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### THE CLOVIS DIG

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### PUBLISHER'S NOTE:

At the end of this novel of approximately 70,604 words, you will find two Special Sneak Previews: 1) **INVISIBLE BY DAY** by Teri Fink, the author's first novel, an historical fiction piece centered around WWI England, and; 2) **FLIRTATION ON THE HUDSON** by J.F. Collen, the award-winning first book in the "Journey of Cornelia Rose" series of historical/women's novels set in America in the Pioneer days. We think you'll enjoy these books, too, and provide these previews as a **FREE** extra service, which you should in no way consider a part of the price you paid for this book. We hope you will both appreciate and enjoy the opportunity. Thank you.

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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are products of the author's imagination, or the author has used them fictitiously.

## Books by Teri Fink

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*Invisible by Day*



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*The Clovis Dig*

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[www.TeriFink.com](http://www.TeriFink.com)

## What Others Are Saying about INVISIBLE BY DAY

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"Teri Fink's suspense driven novel offers readers captivating characters, involved in powerful relationships, within a dramatic historical setting. Every chapter leaves you hungry for the next." ~ Cathie E. West, Author of "The Educator's Guide to Writing a Book: Practical Advice for Teachers and Leaders"

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"If you loved Downton Abbey, you'll devour *Invisible by Day*. Teri Fink recreates World War I era England with vivid details, but while she paints the era with love, she doesn't sentimentalize it. Instead, she captures much of the brutality, sexism and class warfare that defined the times. A detailed, sweeping novel that explores three of the most compelling facets of human life: love, war, and redemption. Readers will be marking their calendars for Teri Fink's next release." ~ A.C. Fuller, Author of the "Alex Vane Media Thriller" Series

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"Often books are good because of the story. There are a few that are special because the words are beautiful and take you to another place and time. Those are harder to find. You have both! I loved it! I look forward to your next book!" ~ Debbie Taylor

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"Teri Fink's first novel is a genuine page-turner, the kind of book you want to have on a long flight or a lazy few days on a beach. The people and events are completely believable, in part because of how well the author researched the time period and how stylishly she describes it. This book is suspenseful, fast-paced, and satisfying. If you're looking for entertainment, it would be hard to do any better than this. I recommend it most highly." ~ L. F. Smith

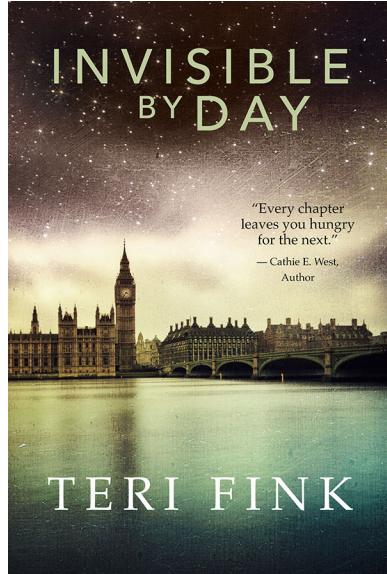
## BONUS CONTENT

We're pleased to offer you not one, but two Special Sneak Previews at the end of this book.

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In the first preview, you'll enjoy the First 5 Chapters of Teri Fink's novel, *INVISIBLE BY DAY*, a critically acclaimed, award-winning historical novel.

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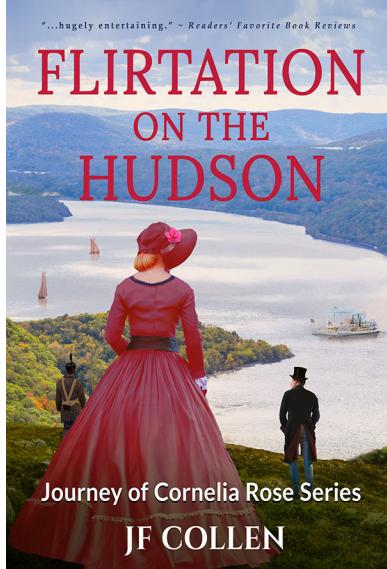


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**[TERI FINK'S Books at Evolved Publishing](#)**

In the second preview, you'll enjoy the Prologue and First Chapter of ***FLIRTATION ON THE HUDSON*** by J.F. Collen, the award-winning first book in the "Journey of Cornelia Rose" series of historical/women's fiction novels set in America in the Pioneer days.

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*Reviewer Christian Sia says in a 5-Star review at Readers' Favorite Books Reviews:* "This is a beautiful story and the author brings to life a period of history with its traits and way of life....

*Flirtation on the Hudson* is real; a narrative that features elaborately developed characters and adventures that will keep readers entertained. JF Collen combines humor and wit in a work that is hugely entertaining. I enjoyed every bit of this story."

