

Kalvesta

by Terri Quillan

Another drought-dreary afternoon is smothering the Weaver farm. The still wind whispers across the parched Kansas plain, scattering scorched fronds of dying sorghum along the dusty footpath from the clapboard house and out to the faded red barn.

Katherine Weaver flits about her birchwood kitchen in a trance, heaving a heavy sigh. A lot of good it does, she thought, to be part Indian, if you can't make the rain come. Katherine Littlefoot Weaver. One of the last folks in Kalvesta with any true Pawnee blood. Her grandfather, Clemson Weaver, was a medicine man.

She longed for the days spent growing up on the Oklahoma reservation, surrounded by the strength and spirit of her clan. Clemson Littlefoot was a small but mighty man, who carried with him the power and presence of the great spirit. If he were here now, he could make the rain come. She remembered how the village women brought him coins and shiny seed-filled gourds to coax the rains or some other request from the great sky. In exchange, he would don his cap of painted grouse and turkey feathers and his belt of shattered buffalo horn. Alone he would venture, to the edge of the plain, to confront the speechless sky, and would lie, near naked, for hours beneath the tireless burning sun, to steep in his own sweat. Delirious, he would stagger back to the reservation. The village women would be waiting to lead him to the center of the sacred circle, flanked by corn seeds, crimson root, and mystic symbols etched in the dust.

Exhausted, he would sit alone in the center, as the women placed a garland of beads and bear-claws around his shoulders, and rubbed jicawa into his spine. Silently, everyone would gather round him, sitting on the hard hot dirt, to await the descent of grace from the Great Spirit.

Soon a gust and swirl of dust would surround him, whisking him up to his feet. Then all at once, Clemson Gentle Coyote Littlefoot, standing strong and erect, would shudder and begin to dance and shout. She could feel the low humming vibrations made by his stammering feet, as he danced and prayed for rain. Katherine would give anything to be sitting near his feet to absorb the sweet vibrations before the coming rain, to be caressed awake by softly pelting droplets out of a hot hazy sky, surrounded by her kinswomen, and she'd give anything for a child.

She stared out intently at the not-yet-ready-to-give heavens, as this alone would cause the skies to open. "Now, Dear God," she prayed, "If only a little rain ..." Nervously she straightened the lace-edged muslin cafe curtains capping the window. How absurd. That she should think she could wish the rain to appear!

Her grandfather told her once, that Coyote medicine is good medicine, strong medicine, that could help her anytime she needed it. Where was it now? What did it matter that she was born on the autumn night of the coyote's howl? Perhaps her mother, a hard-working farm girl of good Dutch stock, was right. All this Indian hullabaloo is just phoney-baloney. Tradition, sure. But power? That's what you find in the Bible, in a church with stained glass windows and a pulpit. Or so her mother believed.

Going to church every Sunday, supporting the mission, wishing and praying—even visiting a supposed Osage shaman, didn't bring her any closer to bearing a child.

She didn't have much success by going to church. The minister said, "God's will. Adopt." What's that supposed to mean? She had better luck at the clinic in Cimmaron, from the fertility specialist who told her tubes were blocked, but that it didn't really matter, because Buck was sterile anyway.

She had difficulty accepting that a generally healthy strapping six-foot-two-inch, two-hundred-twenty-pound logger from upstate Washington could have this problem. Back trouble, maybe, from too many hours driving his rig cross-country, but not a sperm count of zero.

She considered adopting a baby, and had even discussed it with Buck. Buck loved kids, but couldn't stand to upset his mother—especially **now**. They couldn't adopt. Because to do so, would be to admit to the whole world Buck's problem—or so his mother, Hattie Weaver, thought.

Hattie's a kindly and feeble old soul, easily driven to tears and tantrums, and who rarely every makes any sense. She likes to telephone people in the middle of the night to ask about the strangest things—like chickens. Katherine and Buck took her to the Pennington Clinic in Wichita, only to learn that she's senile. Organic Brain Syndrome they called it. Five thousand dollars

for a fancy way to say senile. And no money left over for a nursing home, or for a lawyer for that matter, to initiate adoption proceeding. As it was now, there wasn't even enough money left in the cracked mason jar hidden behind the Drano beneath the sink. She'd spent most of the change she'd saved from picking through Buck's pockets on love offerings to healers and readers.

So far everything she'd heard from the readers was the same, and the healers and the shaman, too. A child would come, once she righted her life, and learned how to "relax," and to be content to just walk in the comforting shadow of the Great Spirit. She knew how to pray, how to love her neighbors as her self, but not how to relax. How could she? Even thinking about relaxing made her tremble. What, with sewing, and canning, and all those other farm-wife duties, where was the time? These were only worth putting aside for a child. Only for a child.

