

## *Chapter 22: Institution Time*

In the days that followed the ceremony I found myself feeling more empowered than ever before. I increased the frequency of the lodges and began sharing what I had learned with an ever widening circle of people.

In the meantime, Victoria's decline was beginning to accelerate. She began to become even more depressed. In a vain attempt to cheer her up I managed to go out and get her an old white Jaguar xj6, with the help of my father and the good fortune of finding a decent mechanic. She had always wanted one, and for a short time her enthusiasm seemed to buoy her over her mental illness. I knew better than to believe this was any kind of cure, but my desperation was growing in equal measure to her depression.

Within three months she had declined into a state bordering on suicidal. I survived emotionally by running lodges as often as I could, and continued to teach the ever expanding collection of people exploring the Red Road over in Miguel's backyard. I could feel the Four Enemies surrounding my circle, and struggled to keep a sense of how they might serve as my allies somewhere within my grasp. It wasn't long before I developed nervous twitches and a state of perpetual fatigue.

Early one February evening, almost six months after I had come down off of the mountain from facing the three day death ceremony, the Fourth Enemy of Death came knocking hard on my front door.

Victoria was in a state of complete nervous breakdown. The medications were having no stabilizing effect on her mental state. I came home from work to find her in tears.

“I just want to die,” was all she could say as she rocked back and forth on our battered old couch.

I could feel anxiety beginning to well up within me. Without thinking, I found myself muttering a silent prayer for guidance from anything and anyone willing to help me. In a flash, one of my old enemies from the mountain came to my rescue.

Clarity answered the call. Fear summoned it. I grabbed Victoria and wrapped her in a blanket, bundling her shaking body into the car. It was if I had been infused with a new energy to act. If Victoria was intent on calling Death into her Circle, I was going to respond with the other three enemies acting as my allies.

It took me half an hour to work my way through the traffic and get her to the emergency room. Over the years of dealing with her problems, I had become quite adept at the emergency care routine.

Over the next six hours I watched as the excruciatingly slow process unfolded. As I stood in the ER I felt strangely calm, as if things were finally going as they should. It was decided that my wife would be placed under a seventy-two hour suicide watch. It would take a few more hours to arrange for her transport to the locked facility where she would be kept.

She had been sedated. I called around trying to find someone to talk to. Paul was on the road, and finally I located my friend Robert Blake. Robert was an actor of extremely wide renown, and had become a close friend by virtue of his own trials and tribulations. We had a shared interest and experience with the Indian ways of the Red Road. We talked on the phone for a little while,

and I felt a little better. It wasn't an hour later when I was summoned by a page from the front desk to find him waiting in the ER reception room.

"I figured ya might need a little company", he said when I saw him. Seeing him was like a gift from Great Spirit. We walked outside and sat on the curb, watching the ambulances roll by with their steady parade of the ill and injured.

"What are we gonna do about yer girl?," Robert asked. "I don't know, I guess we've done what we can", I said.

"Well, maybe there's somethin' more that we could do, some way to look out for her, or find a place for her to live, damn, I've been through stuff like this and I gotta tell ya, I know its pretty damn miserable when you're stuck in the middle of all of it. Kinda twists yer guts up in a knot". Robert was right, and I couldn't argue with any of it. One thing about him, he always called it as he saw it.

I don't know why, but suddenly I felt as if Clarity had come walking back into my circle. "You know something, I think it's really about letting go instead of holding on. I think she's got to go live in her own circle, and I have to live inside of mine, and if I try to get in hers I'll either end up just as crazy as she is, or something even worse. I have to let her have her own circle of who she is. My way isn't working. We just have to see what Great Spirit's way is gonna be. If she's supposed to die, she's going to find a way to get there. If she's supposed to heal, she's gonna find a way to do that too. I don't get a vote anymore, I just get to stay in my own circle of being and do everything I can to help". I shut up after that.

Robert sat there quietly for several minutes. When he did speak, all he said was, “Sure seems right to me. Let’s go check on our girl”. We walked inside.

It was truly heartbreaking to see her lying on the gurney in the holding area. Her soft white face was streaked with tears and her emerald green eyes looked hollow and distant. I searched them for any spark of the woman I knew was my wife. They were frighteningly vacant. I went over and sat by her, stroking her arm reassuringly. She recognized Robert, and made a weak attempt at humor about the situation. I was encouraged by that, and soon afterward the Doctor arrived. Her transport was ready.