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**OR GRAB THE FULL EBOOK TODAY!**  
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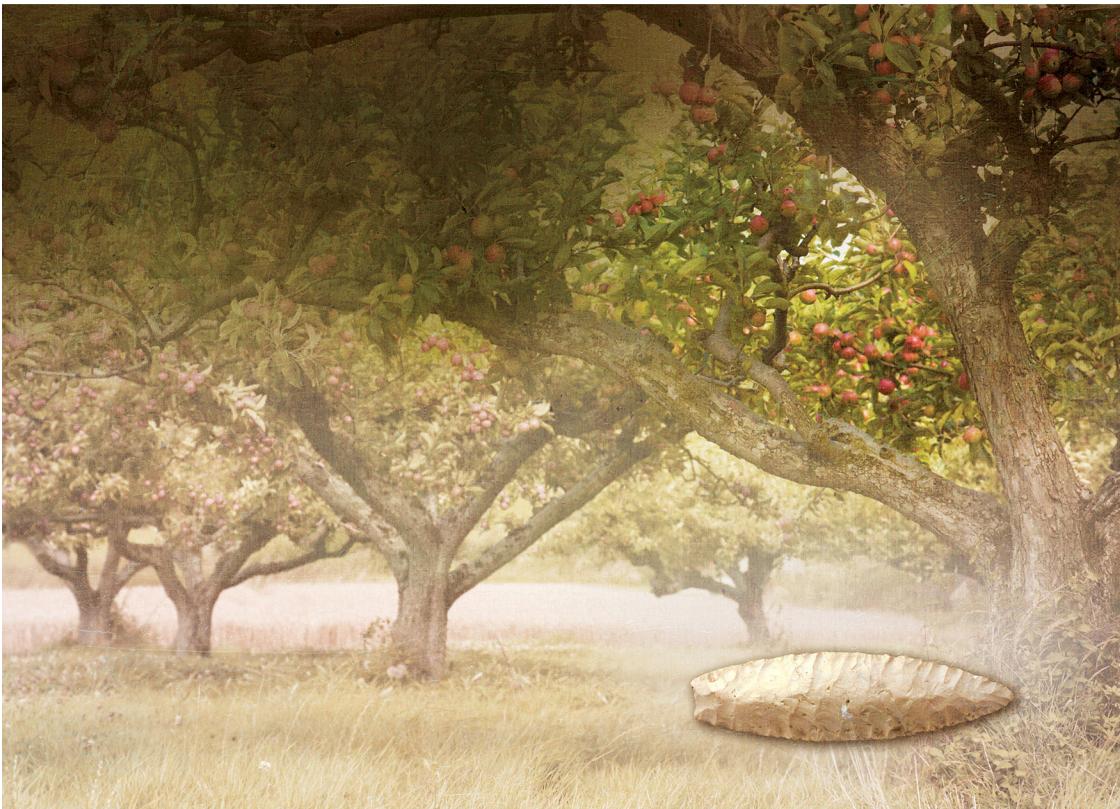
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## Dedication

To my sister, Tracy Fitzwater, an avid reader from an early age. "Maybe I was born reading," she says. Tracy dedicated her life to books and reading in her long career as librarian, teacher, and book reviewer.

*My love of books was inspired by her.*

# THE CLOVIS DIG



A Novel by  
**TERI FINK**

## Chapter 1

"I think we all have some parcel of the past which is falling into disrepair or being sold off piece by piece. It's just that for most of us, it isn't an orchard; it's the way we've thought about something, or someone."

*Amor Towles, "Rules of Civility"*

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### **East Wenatchee, Washington, July 1987**

Claire stared, numb, at the chaos before her—two sheriff's cars, two city cop cars, a fire truck, and an ambulance crowded her driveway.

The trouble had begun twenty minutes earlier with a scream.

The sound had turned her gut to ice. She had raced through the apple trees toward the sound, ducking branches, as the scream lured her out of the orchard. The sound was coming from the dig site, and for that, she felt a modicum of relief—it meant no worker had been run over by a tractor, mauled by the mower or shattered bones in a fall from a ladder. The sound led her to the chain-link fence that surrounded the pits, and she hooked her fingers through the gaps.

She panted. "Is someone hurt?"

The gate to the fence creaked open and slammed shut. Spencer skirted the corner and put an arm around Claire, pulled her into him and gently guided her away.

"We need to call the police," Spencer said in the same tone and volume that someone might say, *we need to make a cup of tea*. He navigated her toward the house. "We're going to call 911, but there's no rush. Dead is dead." His voice was flat. "Everything will be okay. Trust me, Claire."

Trust him? Someone was dead and she didn't know who or how or why. She only knew it happened on her property, nearly in her own front yard.

When they got to the house, Spencer called 911. Soon, sirens wailed up Grant Road. Lots of sirens. Men and women jumped out of cars and trucks, and Spencer led them calmly to the body.

Claire stood on the veranda, stunned. An hour passed before a man with a long, craggy face walked up to her with Spencer and a gangly deputy on his heels.

"I'm Detective Wayne Taggart," the man said. "May we talk in the house?"

A homicide? Queasy, she turned to go inside.

Spencer asked, "Claire, are you all right?"

The deputy stopped him. "You need to stay here, sir."

"I'm okay," she managed, embarrassed to discover her throat had tightened.

"Don't say anything to him." Spencer ignored the deputy. "We need to call your attorney."

"My attorney?" she repeated dully.

"You *do* have an attorney, don't you?"

"No."

"Then don't say anything. I'll find one for you."

He turned to the detective. "Hear that, Detective? She's not going to talk to you until an attorney is present."

"I'll wait. Meantime, you tell your people no one goes anywhere until we say."

"I will, but first I'm going in to use her phone." Spencer walked past the detective into the house.

Claire gazed out toward the yard. Her thoughts drifted back to the day she had made the phone call that started all this. Carlos had tried to talk her out of it. He'd said what's buried

should be left buried.

Why in God's name hadn't she listened?

## Chapter 2

**Four Months Earlier, March 1987**

Claire Courtney tramped through the orchard, a willowy figure in a long-sleeved, blue cotton shirt tucked into Levi's. Her wheat blonde hair, streaked by the sun, roped down her back in a loose braid.

Carlos Barbosa, the foreman, stood between rows of trees, turning something over in his hand.

"What's going on?" Claire had been working since dawn and hadn't slept much the night before. She glanced at the gas-powered trencher they had rented to dig the new irrigation line. "We're getting charged by the day on this trencher, Carlos. Shouldn't someone be using it?"

"Juan was digging the trench, and this came up." Carlos held up a cream-colored, chiseled, pointed rock, about ten inches long.

Claire took it, brushed off some dirt, held it up to the light, and turned it back and forth. "Wow. It looks like a gigantic arrowhead," she said, tiredness evaporating. "I found stuff like this as a kid down by the river, but nothing this big or this color."

"There's more." Carlos pointed to the ground where two more like it lay.

She knelt down, brushing dirt away. "What do you think they are?"

"I think they are trouble."

She almost laughed. Carlos wasn't usually given over to dramatics. "Really? Trouble?"

