaping Elk responded. "He's going to take you to someone who might be able to help - or so he thinks. I'm not so sure." She sighed and then continued, "The problem is, there really isn't anyone here on the Other Side who's a lot of use!"

"I've noticed!" said Aunt Fifi. "Look, forgive me for asking, but you talk very differently to the Chief. Is there a reason?"

Leaping Elk threw back her head and laughed loud and long. "I'm sorry," she said, "yes, there really is a reason but you need to ask the Chief why he talks the way he does. Basically, I'm talking to you in my own language - one of the Native North American languages. You can understand me because you are really hearing me in your mind, rather than with your ears. It's all a bit difficult to grasp, but it's part of being on the Other Side and also part of having this odd gift that we seem to have."

"But me talk to you in English," came a familiar deep, booming, voice as the Chief stepped into the tepee. Aunt Fifi looked a bit embarrassed but the Chief smiled and helped himself to a biscuit as he sat down.

"Me join Buffalo Bill's West Show and he teach me to be good showman," said Thunder Head. "He tell me to talk like this because he say it is the way white men expect Indian to talk. Me become good showman - star of show! Talk like this all the time and it become habit!"

"I never had to talk much in the show," said Leaping Elk. "I was one of the girls who sang and danced as part of the Indian camp scenes. I was a bit thinner in those days when used to dance."

"She beautiful, like young deer!" said the Chief. "Still beautiful, too, and make good biscuits!" He reached for another as Leaping Elk blushed.

"Flattery will get you nowhere," she said and quickly put the biscuit plate out of the Chief's reach, but she smiled at him and he winked at the children.

"I prefer to use our language," she said. "I don't call myself a Red Indian either - as you can see we aren't red and we don't come from India. We're really Native North Americans."

"But public want to come and see Red Indian war dances!" said the Chief. "Native North American war dances a bit of a mouthful!"

“Do you live in this all year round?” asked Sarah, looking round the tepee. “It must be fun in Summer but a bit cold in Winter.”

“It certainly is,” replied Leaping Elk, “but we travel around. In Spring we travel North looking for good grass for the horses. In Autumn we travel South to a warmer climate. We’ve got a cabin there that the Chief built and we stay there in Winter. There’s a stream full of fish and there are lots of plants that you can eat. It gets very hot there in Summer and it’s nice to travel where it’s cooler but where it’s still warm enough to sleep here in the teepee or even under the stars. It can be very beautiful - as long as the sky doesn’t open up and show you tumbling planets and whirling suns!”

“Ah! So you get that here as well!” said Aunt Fifi.

“We certainly do,” said Leaping Elk and the Chief nodded in agreement. “I wish we could find out why!”

“That why they here!” announced the Chief, reaching for another biscuit. Leaping Elk smacked his hand away. “We go to ask man of science about all this strangeness. Get answer!”

“From him,” scoffed Leaping Elk. “Is this the same man who fell out of a tree because he had forgotten he had climbed it?”

“That the one!” nodded the Chief. “Him have huge brain!”

“Yes, but he keeps forgetting where he put it!” pointed out Leaping Elk.

“Him may not be up to much, but him the only man of science we got!” said the Chief, then he sighed and went on, “Wish Chang was here. Me lost without him!”

“True,” nodded Leaping Elk, sadly and she turned to Aunt Fifi and the children and continued, “he was able to sort the Chief out a bit. He saved his life, really. Without him the Chief would have died in your world.”

“Er, actually, we thought you were dead,” said Aunt Fifi a bit hesitantly. “You see, we thought that this was the Other Side in the sense of, well, heaven or wherever.”

“Understandable,” agreed Leaping Elk. “But no, it isn’t heaven. I thought it was when we first arrived here. It’s a truly lovely place, a real refuge after the sort of life the Chief and I led - you’ll see a fair bit of it on our journey. It’s very like your world - it’s got a sun and a moon, plants, animals, almost exactly identical; the one difference is that there are almost no people! Only a few who came like us, from your world, as sort of psychic refugees. The only other real difference is time - here it seems to move differently. Days and nights come and go like they do for you but we don’t seem to age much anymore although it looks as though we eventually do move on to . . . well, somewhere else. But I’ll let the Chief tell you more about that later. Should we go?”

They got up and brushed the biscuit crumbs off themselves and left the tepee. Outside it was sunny and warm, with a gentle breeze blowing, and Aunt Fifi and the children gazed out across the world of the Other Side. The camp was in the midst of a great grassy plain with odd clumps of trees here and there and on the horizon they could see misty blue mountains. Above them was a huge azure sky flecked with white clouds. Near the tepee some horses grazed contentedly - the chief whistled and they all ambled over. Joe and Sarah weren’t frightened of horses after their experiences with the Khan’s guards but Aunt Fifi was a bit apprehensive. However a delicate dark brown horse gently put its head into her hand and she stroked it and smiled.

“She like you!” announced the Chief, and Leaping Elk nodded in agreement.

“Where did they all come from?” asked Aunt Fifi. “Did you catch them wild here?”