Robert left, and I spent the last few minutes holding Victoria’s hand, trying to comfort her. I followed her outside and watched as they loaded her into the ambulance. I was not to be allowed to follow her downtown to the unit where they were going to hold her for observation. I stood in the parking lot and watched the flashing lights as the ambulance left the parking lot. Slowly the vehicle rolled up onto the freeway, and I stood watching until even the reflection of the emergency lights had faded over the midnight sky horizon.

I could only stand in the middle of the parking lot. There was a hole through the middle of me bigger than anything I’d ever felt in my life. It hurt just to breathe. In my heart I thanked the Creator for sending me Clarity and Power as allies on that night, and I found myself experiencing both gratitude and pain at the same time. I drove home very slowly that night.

The next day I found out where they had taken her and went to visit. They let her out of the locked unit, shuffling along in her boots with no shoelaces. She looked so frail and broken, and the cold fact that she was going back behind locked doors within the hour was very present on my mind. We talked very little, mostly I just held her and reassured her that things would get better somehow.

Her seventy two hour hold grew into a three and a half week stay, the maximum allowed under our insurance. She was a very sick girl. She went into the hospital on two medications, she came out on five. She wasn't suicidal, she was just so medicated she could barely form complete sentences. She couldn't drive, she was a functional invalid.

I sat up late one night, praying for the strength to see these days through. I had finally found some treatment for her, though our insurance would not cover it. Over 70 percent of every dime I made went into medications and therapy. I wondered how we were even going to keep a roof over our head.

I stayed close to the lodge and went every chance I could. It was the one place I could be in the moment, free from the anxiety and worry of what the future might hold.

I started making regular Sunday morning visits to Robert's house. He would call me early on Sunday's and always ask "whaddya doin?" I would always answer, "Sleeping". He would invariably give me 15 minutes to get across town to his house, where I would find him with his feet propped up on a big wooden spool he used

for a table out in front of his house, under his awning. Coffee in hand, we would discuss the situation.

We would go for long walks along the LA River, which was more like a drainage ditch, running behind his house. Robert had been through a great deal of psychological trauma personally over the years, and had a great deal of experience to share with me. He had also spent a number of years around the reservations and knew several different Elders, and he used to tell me stories of his own adventures on the Red Road.

It always came back around to how I was doing “holding my own circle” and what that might mean for my process of showing up to be helpful to Victoria. Robert was a consistent and true friend to Victoria and I during this time. He bailed us out financially on one occasion with the request that rather than pay him back, we “pay it forward” to help someone else down the road. It was a promise I made gladly, and have upheld 10 times over since then. “How’s our girl doin?” was always part of the conversation.

Victoria’s doctors and therapists were not overly optimistic about her condition. After a few months of treatment and a battery of tests, the verdict came in.

“Your wife has a condition known as schizoid –affect syndrome”, I was told. “Basically, its severe depression coupled with schizophrenic symptoms. It’s not uncommon for people with these problems to remain on medication and live in managed care for the rest of their lives. “This news was delivered by her therapist with a tone of compassion underscored by the serious recommendation that I seek therapy for myself in order to learn how to leave my wife.

These problems had all but swallowed me whole. I did the only thing I knew to do, I headed for the lodge and prayed. There in the safety of that sacred space, I called upon everything I had ever experienced to be with me. I asked myself from within the deepest place I could find in my own heart if I was willing to leave or stay.

I sat in the lodge, letting the darkness hold me. I could see Victoria in my mind, happy and whole. I knew that it was possible, and I knew I could not make it happen. It was up to her and the Creator. I asked the Creator if I could be strong enough to hold on for the miracle.

*“You can be strong enough for one day, little brother. That is all the strength you need. One day’s worth. Every day, you rise and ask for what you need for the day and it will be there for you”.* These are the words I heard in the lodge that night.

I knew I could do one day’s worth of the struggle. I resolved in that moment to make every effort to contribute whatever I could to my wife’s healing. Nothing was going to be ruled out in my mind.

It was time for desperate measures.