"I have a bad feeling about these rocks. Let's stick them back in the ground where they belong and bury them. Whatever they are, they don't want to be found. They belong to the earth. Let her have them."

"They're probably nothing. Maybe Dad used to bury garbage here. Do you remember this part of the orchard before the trees were planted?"

"Your dad never put garbage on the land. We burned what we could and hauled the rest to the dump."

"I'll take these to the house." She gathered the rocks and stood. "Keep the trencher another day. Have Juan keep digging. If any more of these pop up, leave them in place until I decide what to do."

"I should have buried the damn things," he muttered, and Carlos Barbosa was not a swearing man.

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Claire lay the pointed rocks on her desk and dropped into a worn, wooden chair. She ran her hand over the smooth wood of the desk. Her dad had worked here every night, smoking, going over paperwork, and reading. The years he had run the orchard had been prosperous, before all the suffocating government rules and regulations. Before people sued over spray drift. Things were different now. Now the desk belonged to her. Now the orchard wasn't so prosperous.

She ignored the rocks for the moment and picked up the ledger of orchard accounts. She turned page after page until she came upon the newest entries, ran her finger over each line for the fifth time this month, hoping against hope she had made some stupendous error, and the ink would turn from red to black. She owed the bank a frightening amount of money, and she needed more to make it to harvest. If the crop didn't do well this year, the orchard wouldn't belong to her anymore. Her family home would host yet another farm auction where tractors, trucks, furniture—generations of accumulation—were auctioned off while the family sits, hollow-eyed, watching the very fiber of their lives unravel thread by thread.

She closed the ledger and pulled open a desk drawer, fished out a glass and a bottle of R&R. Canadian whisky. She poured a stiff one, downing it in one swallow, then splashed a refill and groped in the drawer for a cigarette. Camel straights. Her dad's brand. She scraped a match into flame and touched it to the stumpy, filterless cigarette. The acrid smell of tobacco filled the room. She inhaled, and the harsh, stale tobacco seared her lungs.

"Jesus," she sputtered, coughing. She rarely lit a cigarette, only when life squeezed in on her and she longed for her father's presence, as if smoking one of his cigarettes might bring him back, or at least impart some paternal wisdom.

She stood and reached through white linen curtains on the window next to the desk and pushed it open. The smoke drifted out. The window framed a view of the Cascade Mountains, snow-capped and rugged, towering over the Wenatchee Valley. The valley lay before her like a rough-hewn bowl, cut down the middle by the Columbia River. The Courtney Orchard spidered along terrain that rose to the east toward arid basalt cliffs.

She sat back and gazed up at the old family photos that hung on the wall. In the first, she had been five, a tow-headed girl in pigtails fastened with bows in a lacy dress, white ankle socks, and black patent leather shoes. Her dad's hand rested on her shoulder with his other arm wrapped around her mom, who held the baby and smiled broadly. The smile transformed her mother's face as she held her baby boy, little Joshua, an expression Claire rarely saw in later years. Claire, too, had doted on Josh.

In another photo Claire, a teenager now, stood tall and proud between her dad and Carlos. Carlos had driven up from Mexico with five other young men in an old pickup. Earl Courtney, Claire's father, had hired them on a warm July afternoon to pick cherries, then later, apples. Claire had been a freckled-faced, pig-tailed ten-year-old, and she had taken an instant liking to Carlos, shadowing his every move. His English had been pretty cryptic in those days, and Claire had been fascinated with his strange accent and words – there weren't many Mexicans in the valley back then. Most of the migrant workers came from the south – Arkansas and Oklahoma. After the first apple season, when his companions piled into the truck one crisp, cold October morning to head back to Mexico, Carlos had remained with the Courtneys, hired on permanent. Over the years Claire and Carlos taught each other their native languages.

In another photo, fifteen-year-old Claire stared at the camera with crystal blue eyes. Pigtails had given way to braids, and the dress had become denim overalls with a red plaid flannel shirt. She remembered exactly how she had felt at the snap of the photo – like one of the guys, an orchardist like her dad and Carlos. She already knew the business of growing apples and cherries, of thinning, fertilizing, spraying, propping, and picking. She had thought she knew it all.

In the next photo she stood, a young woman now, between her brother Josh and Keith – her fiancé, once upon a time. She stared at Keith's image, his carefree grin, his beautifully tousled hair. Her eyes trailed down the photo to Keith's cowboy boots. Not too many guys around town wore them, so she had called him her cowboy. He looked damn fine in those boots. Her heart still ached at the sight of him, all these years later.

She looked away, puffed on the Camel, careful not to inhale this time, and picked up one of the rocks from the desk, and turned it over in her hand. It looked like an arrowhead on steroids.

Back in the seventies, the county had built a bridge across the Columbia at the north end of town. No sooner had they started excavation when they discovered a trove of Native American relics, mostly pottery and tools, including arrowheads. Archaeologists had arrived from Washington State University, and the construction of the bridge had been put on hold while they investigated. The local newspaper ran a series of articles on the historical life of the

Wenatchi Tribe who had lived along the river before white men arrived. After a few months, artifacts were displayed in the local museum, the WSU people left, and the bridge was built.

Claire sipped the whisky and tried to remember if there had been any talk about the worth of the stuff they dug up. Maybe arrowheads were worth something to somebody. Lord knows she could use the money. Or maybe she should listen to Carlos. Ignore the damn things and get on with the business of growing fruit.

As the spirits warmed her blood, she decided to call Washington State University, her alma mater. She'd start with WSU's Tree Fruit Research office in Wenatchee, talk to people she knew, see if the pointed rocks were something important or nothing at all.

\*\*\*

Carlos picked up the last dish, drying it by hand in a kitchen devoid of dishwasher and microwave oven. A birch kitchen table with two chairs stood in the corner – wood sanded smooth by Carlos himself. He had laid the rustic terra cotta tile of the kitchen floor. It reminded him of the noble buildings of his boyhood town in Mexico, like his church, Our Lady of Angels, with its sturdy floors of tile and stucco walls. No linoleum for Carlos. He loved most things about America, but linoleum floors and kitchen gadgets did not number among them.

