

# TRIBAL TRADITION

by Jeannette Dean

The scraggly coyote warily made her way down to the watering hole. Weak and confused, her reflexes slow, she anxiously eyed her surroundings to make sure there were no dangers. That she was alone. Shrouded by the desert night, she drank, and curled up in a patch of bush at water's edge with her back pressed against a boulder.

She awoke in the barely perceptible rose glow of pre-dawn, aware of a light easterly breeze. She shivered, stretched, whimpered. Leaning down to drink, she jerked, startled by her reflection. She turned to run but stopped, felt rocks digging into her...hands.

She curled up, tried to slow her breathing. "Think," she told herself.

"Think the thoughts, say the words." The mantra her mother had taught her so long ago began to fill her head. She looked around. She had stopped

here the year before.

She growled, her sensitivity to the cold water part of her growing awareness of the change. She plunged her head beneath the layer of moss and nature's debris that had accumulated along the south bank and began to stroke. Her body ached as she swam, the cuts and bruises announcing themselves.

Emerging to float on her back as early morning light began to chase the shadows, she took long deep breaths.

"Okay, who am I?" she frowned.

"I'm Prairie Storm Trinity. I am..." Her head ached, the effort to recall was a struggle, but she must.

She began stroking her body, feeling the bare flesh of her stomach, hips, ribs, breasts, she slowed. "Two, yes, only two. I'm Prairie St..." she stopped, her hearing still sensitive, defensive. Slowly she sank down, leaving only ears, eyes and nose above water to assess the danger.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to frighten you," came a voice from the west bank.

He was downwind, she told herself defensively, or I'd have known. Think thoughts, say words. But she stayed submerged, listening and watching. Something was beginning to bother her nose.

His laugh was nervous but deep, "I was surprised to see a lovely lass in my pond."

'My pond' confused her. You can't 'own' water. Yes, people own everything. Relax, wait, watch. Think the thoughts.

The sky behind him was a flat pink with slashes of gold, the clouds slate gray. Her mind feared the sun with its revealing rays while part of her longed for it.

The big man took a few steps down the bank. When he squatted his massive body looked more like a bear. Then he smiled, his white teeth framed by a thicket of curly black beard.

"I'm Atticus Brewster. Who are you?"

Her heart was pounding, her head aching. She knew what to do. Say the words.

"I'm Prairie Storm Trinity," she managed to whisper, her lips disturbing the flat surface.

His laugh was full and loud, his mirth honest and warm as she coughed, clearing the water from her mouth.

She brought her head completely above water, smiled. "I'm Prairie Storm Trinity," she said distinctly, her well-modulated voice cracking. She took a deep breath. I'm okay, she thought with relief.

"You must be getting cold. I promise not to look if you want to come out and get your clothes."

"Oh, uh," she stammered, feeling the cold intensely as the reality of her situation dawned.

"Promise, and I'll even invite you for a cup of hot coffee. I'm camped just behind the ridge." He motioned to the east.

Still she was silent, trying to marshal her thoughts, construct a story.

"Okay." He shrugged, standing up. "I'll be there for a while if you decide to come out." He turned, walking toward the rising sun.

“Please,” she called. “I’ve lost them. Someone took them. I think.”

He stopped, frowned. “I’ll not ask how you got out here, two miles from the highway, nearly twenty miles from the nearest town. But, since I’m going to give you my shirt, just tell me if there’s anyone else out here with us.”

She was beginning to shiver. “No, not as far as I know.”

Her feet were too tender and cut up to walk through the rugged terrain so he carried her on his back to his camp.

In silence he rekindled the fire as she nestled into his sleeping bag and fell asleep in a tight little ball. Atticus listened to her whimpers and sniffles as he made coffee. Sitting with his first cup he watched her, intrigued. The mass of dark red curls was horribly matted around her delicate face. She’d felt like a delicate child on his back. Ah, but watching her float in the pond as she mumbled to herself, caressing the pale breasts with dark nipples, had warmed him. Her mound, like a small red furry animal, curled up, waiting, so inviting.

Storm stirred, stretched, jerked upright, terror in her large brown eyes.

She backed away from Atticus, her glance darting around, body poised for escape.

“Hey, it’s okay, I won’t hurt you,” Atticus spoke like he would to a skittish colt.

She watched him, seemed to focus, stood upright and cleared her throat, obviously embarrassed. “The coffee. The coffee, uh, smells good.”

He smiled, turned to pour a cup.

Calm, she told herself, stepping toward the fire to sit down. He’s okay.

He’ll help. She ravenously ate the apple and roll he offered. “Sorry, I haven’t eaten for a bit,” she replied to his amused expression. She stared at the fire. “So, this is your land?” she groped.

“Inherited it from my folks. I breed and stable horses.”

She laughed, “I’ve tried to ride once in my life. She threw me immediately. Once was enough.”

He smiled, “You’ve a melodious laugh.”

She looked away, licked her lips uneasily. “You camp out a lot?”

“Used to, don’t have the time of late. I lost two hens the night before last.

Tracked the culprit this far but lost the trail. Can’t have coyote about with new colts at stake. But, I’ll admit I’d rather scare it than kill it.”

She froze. Chickens, oh my God! He’d been tracking her! That was the smell that disturbed her. He must have a gun. Deep breaths.

“I lost a colt last year. My own fault. I didn’t keep an eye on the mare and she had it early out in the field. It must have come from the mountains.

Desert coyote only eat insects and small rodent.”

“A colt,” she mumbled, horrified.

Misreading her expression, “Don’t worry, they won’t bother humans, just small animals that can’t protect themselves.”