The wind outside the kitchen window started to whip up a little, and the curtains flew toward Katherine, whisking and slapping at her scalp, waking her from her daydream. The skidding tumbleweeds and wind-cast flecks of dirt outside reminded her of the great swarming dust cloud that signaled the call of the Great Spirit, and the last time Clemson Littlefoot danced for rain. His bronzed, sweat-glazed chest became pasty with flying dust, as he coughed and hacked. He could not stand, but instead lie, alone in the sacred circle, gasping for breath, his beaded prayer cloth hanging limply from his loins, and dragging in the dirt. Yet still the rains came. Huge cool droplets streamed past his long silver-threaded ebony locks and over his wrinkled shut eyes, washing clean the sticky sweat-plastered mud from his chest. For the first time, the men entered the sacred circle, to remove his body. It rained for four days and four nights. One old woman swore she saw a coyote sleeping in front of his house.

The hot arid stench of burned sorghum stifled Katherine's senses. She bent forward over the sink, to shut the window, reaching over on tip-toes, her hard flat abdomen accepting the impression of the sink ledge.

She stepped back and rested full-flat on her heels, savoring the sensation in her belly. She sat down on the big carved oak chair across from the refrigerator, and rubbed her abdomen, caressing it, sliding her smooth palms around over the wrinkled gingham apron covering her faded heavy work denims. She continued caressing, in loving strokes, covering her belly and hips in wide concentric circles. As she felt the stiff ripples and rivets on the pockets of her Wranglers, she wondered what it might be like, if her belly was so

big that the pockets would pooch out, and that she'd need to lay flat on the bed to zip them up, yet be unable to do so.

She wanted to drive to Dodge City to buy some of those jeans with the square elastic panels in front, and one of those frilly, three-sizes-too-big, long-in-front maternity blouses. Or at least be able to take the truck to Cimarron to buy a pattern to make some.

She loved Buck desperately, but even more desperately wanted to bear his child. However, the thought of another lonely supper with Buck talking about the hogs, and how he wished he'd go back to driving the rig would drive her mad. A child could change things. A child would make life exciting, worth living.

Katherine stared at the closed refrigerator door, at the magnets cluttering the front, and at the long sleek freezer door handle. The silvery letters emblazoned in the steel handle seemed to reach out to her, glimmering in the shadows. Their silvery sheen seemed to be magnified by the reflected light, cast down from beneath the moving blades of the rickety ceiling fan. She watched as the unstable old thing quivered, sputtered and buzzed as it turned, chopping the stale and arid indoor air.

The fan sang in tandem with the low hum coming from beneath the refrigerator. This reminded her of the queer noise her grandfather made before he shrieked at the clouds causing them to pour.

The silver metal letters seemed to be moving in the light, back and forth, in and out, playing hide and seek with the light. KELVINATOR. She read the word displayed in shimmery block letters. KELVINATOR. She said it over in her mind a few times. She liked the sound of it. She wondered if there was a Kelvin who started the company. KELVIN, she thought. That would be a nice name for a boy. She was certain that she'd never name a child after Buck. Buck Junior? No. Bradson Jameson Weaver the fourth? Certainly not. A boy's name. A kid name. Something like Kelvin, or Kevin maybe. A fun, let's-go-romp-in-the-hay-and-turn-the-hoses-on-the-pigs-and-bring-frogs-into-the-house kind of name. An All-American boy name. The more she thought about it, the more "Kevin" seemed just right.

As she reached into the fridge for six ears of crisp white corn and a few fat parsnips, she thought about the possibility of a Kevin coming into her life. Maybe she could get money somehow to see a lawyer. To heck with Hattie. Anyway, when it comes to being Indian, women have control over adoptions, captives and just who can and cannot enter the clan. Dear God, she prayed,

if only the money for an adoption. And, Dear God, please, a little rain?

She could smell a half-open jar of mustard Buck left on the side-door. She wondered about family barbecues, and a red-headed freckled kid, who'd love hot dogs, and ice cream, and slopping the hogs with his daddy. She threw a package of bleeding steaks onto the formica counter with a thud, and slammed the fridge door shut with the side of her foot. She plopped the ears of corn and the parsnips into the dry sink, and wiped her bloodstained and sticky hands on the rear pockets of her jeans.