After twenty years, the small rooms felt as much a part of him as his black hair, now peppered generously with gray, although his thick mustache remained stubbornly black.

He pulled a broom from between the old Frigidaire and the wall, briskly swept a few remaining crumbs out the kitchen door and replaced the broom. He opened a drawer and pulled out a pipe and a pouch of tobacco, pressed tobacco into the pipe and stepped onto the back porch, his nightly ritual. He scratched a wooden match along the railing and puffed the tobacco to life.

Cherry trees surrounded the house. The orchard could be noisy during the day with tractors and sprinklers and workers, but at night the trees buffered him from the world, especially after the leaves came on; their denseness absorbed sound like a blanket, cocooning him from the world.

He stepped down into the yard and strolled into the orchard. Usually he enjoyed this evening routine, but tonight he felt troubled. He ambled toward Claire's house, moving steadily until he could see it through the trees. The light in the study glowed, like every night. Claire would be going over the books or reading one of her agriculture magazines. Working, always working, the weight of the world on her shoulders. A pity she had never married. A woman blossomed as a wife and mother. But then, Carlos had never married either. Not yet.

He stared at the house for a long time, smoking and thinking about the strange rocks they had found. The study went black, and minutes later a light flicked on upstairs. Carlos tapped his pipe against the trunk of a tree, the ash flaking to the green grass below. He stared at the window for a moment longer, then turned back and made his way home.

## Chapter 3

Joe Running dropped his lecture notes into a leather briefcase — a briefcase so new, not a scratch marred its surface — as he emerged from the lyceum and squinted at the bright afternoon. High cheekbones and a straight nose chiseled his face into angular lines, tempered by full lips that would have been too much on another man's face. He set out across campus with long strides. At six feet two, his black, straight hair rose and fell rhythmically with his gait; his eyes were nearly as dark as his hair. The long braid he had worn since his teens had recently been abandoned on a barber shop floor, and he missed the heavy weight of it upon his back. He regretted the decision, not only because his long hair had been a part of his identity, but because he realized, too late, he had cut his hair because of his new job at Washington State University. *Professors didn't have braids*, he had reasoned at the time. Horse shit. He had never looked like anyone else at school before, so why now? He determined to grow it out straightaway.

He liked Washington State University — WSU — or Wazzu, as the locals called it, with its campus of meandering sidewalks, aged brick buildings and oak trees that had witnessed the turn of the century, all folded into the rolling wheat fields they called the Palouse. He especially liked the solitude of southeastern Washington, where the coyotes and jackrabbits outnumbered the people. His type of place.

The only Native American on the faculty, he melded nicely into the eclectic collection of professors from around the world. Students of a calculus professor — an Indian from New Delhi — complained to one another that his thick, singsong accent implied meditation rather than calculation. WSU seemed to pride itself on luring an international faculty to its rural setting.

"Finally, a Native American on staff," one colleague had welcomed Joe. "We get the occasional question from prospective students as to the danger of," he had cleared his throat, "well, wild Indians, because we're so far out west." Joe had laughed, thinking it a joke, but the slow smile on the colleague's face had told him otherwise. Joe liked the idea actually, people still believing in the wild west. In honor of the idea, he began wearing the cowboy boots he always wore during the summer when he worked on his cousin's ranch in Idaho.

He savored the university life. He attended the requisite staff meetings and once joined a few faculty members on a Friday afternoon for a beer at Rico's Public House, which turned awkward when he ordered a cup of coffee instead of the Grants Scottish ale the others favored. But mostly he kept to himself, pretty much like he always had, with the exception of baseball. When it came to baseball, he was a team player all the way.

At College Hall, the old, brick building that housed the anthropology faculty offices and the Museum of Anthropology, he took the concrete steps two at a time. His office was on the third floor, and its size matched his status as a first-year, non-tenure-track associate professor — bigger than a closet, but barely. Setting the briefcase on the desk, he picked up the day's mail and shuffled through. A green telephone message slipped from the pile — a message from WSU Tree Fruit Research in Wenatchee. Why would Tree Fruit be calling him? The message had originally gone to Bradley Randall, chairman of the Anthropology department, and Randall had forwarded the message to Joe, scribbling in the margins. *Read your email Joe*, it said. *Message from Tree Fruit waiting for two days now.*

Email. A new and bothersome technology. He flipped on an IBM PC which begrudgingly came to life. The college had recently made the leap from terminals linked to a mainframe — which they still used for data and research — to the personal computers, or PCs, as they called them. Joe discovered twenty unread messages — staff memos, notices for meetings he had

already attended, and the message from Bradley.

An orchardist in East Wenatchee had contacted the Tree Fruit Research station after finding some large arrowhead-like rocks buried in the ground of an apple orchard. They wanted to know if someone from WSU might want to come take a look. Bradley asked if Joe could squeeze in a visit. A name, Courtney Orchards, address, and directions followed. Joe printed the message, the dot matrix chattering like a toy machine gun. He had driven through Wenatchee but had never stopped to look around. He plucked the message from the printer. With no plans for spring break, a drive to Wenatchee might be interesting.

He finished his paperwork and headed home for lunch. His apartment was within walking distance, even in the winter, but far enough away from the hubbub of student life. The single-level apartment complex took up a city block, crisscrossed with sidewalks, with old maples and oaks towering overhead. He loved the gigantic, old trees, so big most places would have taken them down by now.

Back at his apartment he grabbed a quick bite then headed to his bedroom. On his dresser were his favorite baseball mitt, two autographed balls from his junior and senior years at the University of Michigan, and a couple of trophies. He changed into sweats and a t-shirt and took off for a run, wondering, as he loped up the hills of Pullman, what this Wenatchee orchard might have in store for him.