“No, they all come from your world,” said the Chief. “I bring them here.”

“The Chief finds them ill-treated, starved and beaten and rescues them,” said Leaping Elk, stroking the flank of a big, light brown horse with liquid brown eyes who nuzzled her and put its head close to hers. Joe and Sarah noticed that the horse had nasty jagged scars down its side. Leaping Elk went on, “The Chief has a real way with horses. He can’t bear to see them ill-treated and when he finds them he brings them here and we look after them. They have a good life here. We use them for travelling about and hunting and when they get too old for that, they roam loose on the prairie with plenty of food, warm sun and streams to drink from.”

“Now we go,” said the Chief. “Me know that Sarah and Joe can ride, but can you?” he asked Aunt Fifi.

She looked a bit uncertain at first. “I’ll have a go,” she said, gamely. “I’ve never ridden before. Should I ride this one?” she asked, still stroking the dark brown horse who had made friends with her.

“That one called Dawn Wind,” said the Chief. “She make good mount for you. Me put blankets on our horses - you need saddle, though.”

The children asked for saddles too - they weren’t used to riding with just a blanket on the back of the horse. The Chief saddled up three horses and helped Aunt Fifi up into the saddle of Dawn Wind.

“It’s a bit high up here!” she said. “Where are the brakes? What am I saying? I don’t even know where the brakes are on a car!”

However, Dawn Wind was a patient animal and didn’t run away with Aunt Fifi or play up at all. Sarah explained how to control a horse and they rode together, Aunt Fifi soon picking up the basics of horse management. Joe was very impressed by Leaping Elk, who despite being built rather on the generous side, leapt onto the back of a big horse with just a blanket to sit on and a rope bridle for control. She seemed very at home on horseback.

“I like Dawn Wind very much,” said Aunt Fifi after a while, “but I’m not sure what various bits of my body are going to feel like after I’ve travelled a few hours like this! I really know what it will do for my deportment!”

“Your deportment be fine!” said the Chief, grinning. “It will just ache a bit!”

Two horses followed the riders, laden with packs.

“Journey not take long,” said the Chief. “Journeys here never do. We stop for food on that ridge ahead,” and he pointed to a long low rocky outcrop in the distance.

“Looks a long way to me,” said Aunt Fifi. “I don’t want Dawn Wind to get tired. She might lay down for a rest with me still in the saddle!”

“Don’t worry, we will be stopping regularly to water the horses and have a breather,” Leaping Elk reassured her.

As the Chief said - and as had been the case on their journeys on the Other Side before - they did not in fact seem to travel for long. They stopped once by a stream and dismounted to let the horses drink. Aunt Fifi ached a bit here and there but was quite surprised when she looked towards the ridge.

“We seem to have covered an awful lot of ground already!” she remarked.

“As I said, time seems to move differently here,” said Leaping Elk. “You’ll get used to it.”

They reached the ridge much sooner than Joe and Sarah thought possible and dismounted, letting the horses loose to graze, free of saddles and blankets, and near to a pool for them to drink. While Leaping Elk unpacked some food and spread blankets for them to sit on, the children and Aunt Fifi stretched their legs and looked around. Aunt Fifi was aching again but found that walking round a bit helped. The Chief had been strangely quiet and thoughtful as they had neared the ridge and now stood, some way off, looking at a strange tree.

The ridge that they were standing on was flat on top, about a quarter of a mile wide, and snaked along the plain for miles. It was rocky but not bare. Clumps of trees and bushes grew in places and there were occasional pools of water fed by springs. The view from both sides of the ridge was superb - the wide grassy plain stretched for miles on each side, studded with trees and bushes. Looking back the way they had come, they could see that the plain that side was ringed by a range of blue-green hills and on the other side, in the direction they were going, by a range of grey-blue mountains fringed with dark green forests. The mountains were much closer now, their tops white with snow.

Aunt Fifi and the children walked over to see what the Chief was looking at. What they thought was a strange tree was in fact a thick wooden column carved into fantastic shapes - animal heads, grotesque faces and birds with their wings protruding, all once brightly coloured but now a little faded; it was in fact a totem pole.

“Did you carve this?” asked Aunt Fifi.

The Chief nodded sadly. “It is monument to Chang,” he said. “He live here, on this ridge. That him, up there. Best likeness I could get.”

He pointed. At the top of the pole, over all the strange, fierce heads, grimacing animals and birds with long beaks, was a very different face - in fact the head and shoulders of a man, beautifully carved, his serene face deeply lined, the eyes showing him to be of Asian origin, the mouth smiling slightly, as if he was looking out over the plain to the mountains beyond.

“Is that Chang?” asked Joe. “It’s a beautiful carving.”

“Yes,” agreed the Chief. “He love to sit here and see all this,” he said, indicating the view. “He meditate here for hours. He live here - have hut there.” He pointed to a bare area a few feet away. “I burn it after he go. He ask me to do so, before he leave us.”

“Do you mean he died?” asked Aunt Fifi gently.