\*\*\*

“Can’t believe I’ve been here three weeks.” Storm stretched, pressing against the warmth of his massive body.

Atticus chuckled, “I’ve often brought orphaned or injured animals back

here, but never a hot-blooded, sex-starved beast like you.” His arm completely encircled her long slender body. She stiffened, pulled away from him, sat up on the edge of the bed with her back to him.

“You’re going to tell me your dark secret, you know. It’s torturing you. I’ve not asked, been waiting ‘til you were ready to trust me.” His deep voice so invited unburdening her soul.

“You know I love you, Storm. I believe I could accept anything, that nothing could be so dark as to turn me away.” He reached out, stroked her naked back, felt her tremble. “When I took you to your place to get your things I was so afraid you wouldn’t come back with me. But, I knew you loved me. Even then I knew we’d make ba...”

“No! You know nothing!” she jerked around to look at him. “I’m a freak, Atticus. I shouldn’t have let it go this far.” She began to cry, sobs wracking her body, she slid down on the floor, hugging her knees close.

Atticus moved down beside Storm, wrapped his arms and legs around her. And let her cry.



"If you changed you'd be a bear," she finally whispered.

He chuckled, "Granny called me PoohBear when I was small. Thank goodness the nickname didn't stick."

She took a deep breath. "Many generations ago, a woman spread her legs to be fertilized by the wind, as was the tradition of her tribe. But it is said that the wind that impregnated her had first blown on a coyote."

Atticus was stroking her hair gently, listening closely as her voice was so low. He's right, she thought, I must tell him. But I've never told anyone.

She laid her head on his warm chest, inhaled the scent of their lovemaking, and relaxed into the security of his embrace.

"Through the years each of her female offspring has suffered the curse.

At puberty there is a change, or several changes. As a matter of precaution, the female is locked away during her time each month all that year. Just in case she becomes a coyote."

I sound like a raving lunatic, she thought, falling silent, awaiting his laughter.

"Are you telling me you've been through this?" he asked quietly.

“I’m telling you I’m still going through it. When you found me I was going through my last change. Instead of bleeding like most women, I go out killing and eating raw flesh. It was me you were tracking,” she barely whispered.

“That’s why there was blood under your nails,” he sounded distant. She knew he was going over the details of that morning.

“Granny told me so many stories. There was something about that, but I never imagined them true.”

Storm sighed. “It must have been me who took the colt,” she said with revulsion.

They sat in silence for several minutes.

Atticus frowned, “You said you’re twenty three.”

“The curse seems to get stronger with each generation. I don’t dare have a child. She might come out with pointed ears and a fur coat.” She tried to smile.

Atticus tried to muffle his laughter, but gave way, his body trembling. “Can you imagine the doctor’s face when he delivers a cute little coyote pup?”

She gradually began to laugh with him, and tears flowed. Her relief was enormous. But the worry was there.

“What if it never ends? I mean, it could happen every year, or go back to happening every month.”

Kissing her eyes, her cheeks, her hair, he whispered, “You trust me, you really trust me, and that’s all that matters. Anything else can be worked out.”

Lifting her onto the bed, he laid her on her stomach and began caressing her body. All of her, first with his hands, then with his mouth and beard, so soft and curly. She began to turn but he held her.

“Trust me, my Love, I will only do what is best for you, what I know you really want.” His voice was hoarse, his breath hot on her back.

Storm realized she had never trusted anyone, accepted that she loved this unique man. Her relief in sharing her burden was mixed with overpowering emotions. She began to moan. Laying there was so difficult. She wanted to take control, to consume him. Only his mouth touched her, nibbling and licking the small of her back with the exquisite tickle of the surrounding

beard. Whimpering, her body convulsed, her whimper became a howl as he watched, stroking the inside of her thighs in time with the pulsing of her lips.

When she stilled, he gently turned her over and began the inch by inch attention again, but firmer, the urgency greater. Her moans became pants then demands as he teased, holding back though he ached, sweated. When she began to plead he entered her slowly, deliberately, and together they exploded violently.

\*\*\*

“Are you sure this is necessary?” Atticus asked, standing in the doorway, key in hand.

“Yes, and you must not come in, no matter what you hear.” Storm paced, already feeling like a caged animal.

“We’ve had a good year,” he smiled, looking around the big old storage shed they’d emptied. “Okay, you’ve got food, books, sleeping bag.”

“And plenty of hay, which will probably serve me better. I feel ‘different’, Atticus. The horses feel it too. I always wonder if they know I killed one of their own.” She grimaced, “That’s hard to live with. The fear that I might do it again haunts me.”

“I don’t like leaving you here, but I understand,” he hugged her to him protectively.

Storm pushed him away, “Go now.”

\* \* \*

The next morning Atticus returned to stand outside the door and listen.

There was no response to his calls so he left with heavy heart. The growls he heard when he returned that night gave reality to his fears. Since then he had returned to the building every few hours, only to retreat in despair.

After five days Atticus stood at the door, called her name and pleaded.

The silence was broken by a low growl. He took a deep breath and put his

hand on the door.

“Yes, Granny told me the stories, my Love, and I know what I must do. I know what you would really want.” His every step and thought was slow, an effort to delay the inevitable.

The sounds became frantic, the howls mournful, more frequent.

Stepping in the door, he quickly aimed and pulled the trigger before his pain deafened him to her growls.

Kneeling over the skinny coyote, he stroked the silver mask around her slanted eyes, his tears spotting her auburn coat.

“Did you know, my Love, that you couldn’t change back after four days? Is that why you came to me? I’ve waited. But I couldn’t just set you free. Not with new colts at stake.”

finish