\*\*\*

There were shorter routes to East Wenatchee from Pullman, but Joe had a stop to make on the way, so he headed to Spokane, and took Highway 2 to Reardan, his old stomping grounds. He pulled his 1977 GMC pickup — white beneath a fine coating of dust — into the parking lot of the Red Rooster restaurant and flipped off the ignition. The truck coughed once, then shuddered to a standstill. Joe sat a minute, searching for a car that wasn't there.

He took a deep breath, let it out slow, climbed out of the truck and headed inside, pausing before he pushed open the glass door to examine the fading and peeling painting of a rooster on the front window. At the bottom right there was a signature — *Janet*. Joe felt a tug of emotion.

Inside, the first two booths on either side of the aisle were packed full of stuff. Manila folders, shoe boxes bursting with receipts, even a cash register sat not on the table itself, but on the overstuffed, cracked vinyl seat. Joe passed the disarray and walked to the first clean booth he came to and slid in, facing the street. Behind him, snippets of conversations, all male voices, talked about crops and traffic and how much they liked the Hollywood actor turned president.

A full four minutes passed before a cup of coffee appeared on the table before him. "She ain't here."

Joe looked up. "Roger. How are you?"

"Same." Thin-faced with floppy gray hair, Roger had been the handsome, blond quarterback of Reardan High School a couple of generations before.

"How's Mike?"

"Mike's still trying to make a living ranching, which ain't a living at all. I'll tell him you said hi. Now Christian, my grandson, he's another story. Between Mike and I and a bunch of scholarships, Christian's at the UW Medical School. How 'bout them apples?"

"That's good news."

"Shit, yeah, that's good news. I hear you're doing pretty good yourself."

"Can't complain."

"You been going to school for a long time, and let me tell you, my grandson's going to make more money in his first year as a medical doctor than you're going to make in a decade. An archaeologist is a doctor who don't make shit for money."

"You're right about that." Joe laughed.

"I highly recommend the eggs and ham with hash browns this morning. Eggs are fresh, ham is nice and salty and full of flavor."

Joe picked up his coffee cup and drank. "Sounds fine."

Roger pushed through a swinging door next to the counter into the kitchen, in full view of the booths. A slice of ham hit the griddle with a sizzle, followed by a dollop of grease and a mound of shredded potatoes. He flipped food and shuffled to the refrigerator in the back of the kitchen. Soon came the crack and sputter of three eggs frying. Joe watched as the old cook piled everything onto a hot plate and retraced his steps back to the booth. Another customer, a farmer no doubt, passed Roger and let himself in behind the counter, where he refilled his coffee cup before retreating to the back of the café.

After a bit, Roger filled a cup of coffee of his own, pulled off his apron, revealing a U.W. Husky t-shirt, and slid into the booth opposite Joe.

"How's the grub?"

"Delicious, as usual," Joe said between mouthfuls. "Thanks."

"Well, it ain't on the house. I need the money to get Christian through med school." Roger took a drink of coffee, squinted at Joe. "Your mom, she did real good for almost six months. Then February or so, went back to the same old same old. She'd be late on a Wednesday morning, but right as rain on Thursday. Then she quit showing up on Wednesdays and Thursdays. Never called in, just showed up on Friday like nothing happened. Finally, she quit showing up at all."

"You should have called."

"I called your brother. He said he'd take care of it. Gonna go see her?"

"Yeah." Joe sipped his coffee. "Looks like you could use a new rooster painting on your front window."

"Is that a roundabout way of asking how Janet's doing?"

Embarrassed, Joe answered, "I guess."

"She's not doing much painting anymore. Three kids, oldest one's seven, and I think they go every other year younger after that." Roger drank his coffee. "Whatever happened to the two of you, anyway? Didn't she go off to Michigan with you?"

"She did," Joe replied. "She decided she missed her family and friends more than she would miss me. Simple as that. Ancient history."

"She probably wanted to start having them babies, and I would guess you weren't much interested at the time. More interested in baseball than babies." Roger stood, his slight stoop making him an inch or two shorter than he'd been in high school, and unconsciously rubbed his right knee where arthritis had set in after one too many sacks when the front line couldn't save the quarterback from getting flattened. "Good to see you, Joe. Glad to see you made it off the rez. That you're making it on your own, whether you get paid shit or not."

It was nice that some people never changed. "Thanks, Roger."

By the time he sopped up the last of the egg and polished off the ham and hash browns, most of the breakfast crowd had gone. He left a larger than usual tip, to help in a small way with the grandson's medical school. Outside, the morning air was fresh. He took a deep breath, glanced at Janet's painting one last time, then headed north towards Wellpinit on the Spokane Reservation. His hometown.

\*\*\*

Joe drove through the familiar landscape, scattered pines and irrigated fields, until he took a left at Little Falls Road. He followed the pavement as it crossed the river in front of a dam

where once a set of rapids had churned the waters of the Spokane River white, where a waterfall had spilled the river down a chunk of elevation after the rapids. No longer. The landscape turned to dry sagebrush as he drove, and a few miles before the town of Wellpinit, he took a left again onto Wynecoop-Cayuse Road, which meandered down toward the river, and pulled into a dirt driveway.

He turned off the ignition and sat in silence. Nothing had changed since he moved out in 1970 to go to college. Patchy grass, overgrown in some spots, bare dirt in others, fronted the place. Two cars sat haphazardly on either side of a mobile home that was showing its wear badly. Rusty, corrugated metal siding, shutters begging for paint, faded yellow curtains fluttering in the windows. The 1966 Ford Galaxy he used to drive to high school, once maroon, now faded to a sickly pink, slept like a fat old cat deep in tall grass and weeds. The '72 Chevy Impala, the car his mom drove to work at the Red Rooster, likewise had grass growing around the tires, about a month's worth.

As dismal as the place appeared from the road, the other side was a different story. It overlooked the river, where steep, sandy banks dotted with pine trees made for a fine view. Growing up, he had gazed at that sight endless nights from his bedroom, trying to ignore the loud ways of his mom and her friends as the night wore on and the bottles emptied.