She could hear the rustling whistle of a narrow zephyr edging beneath the back door. Carefully she opened the screen door, and peered out. No sign of Buck. The wind was really howling now, and from the way it looked, there would be—THANK GOD—rain in about an hour, and coming from the east. Storm clouds were twirling in a grey and ebony pinwheel, about a mile behind the tumble-down barn, and above the pig pens. The pigs, slathered in mud, huddled tightly in one corner, as if to shield one another from the coming downpour. Buck was nowhere to be found. He was probably in the barn, fixing the rusting tractor, that was broken, AGAIN.

Katherine looked up at the groaning grey sky and shook her head. Now she had the corn to worry about. If this storm turns out to be the hum-dinger it's hinting at, the corn will be in trouble, and surely there won't be any money for a lawyer, a pattern, or even gas to put in the truck for a trip to Cimarron. The sputtering electric tinkle interrupted her quietude. It was the phone. Katherine slowly shut the door, and shuf-suffling in her foam-soled wedgies, glided across the hardwood floor toward the phone. It stopped ringing before she got there.

Rats! she thought. The blasted phone. Whoever it is will just have to call back. Dazed and disgusted, she decided to do the dishes which she had haphazardly stacked into a babelous pile at the edge of the sink. She dropped an armload of veggies from the dry sink onto the drainboard, and reached for the round black rubber drain plug at the back of the sink. Again she savored the chilling, painful, yet comforting sensation of the icy sink burrowing into her belly. She shoved the stopper into the drain, and lifted the tap, allowing warm water to fill the sink. Yes, a storm was really brewing. In fact, it had already started to sprinkle. The soggy smell of dead and damp sorghum came piercing from the window. She watched the rain as it matted down the buds and chaff on the sorghum, occasionally flying and spattering against the closed window, with an occasional gust of wind. She thought about how windswept

raindrops would spatter against her grandfather's cheeks as he chanted. She was never really sure if perhaps they were mixed with tears. THANK GOD she thought. It's been one heck of a drought.

She stared intently at the waterfall of raindrops on the window, and wondered how in the world rain was supposed to relax people. The rain began to pound. She could hear the wind slamming and rattling the shutters on the outside. She was glad that Buck installed the lightning rod last week. She thought about the legend of Kitkehaki, the Moon Daughter, and Lightning Medicine. About the maiden who prayed for rain and a child, but when she left the tipi to rescue the abandoned coyote kit, she was struck by lightning. Her hours of gazing up and counting the stars, and talking to the Great Spirit, were rewarded by a wild shining bolt of light, and lifted by the wind, she was carried up, far away into the night heavens, to take residence in the moon. The Pawnee say that when a strong rain comes, you can see her smiling in the moon, and talking to her Coyote children below, who bay back at their glistening mother.

Katherine looked, but couldn't see the moon. It was only dusk. But she could see the huge jagged bolt which cracked at the rod before her, darting back and forth behind the barn, tracing an electric sizzle into the damp sky. As she watched the rod quiver, she thought about the lightning, the rain, and Kitkehaki. She realized, that as it was now, here with her hands in warm soapy water, a storm raging outside, she had a much better chance of getting struck by lightning than she did of ever bearing Buck's child. If only there really was a Kitkehaki, and if only she could grant a wish. If you can wish upon a star, why not a squaw in the moon? How absurd. Wishing on stars and the moon. But oh, how she did wish she could be swept up by the wind, carried to some far off place, to return with the budding seed of her spouse flowering inside her.

She washed away the last crusted crumbs of dried oatmeal and sorghum syrup from a favorite Pfaltzgraff bowl with a ragged dish sponge-mop. Just as she hung it over the plastic-laminated rung on the dish drainer, the phone rang. "Are the chickens in yet?" It was Hattie. Hattie and those dog-goned chickens. Whenever it rained, she thought chickens were out drowning somewhere. "Yeah, Hattie. Buck will bring the chickens in... I promise...Oh, just some dishes...." ZAP. She heard a quick sizzle and a crackle, and the phone line was dead. She looked out the window. Rain was sweeping in airborne currents and flailing against the back stoop. The lightning rod was

vibrating. Hattie must be scared out of her wits, she thought. Oh well. Just have to wait till she tries to call back.

The freshly washed dishes were now resting contentedly on the drainboard, and dripping peacefully onto the rubber mat. Katherine's hands were in the cooling water, swishing shards of food and debris into the drain with her fingertips, sweeping in slow circles. The phone rang again. Must be Hattie, she thought. She shook her wet hands rapidly over the sink, like a dog after a dip, flinging droplets over the counter and sink.

She grabbed the receiver of the phone with her slick wet hand, and propped it up on her shoulder, and plunged her hands back into the emptying sink.

"Uh, hello ..."

"Is Kevin there?"

"Kevin???"

