

My First Encounter

I can only imagine. Meeting someone who hears voices, has visions, and draws a future even she doesn't always understand. Oh Willi! When I first drew you, I didn't know we'd meet. And then I tripped over you at the Save-the Geese protest. I know, crazy.... believe me, I was as surprised as you were. I... I fell in love with you before we met. Insane! I've been struggling with this gift/curse since I was eight. Kim understood long before I met you. And that ended badly. Maybe secrets are meant to be kept secret. I'm not sure. I trust you and maybe, someday, I'll tell you all of this, but what happened here was only the beginning.

My parents called me Bright Eyes. I grew up in hippie communes up and down Coastal Highway 1 in California. By the time I was eight, we had moved four or five times. My 'awakening' happened at Centrale, a community midway between LA and San Francisco. The place was built in the woods about half a mile from the coastline cliffs, a mixture of shanties and tents, no running water or electricity. Many people passed through, everyone searching for something... utopia, or belonging. Some came out of curiosity, some came to find love. Yes, there were drugs of all sorts, but that wasn't the point. If it had a theme, I'd say spiritual connection because of its primitive setting and inspirational nature. About a hundred of us lived there under one common goal—get along in peace. Everyone shared what they had. It was an experiment in building a new social order. What happened next... I have no explanation.

I was undisciplined, wild, with a non-formal education until high school. My mother was a painter, my father a musician. I started drawing as soon as I could hold a pencil. By eight years old, I could draw not only trees but forests, landscapes in perspective, and I could draw ocean waves crashing. Go ahead, try to draw an ocean wave crashing with a pencil. On my eighth birthday, my life changed.

A mountain stream was our water source that cascaded down the steep hillside. It was cold and pure, rushing by a huge, flat rock into a crystal-clear pool near my family's homestead. The stone was smooth and warmed by the sun, perfect for a young girl with a fierce imagination. I would sit on this rock, mesmerized by colors reflecting off the pool's surface and the soft shushing sound of moving water. Under tall pines, the world would disappear and I would pretend to be a frog or turtle sunning myself. Some kids had stuffies, I had a rock.

On that eighth birthday, as I stared at the pool, images formed on the river's surface. Pictures of places I've never seen, strange buildings, people I've never met, and then my mother's face undulating in the water's movement. She spoke to me, crying out in distress. My heart pounded. I stood up, unable to look away. Blood dripped from the corners of her eyes, forming a red streak flowing down the river. Believe me, Willi, I was shocked.

I jumped off that rock and ran home, tears streaming and petrified. I just about knocked my mother down when I crashed into our kitchen, throwing my arms around her. I babbled sentences that could not be understood. She grabbed my arms and sat me on the bench, her forehead wrinkled, eyes penetrating. "Bright eyes," she said, "what's got you so upset?"

"A vision, mama. I saw a reflection in the water. People crying out for help. You were hurt and bleeding."

"You were dreaming," she said. "Now you are awake."

If I was awake, why could I still see bodies scattered on the ground outside our shanty, tents, and scabby buildings in flames? Even my mother lay like a crumbled doll just outside the window. I pushed back from mother's skirt, but she caught my arm. "Madison!" she shook me. "What are you seeing?"

But there were no words. Only a voice crashing into my thoughts. “You must save her.” I stopped breathing. A universe behind a universe appeared. A reality within a reality. It’s unexplainable. For an eight-year-old, terrifying.

My hand moved as if I were a marionette. I jerked myself from mother’s hold and grabbed a kitchen knife from the table. Before she could stop me, I slammed the pointed blade through my palm. My mother screamed. A wind carried my soul away. Blood spurted over cut vegetables, squawking birds flew out of the trees and the sky turned dark. I passed out in my mother’s arms.

What happened next was a blur. I woke up on a table at a local clinic, my hand bandaged and my mother’s tear-filled eyes staring down into mine.

“I had to save you, mama,” my first words.

“From what, Madison. From what?”

“I don’t know, mama. The voice told me to do it.”

Her eyes became like mirrors when I told her this. She pulled a chair next to the bed.

“Don’t say a word about this to the doctor here, Ok? You have a gift.”

“Ok,” I sniffled. “What gift?”

“Say nothing! What happened was an accident. Understand?”

“Yes, mama. I understand.”

When the doctor came in, my mother made up a story about children playing with knives. He gave her a disbelieving look, but wrote up the incident as an accident.

Several hours later, we returned to Centrale. As we hiked up the half-mile trail through the woods, signs of trouble loomed. Torn clothing hung from bramble bushes, shoes left on the

path, deep gouges in the dirt, raspberry bushes flattened by tread marks of ATVs. This was only the beginning of a violent story.

ATF and ICE had assaulted our small community. They destroyed tent homes, scattered belongings, makeshift shelters torn apart, fires smoldered, food supplies kicked over. Officers hauled away immigrants and those without proper ID. They arrested whole families for illegal drug possession. Bare-breasted women were called whores. Several were raped. These women greeted us in tears. An ATV struck the makeshift walls of our homestead, collapsing the roof, destroying our rudimentary house. Papa had been fishing at the beach across Highway 1 when they attacked. When we met up, we hugged and cried. He asked where we had been. Mama said we were at the clinic after I had cut myself with a knife. I showed him my bandages.

That night, my hand throbbed, and I decided never to go to that rock again. I snuggled in a sleeping bag on the ground and listened as community members gathered around a fire to discuss what happened and what to do next. The camp was in ruins. Many would head north to a place in the hills behind Half-Moon Bay.

After the meeting, late in the evening, my mother came to my bedside. “Say nothing about the voice to your father or anyone else,” she said. “It will be our secret.”

For many years, it was our secret, but mostly, my secret. It kept me prisoner until I met Kim and then you, Willi.

Images came frequently, and I drew them. I thought I was crazy, but mama assured me I had a gift. That day, I had saved her from a beating and arrest and probably rape. A few years later, the voice, and I, would save her life... but only her life. Papa would die in the same horrendous accident.

I hated the voice for a long time. But it still came. I had no choice. And I've seen the future, your future Willi, and if I told you... Oh Willi, I'm so sorry.