He steeled himself to see his mom, hoping for the best. He knocked once and cracked open the door. The smell of stale cigarette smoke wafted through the opening.

"Mom, it's Joe. You home?"

His mom sat at the Formica kitchen table, cradled a cup in one hand, and held a cigarette in the other, its long ash threatening to drop on the table before she could tap it into the overflowing ash tray. As a kid, he had eaten bowl after bowl of cereal at that table, always from white cartons with black lettering — *corn flakes or puffed rice*. Government-issued food had no need for colorful characters on the box.

"Joe." She snuffed out the cigarette and stood, then indulged in a coughing fit. She wore a thin, terry cloth robe and fuzzy slippers. Her straight hair, which had been jet black a few years back, had faded to gray. "Coffee's on, help yourself," she croaked when the coughing subsided.

Joe walked over to her, wrapped his arms around her and kissed the top of her head. It felt like hugging a broom, all stiff wood and bristle. She patted his back with one blue-veined hand. "Go on now, get some coffee." She stepped out of his embrace.

What had he expected? He poured a cup and they both sat on opposite sides of the table.

"What brings you home?"

"I'm on my way to Wenatchee, so I thought I'd drop by. Had breakfast at the Red Rooster."

Her face fell at the name. "What lies did Roger tell about me?"

"He said you quit showing up for work. Again."

She shrugged, reached for another cigarette and lit it with a plastic lighter of pale red. "I'm ready to retire."

"You have a retirement income?"

She waved her cigarette at him as if it were a magic wand that would turn him to dust. "I'm fine. I get a little something from the Tribe, like we all do, and a check for the years I cleaned up at the tribal school." She brightened, "I started getting disability checks on account of my COPD."

"It might have been nice to let Roger know you were quitting."

She laughed, a raspy sound like crumpling parchment paper. "He's a big baby if he couldn't figure it out. Too busy bragging about his grandson. But I had you to brag about."

A rare compliment. That was a fast ball he hadn't seen coming.

Outside came the deep rumble of an old diesel pickup. A minute later, his brother George filled the doorway. "Joe. To what do we owe the pleasure?"

Nearly as tall as Joe but heavy in the gut, George's black hair poked out from beneath a tattered baseball cap. He cradled paper grocery sacks in each arm.

"George. Good to see you." Joe stood.

George set the bags on the counter and the brothers shook hands. George fished in one of the sacks and pulled out a gallon of Wild Turkey Rye and held it up. "Ma?"

"I could use an eye opener," his mother grinned, then glanced at Joe. Her grin faded. "It's not even noon yet. What were you thinking?"

George stashed the whiskey and the rest of the groceries, then regarded Joe. "What's up?"

"Nothing much. Passing by and stopped in to say hello. I'm on my way to Wenatchee to check into something dug up in an orchard."

"The world-famous grave digger," George snickered.

"How's work?"

"Good. Working security for a concert tonight."

"Anybody I'd know?"

"It ain't Wayne Newton."

They sat around the table and chatted about nothing much until the last of the coffee was gone. Joe drained his cup and stood. "I better hit the road. You two take care."

"Don't worry about me," his mother smiled. "I'm fine." She held her coffee cup up in a salute.

Outside, a rush of cool air washed over him, filling his lungs until he could breathe again.

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Joe doubled back to Highway 2, followed the asphalt as it eased through acres of sagebrush country where hawks perched on the cross-arms of utility poles. *Leave the past behind*, he told himself, but the whole morning had been a baptism of memories, and they crowded in on him like a smothering membrane, blurring the sagebrush landscape.

Growing up, his mother had been there physically, but not there—not in the sense of what a mother should be. He wasn't alone. A loving two-parent household wasn't exactly status quo on the reservation. As a teenager, he decided to go to Reardan High School instead of the reservation school, and his mother definitely did not have his back. Oh, she went along with it when she was sober, but when the booze flowed, she let him know what she really thought—that he was a pain in the ass who thought he was better than everybody else. She hoped he didn't expect her to drive him to school every day. It was thirty miles away, for God's sake, she had ranted. *And what about your friends?*

What about his friends, indeed. They pretty much sided with his mother. They couldn't figure out why he'd want to go to school off the reservation. *Baseball*, he had told them. But they didn't buy it. They called him a pussy, said he wanted to be white. They said by leaving the reservation, he was walking out on them, so they abandoned him.

He hadn't realized it at the time, but he had needed a friend. He met Janet the first day of school at Reardan High, in first-period English class when everyone was staring at him as if an alien from Jupiter had suddenly landed in their midst. The only one he didn't mind staring at him was blonde, blue-eyed Janet, because she had given him a shy grin. When the lunch bell rang, he took his battered paper sack containing a peanut butter sandwich and potato chips outside. The September sunshine made him long to go back to the familiarity of the rez. A few kids were scattered around, but he found an empty picnic table and turned his back to the school. A few minutes later, Janet plunked herself down across from him. *Hi, I'm Janet. You're*

*new. It's nice to see a new face. I've been going to school with the rest of these goofballs since kindergarten. Who are you?*

And so it began. First, they were friends, then by their junior year, a couple, which didn't exactly thrill her parents. She became his lifeline. His confidant. Unfailingly trustworthy in a way nobody had been so far in his life. And, he had baseball. The first year, the coaches and kids had welcomed him in a thin, artificial way with fake smiles and suspicious eyes. The more they played, the better things got, because Joe could play, by God, and he loved baseball, along with Janet. Baseball was the other steady constant in his life. By his senior year, the coaches and team accepted him as one of their own. He and Janet even double dated with some of the guys from the team and their girlfriends.

He had gotten a baseball scholarship to the University of Michigan, and by the time they graduated and headed off to university together, Joe had figured they'd be one of those couples who met young and stayed together forever. They would eventually marry, have kids and grow old together. In the meantime, they had years of school ahead of them, and he had baseball to play.

