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CHAPTER 1

Draw in, find your place on the branch and know this: Dreams are sacred.

When we sleep, we see life as the Maker first saw us. We are, after all, what the Maker dreamed in her long night alone. The stories revealed to us when we dream, then, aren't just images shaped by night and mist, but things we must grasp and remember. Once we wake, who knows what action we will be directed to take?

Cousins, listen! Some of the things I will tell you I have lived.

Some of the things I will tell you I have dreamed.

Some of the things I will tell you may have dreamed me.

And that may make them all the truer.

Dream with me now, and see how I have seen things, dreamed things, and come to this place. Watch with me as three Crows approach across a stretch of rolling hills. It is late spring. The sun glitters low in the west, and from a distance they are not immediately distinguishable one from the other, three black crescents flickering in the glare. One flies with the slow, energy-saving strokes of the elderly. A younger one flies with thoughtful and direct strokes immediately beside the elder, her head cocked in his direction, as though listening to something being said. And the third flies with urgency and impatience, rushing above, over and ahead of the other two, then slowing for them to catch up.

These three approach low over tall grasses that ripple and shimmer like waves before wind on the surface of the ocean. The shadow of each bird stretches and races ahead, long and lean. Listen. As they fly, their voices lift and rise across the field and across time as well, because these events have occurred in the past.

"No," the restless one argued and swept back to join the others as he made his point. "No, it's not —"

"That's not what I'm saying, Kyp —"

"Kym, are you saying —" he interrupted her, only to be interrupted in turn.

"How can you possibly tell what I'm *saying* when you aren't even *listening* to me?"

"I *am* listening. I am listening and, are you saying — are you saying, because it sounds like this is what you are saying — are you saying that *no* ceremony can be changed —"

"Don't be an idiot," Kym snorted. "Of course that's not what I'm *saying*." The way she said "idiot" was fond. These were friends disagreeing.

"Well, have you been listening to me?"

"Have either of you," the older one interrupted patiently, "been listening to the other?"

"Because," Kyp continued, "because if we can't *change* anything, then we can't *fix* anything either, and *something* has to change. Three good Crows were Banished just this winter. And for *what*?"

"I know, and I'm not saying that things can't change."

"Good. Because they've got to, Kym. They've *got* to change."

"And they will, Kyp. And we'll make those changes. But not all at once. We can't just push these older ones out —"

"Calm yourselves," Kalum interrupted again. "Some things will change and some won't, and you will be surprised to discover how much and how little you have to do with either. You will both have to deal with more pressing situations than this — and lead in a calmer and more reasonable fashion than either of you have demonstrated here."

"I'm sorry, Kalum," Kym apologized immediately.

"And I'm sorry," Kyp echoed. "It's just that there are so many things to be done."

"Well. Let's move on to something else," said Kalum. "Tomorrow there is a Naming. Which of you can be expected to lead the Family in the Recollection of Names?"

"I could do that," Kym offered, after exchanging glances with Kyp, "if you'd like, Uncle."

"Very well," Kalum said and nodded. "And what is the first thing that must be done after the Family is assembled for the ceremony?"

"I will lead the Family in prayer."

"And then?"

"And then we will recite the Long Flight, Chooser to Chooser from the First Nest on."

"Very good," Kalum murmured. "And you can recite it, of course, Kyp?" A silence followed. "That would be *you* I was asking, Kyp."

"I *think* so," Kyp answered hesitantly.

"Think?" Kalum repeated.

"I just have some trouble with the middle portion —"

"*Middle* portion?" Kalum sighed. "There is no *middle* portion. That's your trouble. You think of it as a list, but for it to live in you it has to become *more* than a list. More than a series of events."

Kyp returned a glance that said he understood nothing

of what had been said.

"But it *is* a list," he maintained. "A long list."

Kalum squinted at Kyp and then began patiently. "Your name is you? That's correct? That is, it describes you. Yes?"

Kyp nodded.

"So, tell me, which of your names is you? Are you *Kyp*, or are you *Kurea*, or are you *Kinaar*?"

"All of those things."

"*Exactly. All* of those things. All of those things is not a list. It is *you*. You. You are not Kyp *or* Kurea *or* Kinaar — you are Kyp of the Kurea Clan of the Family Kinaar. One Crow. What you deliver to the Family isn't a list, it is a Chant of Remembrance, and *everything* in it is connected from beginning to end. Do you see?"

"I think so," Kyp said hesitantly.

"Well, I'm not sure that you do. But perhaps by repeating it one more time you will begin to understand it more fully. Let's go over it as we fly."

Kyp stifled a sigh and began. "From the nest of Great Crow came the First Brood —"

Kalum nodded his approval, glanced up and over a shoulder, then abruptly turned and broke left. "Fly!" he shouted.

The Crows scattered over the prairie grass. From above, a thunderbolt of feathers and talons struck, snapping a clump of grass and dirt through the air. Out of the cloud

of debris and dust, a scream of frustration sounded, and an adult golden eagle emerged, wheeled, recovered and without hesitation selected the oldest and slowest of the Crows.