Kevin. She was startled. Someone wanted a Kevin. Why, she couldn't name her child Kevin. There was someone else around here with that name.

"I said, is Kevin there???" The voice seemed to be coming from some dark lonesome hollow, almost as if some sacred earth mound had this modern convenience. The woman's voice sounded raspy and screeching, and like it was coming from a tube. It also sounded quite angry. Apparently at someone named Kevin. The hollow in the woman's voice seemed to expand and contract, accented by crackling and sizzling whenever the aged woman took a breath between words. A rotten connection.

"Kevin? Ma'am, there's no Kevin here. You have the wrong number."

"Hardly." The woman replied in a crazed and gruff angry tone.

"Huh?"

"I said, is Kevin there. Let us speak to him."

"Umm, are you one of Hattie's friends?"

Ma'am, there's no Kevin here, really."

"Hattie? Oh, no. Kevin's. He's ours. And we know he's there."

"Ma'am, I don't know what you're talking about."

"That's what they all say, right? And this is a wrong number. Wrong."

"Look, lady, for the last time, there's not a Kevin here, got it?" Katherine was getting aggravated at this crazy odd woman and thought she'd hang up, so she pulled her hands from the cold soapy water, and wiped them vigorously on the towel hanging from the under-sink cabinet door handle. She jerked the receiver from her right shoulder with her hand, and with an air of authority, switched ears, stood upright, as if ready to do

battle in a face-to-face confrontation with the woman. The lady remained silent. Katherine knew if she tried to hang up now, the line would be jammed, so she could only hang up once the woman wanted to. In exasperation she blasted a yell into the receiver. "For the last time! There is no Kevin here, has not ever been and probably never will be! Okay???" The thought of this senseless verbal exchange, and her last remark, caused a sad twinge inside.

The woman said in a soft but sarcastic voice, "Okay. Have it your way. But this is Kalvesta, Kansas, right? This is the Weaver residence, right? Don't bother. Tell Kevin we know. And tell him we're on our way over."

Katherine slammed the receiver down hard on the wall jack, and as she did, a queer electric shock travelled all the way up her arm and into her shoulder, pinging a piercing pain into the side of her neck, down through the palm of her hand, at the same time. Her fingers went numb, tingly and cold.

She heard the low rumble of thunder along the plain and could smell the torrential sheets as they washed the wheat. She grabbed her left wrist, and rubbed around it, kneading, trying to force the blood into her hand, to get the feeling back. She felt nauseous. She looked at her hand, and noticed it had taken on a pallid, china-blue-casted white hue, not unlike the sink it was now resting upon. She continued to rub the hand.

The back door rattled, banging against the inner screen with great force. It wasn't the wind, but wild knocking.

"God-damn it, Kit! Open this God-damn door, why don't you???? I'm getting soaked out here!"

Still clasping her cadaverous hand, she walked zombie-like to the back door, and opened it slowly. There was Buck, shivering.

"Damn it, Kit! Are you okay?" She just looked at the swollen hand. "What's the matter with your hand?" She didn't answer, but looked over at the phone. She saw Buck dripping wet, like he had dropped into the pond, chasing after one of the pigs. His hair was plastered to the back of his neck, his bangs stuck to his eyebrows. His plaid shirt with cutaway pockets and pearlized grommet snaps conformed to every perfectly shaped muscle of his upper torso. His jeans were so wet they looked deep ebony. His heavy workboots were tracking oozy thick mud and matted hay into the house.

Her hand stopped throbbing. She looked up and realized just how wet Buck really was. "Oh, honey! Look at you. You're wrecking the floor. Please go get changed. You'll catch a chill."

"No, Honey. I—I came in for you. You gotta

come back with me—out to the barn. There—
 There's this kid—and well, found him crouched
 behind the rabbit feed, mumbling something about
 "don't find me." He—He won't talk to me.
 Weather's too bad to take him to town, besides the
 phone lines are down. Can't call anybody. He
 won't leave the barn. Did get one thing out of him,
 though—says his name is Kevin."

Sunbathers

wet slabs of meat
 laid out to dry
 with bleached hair
 carefully arranged
inside the pink bikini body bags
Don't you find it strange?
Greased like pork
 worshipping the sun
 like shrivelled bacon pagans.

--Kimberly Gustin

Violated

Pinned
 Against a wall

Violated
 by this stranger

A man
 i don't know
 who doesn't
 know me

Caresses me
 Touches me
 Talks to me

Scream!

Help!

Slap!

No one hears
 No one helps

So....

The stranger
pins me to the wall
 Violates me

While others
 unknowingly
 continue their fun
 on the other side
 of the
 door

--Tawnee Shallenberger