Janet hadn't lasted a year in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Halfway through spring term she told him she was going home and wouldn't be coming back. Her words hit him like a kick in the gut. She cried, and told him she was sorry, but she didn't like college and she missed her friends, and now that he was busy 24/7 with baseball and classes, there was no time for her. The biggest thing was that Ann Arbor was over 2,000 miles away from home. The trees were weird, the weather was frigid, and as much as she loved him, she just couldn't cope any more. He took her to the bus station two days later, staring vacant-eyed at the back of the bus as it pulled away.

After the initial blow and trauma, he had no choice to but harden his concentration into his studies and baseball. He couldn't afford to mope. A psychiatrist would probably tell him he was suppressing his emotions, and that Janet leaving him was one more blow, along with having an alcoholic mother and an absent father, that would leave him with abandonment issues. But what was done was done. He had work to do, and so he showed up to class every day, suited up for practice every afternoon, did his homework, and played his heart out on the diamond.

Life went on.

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Hours later, the highway dropped into the steep, winding road of Pine Canyon, then along the Columbia River to outskirts of East Wenatchee, Joe shook himself back into the present. He found Grant Road, which climbed gently east until town faded away and orchards took over.

He was gazing up at basalt cliffs that loomed behind the orchards when something ran in front of the car. He braked hard. A coyote stopped at the edge of the road and glanced back at Joe with savvy eyes. *If a coyote crosses your path, the Navajos say, turn back and do not continue your journey.*

The coyote trotted away, and Joe tried to shake off a sudden chill. A mile up the road, he spotted the mailbox for the Courtney orchard.

He pulled into a long, dirt driveway, killed the engine and looked around. Purple crocus mingled with blood-red tulips grew against a white, two-story farmhouse. Dormer windows looked out from the second story like veiled eyes. A roof of cedar shakes, darkened with weather and time, sloped down to cover a veranda running the entire length of the house. The driveway continued to a large, old garage before turning into a two-track road along the edge of a sizable orchard.

Overhead, islands of brilliant-white clouds drifted against a turquoise sky.

Joe got out, all long legs and cowboy boots, stuffed latex gloves in his back pocket, and took the steps to the house two at a time. He knocked, his gaze returning to the orchard as he waited, then knocked again. No answer. A motor hummed in the distance. He followed the sound into the orchard, passing a cluster of small, white cabins before he finally spotted a guy in rain gear—a yellow hat and slickers—driving a tractor pulling a sprayer.

The spray whipped tree branches and thickened the air with an acrid chemical bite. Joe kept his distance. He watched and waited until the roar of the sprayer stopped. The tractor pulled in front of a large, open-sided wood building, up to a black hose hung from a tall metal pipe. The engine sputtered to a stop. The driver jumped off and pulled off the yellow hat. A thick blonde braid uncoiled and fell halfway down his back, or rather *her* back. Definitely *not* a guy.

Joe's hand rose automatically to the back of his neck, where his braid had always rested. He stuck his hand in his pocket and walked toward the woman.

"Excuse me," he said. "I'm looking for Mr. Courtney."

The woman glanced his way. A natural beauty, he thought. No makeup, and she sure didn't need any.

"There is no Mr. Courtney. I'm Claire Courtney. Who are you?"

"I'm Joe Running from Washington State University — the archaeologist. You called about some arrowheads?"

Her gaze slipped down to his cowboy boots and lingered there. Her eyes returned to his, and she studied him a minute, then she turned away, stepped on a tractor tire in one, fluid motion, grabbed the hose and turned on the water.

"Let me clean up here," she yelled over the sound of water thrumming inside the sprayer.

After she finished, she slipped out of the yellow slickers and wiped her hands on a rag and tossed it aside.

Joe stepped closer and held out a hand. "Nice to meet you."

She hesitated, shook his hand briefly, then took off walking. "They're up at the house."

Her house, inside, had a vintage look with hardwood floors and well-worn braided rugs. He followed her down a hallway and into a study, where textbooks, magazines, and manuals spilled from bookshelves onto two chairs, an oversized wooden desk, and the floor. *New Directions in Tree Fruit Pest Management*, *Tree Fruit Nutrition*, *Pollination & Fruit Set*, *Intensive Orchard Management*, and *Good Fruit Grower*.

There on the desk, arranged on a folded newspaper, lay three of the largest arrowhead-like artifacts Joe had ever seen, cream-colored with rusty highlights, eight to nine inches long. The tips were pointed, the sides were flaked smooth.

He pulled the latex gloves from his back pocket.

"Uh oh," Claire said. "If you're putting on those gloves to protect the, uh, rocks, we already handled them pretty good."

He picked up one of the points and held it to the light, turning it over. *Holy shit*, he thought. Out loud, he said. "Looks like agate. Maybe even a man-made tool. Both sides look chipped to form a knife-like point." He ran his finger from the tip to the base. "This could be a channel to attach to a handle. I've seen similar knives and tools, but never anything this large."

"Are they important?"

"Maybe," Joe said.

Claire shifted her weight from one foot to the other. Crossed her arms. "So, what happens now?"

"I'd like to take these back to the university lab. If they appear to be authentic, I'll come back with a radar crew to survey the ground. Will you show me where you found these?"

"Yeah. Let me get you something to put those in." She left, returning with a paper sack.

Joe carefully placed the artifacts inside, eager to get these, whatever they were, back to the lab. They were either an amazing find, or fake. He glanced at the photos above the desk as he peeled off his gloves and felt an unexpected pang of envy. Somewhere in the world, apparently here, families really did come equipped with two reliable parents and a stable home.

Joe pointed at the picture of young Claire in the dress. "Is this you?"

She glanced at the photo. Flushed. "Yeah."

"And this must be you with your father?" He indicated another other photo.

"And Carlos."

"You grew up in this house?"

She regarded him for a moment. "Yeah. I inherited this place from my parents and have been running the orchard myself since my dad passed away. Listen, if you want to see where we found the rocks, let's go."

They didn't have to go far. About a half mile west of the house, a gash in the ground revealed dark soil.