“Me not know,” sighed the Chief. “Leaping Elk come with me up here one day and we find him lying on his bed, very still. He tell us that it is time for him to make another great journey and ask us to sit with him. We did and when it got dark he ask us to take him outside under the stars. I carry him and lay him on ground and he look up to the stars and smile. Then he ask us to sing songs to him. We sing many songs of our people. He say he going to another plane now - that the word he use. He say one day we will follow. Tell me to take care of Leaping Elk and to look out for lady who would need my help. That you,” he said, to Aunt Fifi. “Also tell me to burn hut when he gone. Then he look up at stars again and say “It is time now! I go to a better place - be happy for me!” close eyes and his body seem to shimmer in the light of the stars. Then he gone. Nothing left of him - all gone. Me burn hut as he tell me. Then me make totem. Wish he were here. He very wise, know so much. He would know what is wrong and what to do.”

The Chief seemed terribly sad now and the children and Aunt Fifi stood quietly looking at the face of the old man, still gazing serenely at the mountains in the distance. Then the eyes in the head

moved, to look down at them, the mouth stirred and the face became alive! The old man looked straight at the astonished Chief and said, in a clear, strong voice, "Beware, my son! The terror that once stalked a thousand worlds and threatened destruction to all creation is now stirring! Beware of the great serpent! Be on your guard!" The face had become stern, the voice commanding. Then once again the eyes turned to look at the distant view, the mouth resumed its faint smile and the head was again wood, lifeless and still.

"Master Chang!" breathed the Chief.

Leaping Elk had come to tell them their lunch was ready. She found them staring up at the totem and the Chief told her what had happened.

"What does it mean?" she asked.

"Me not know," said the Chief, shaking his head. They walked back to the place where Leaping Elk had set out the blankets.

Joe and Sarah were both very thoughtful and Joe asked Sarah, "Did you ever hear that voice before?"

"Yes," nodded Sarah. "I think it was the same voice that told me to go back to sleep and then started singing after that horrible dream."

"That's what I thought!" said Joe.

"You've heard Master Chang before?" asked Leaping Elk, who had overheard them and the children explained about their dream. They told the Chief too and he frowned and shook his head.

"It sound like he help you when you in danger. Perhaps Shaman trying to get you to open way into your world. Me not know why he not come through anyway - he powerful man. But you helped by Master Chang - that great honour. Me glad he help you."

"I wish I had seen him," sighed Leaping Elk sadly. "He was a lovely old man. He knew so much and I loved to hear him talk. I have to confess I understood very little of what he said but he was so interesting. He had been to so many places. He was very old, you know."

"Did you say he was from Tibet?" asked Aunt Fifi.

"Not originally," replied Leaping Elk. "He was born somewhere in China. He travelled a long way and was in India for quite a long time. Then he went to Tibet and eventually he came here."

"Become my spirit guide," said the Chief. "Me love to talk to him. When me come here, me spend much time with him. Come up here very often. When he go, me feel very sad. Get drunk for a week."

"Any excuse!" snorted Leaping Elk.

"You not understand!" said the Chief angrily. "He more than friend! Him teacher - select me as pupil but me too stupid to understand! He say me have great psychic power, but me not able to grasp fundamentals of Astral Metaphysics - come to that me not even able to spell it. It not matter before; me able to blunder along, but now it serious! Now me need knowledge! Everyone in danger - Madame Fifi, children, you. And me not know what to do!" He got up and stomped off into some trees.

"I shouldn't have said that," sighed Leaping Elk. "He was very fond of the old man, and he's very worried now, too. I better go after him."

As she got to her feet, there was a shout from the trees and they all jumped up and ran to where the shout came from. In the middle of the trees was a clearing and in the centre stood the

Chief, eyes wide with astonishment, looking at a huge pile of barrels in front of him. There was black writing on the side of the barrels - "Best Whisky".

"Thunder Head!" warned Leaping Elk. "If you've gone back on your promise . . ."

"Hush woman!" commanded the Chief. "Me not call this lot up! Me feeling very low, true. Thought back to days when me feel low and have lots of whisky to make feeling go away, and then this lot appear!" He sniffed. "It really rough stuff, too. Just like traders give to Indians to steal their land! But me not summon this up at all. It just appear."

"Hmm . . ." began Leaping Elk doubtfully. "What do you intend to do with it? If I had my way, I'd burn it!"

"Good thinking!" nodded the Chief. "Scientist still building second rocket ship last time me see him. Perhaps he use this for rocket fuel! Come, leave it here and we go to eat."

They ate in almost total silence, each thinking about what they had seen and heard. After they had eaten, rested a while and saddled the horses, the Chief stood on top of the ridge, knelt down, grabbed a pile of earth in each hand and stood up, raising his hands to the skies and letting the earth slowly fall. Then he turned and mounted his horse.

"Why did you do that?" asked Sarah.

"No reason - just look impressive," came the reply and the Chief rode off. Leaping Elk threw an exasperated look at Aunt Fifi and they all set set off on the last stage of the journey.