"We're putting in new irrigation lines to complete a system we started last year, and dug them up with a trencher," Claire said. "If we don't get the pipes laid soon, we'll be moving sprinklers above ground all year again, which is a pain in the..." She glanced at Joe. "Backside."

Joe knelt and fingered the soil.

"You'll figure out if these are real?" Claire asked. "Maybe important?"

Joe stood. "Yes. If they look promising, I'd like to do a preliminary study."

"I decide, right?" Claire pressed. "This is my land and these rocks, or whatever they are, belong to me. Right?"

"They're your property, yes. The game changer would be if we find human remains, burials, or associated burial objects—sacred objects."

She crossed her arms. "How?"

"It's still your private property, but the Tribes will get involved. They'll probably be involved anyway. I'll notify them before we dig. But if this is a Native American burial site, the Tribes won't want anyone digging around their ancestors' cemetery."

Claire stared at him, chewing on her lower lip. "Why should I take a chance? I'm running an orchard and I can't have people getting in my way."

This woman had a hard edge to her. "You've grown up here. All your life memories are tied to this place, right?"

"Yeah," Claire's eyes narrowed.

"These artifacts might be evidence of people who lived here long before you and your family. Who were they? How long ago? How did they live? Are these spearheads? Why are they so large? Why did the people leave them here, and where did they go? These are the questions. The answers may lie beneath the ground."

"Could they be valuable?"

"You never know."

"If something is valuable, would it still belong to me? Could I sell it?" Claire looked up at him.

So that's where she was going with this. Money. Disappointing. He chose his words carefully. "It depends—possibly. This is buried treasure of a different nature. Artifacts like these, if authentic, are a crucial part of human history."

Claire studied him for a full minute. "Okay. I'll figure out what I want to do."

They turned back to the house. As they walked, Joe noticed a man standing in the shadow of the apple trees, watching them. It looked like the Hispanic man in the picture in the study. Joe raised his hand and waved, but the man turned and disappeared into the orchard.

Joe headed toward his truck, and Claire climbed the steps to the front porch.

"I'll be in touch." Joe said, but Claire disappeared inside with an absent wave.

Joe stared at the door and the orchard where Carlos had stood. Not exactly a warm reception. He headed back to Pullman.

## Chapter 4

"Look at the size of them!" Bradley Randall peered through reading glasses at one of the oversized arrowheads. They were in Bradley's office, with a large window overlooking the campus. "Too big," Bradley pronounced.

Bradley flipped the artifact back and forth in his gloved hand.

"I've done some research," Joe said. "If they're authentic, the size and structure correlate with the Clovis culture."

"Now we're talking too big *and* too old," Bradley countered. "Ten thousand years old. Seems unlikely since they were found pretty shallow in a working orchard that's been operating for decades."

"Yeah, pretty unlikely, but possible." Joe walked to the office window and gazed out at the oak trees sprouting glossy, new leaves. "If these turn out to be worth pursuing, I'd like to lead the dig myself."

"Why not? After classes wrap up, you're free to go."

That had been too easy. Obviously, Bradley didn't think the find was authentic. "Great. Thanks. I'll prepare the state application and the letters of notification to local Tribes – one to the Colvilles, one to the Yakamas."

Bradley removed his glasses, rubbing the bridge of his nose with his thumb and forefinger. "I should never have become a department head. Nobody ever wanted anything from me when I was teaching, except my students."

"Thanks, Bradley." Joe moved toward the door. "You won't be sorry."

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Joe met the geologists at the Courtney orchard a few days later. They hauled what looked like a lawn mower out of the back of a trailer. It was, in fact, state-of-the-art ground-penetrating radar equipment. After a brief introduction to Claire, the geologists took hundreds of measurements in a crisscross grid, and at the end of a very long day, headed back to Pullman to create a three-dimensional interpretation of soil, sediment, and whatever else might be buried down there.

The report came back in a week. A concentration of objects populated an area more than six meters square, with smaller objects scattered outward. Many of the objects looked similar in shape – too similar to be random rocks. Joe called Claire with the good news.

She listened in silence.

"If possible, I'd like to start as soon as classes are out in early May."

Still silence.

"Are you there, Ms. Courtney?"

"Call me Claire," she said. "I'm thinking. This would be just a small investigation, right?"

"A preliminary dig, yes. To decide if this is a site worth further excavation."

Joe waited. He imagined Claire standing in her study, chewing her lip, trying to decide. After a long silence she said. "Okay. May."

"That's great. By the way, I noticed some buildings, they looked like cabins, not too far away from the dig site."

"Pickers' cabins," Claire said.

"Are they suitable for renting?"

"They have to be suitable, or the state would have my..." she paused. "The state has strict regulations on housing for migrants. My cabins meet those regulations."

"I'd like to rent a few of them for myself and a couple of grad students while we're there."

"I'm definitely interested in rent."

"Perfect. I'll be in touch with more details and paperwork soon," Joe said.

After they hung up, he couldn't get her out of his mind. Strange woman, Claire Courtney. Aloof with a tinge of anger, if he read her right. His thoughts turned to Idaho. Working on the dig meant he wouldn't be able to make the trip this year. He'd spent every summer since he was eight on his cousin's ranch near Pocatello. Those months had been the saving grace of his youth, a chance to escape the smoke-filled trailer and the nights when his mother and her friends kept him awake with their loud talk and cigarette after cigarette.

He loved working on the ranch in Idaho – the clean air, outside all day, bucking hay, riding horses, rounding up cattle and swimming in the creek. He grew to love his much older cousin, aptly nicknamed 'Tuff,' and Tuff's mom Esther, like parents.

He had known those summers would come to an end when he got a real job, but he planned to visit each year for a week or two, and be grateful for whatever Idaho time he could squeeze in.

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The semester ended at WSU the fifth of May. Joe scheduled the dig to start the following Monday.

He pulled his truck into the Courtney Orchard driveway, followed by a well-used Volvo station wagon that kicked dust into the air as Claire watched from the front porch, frowning.

*Yup, aloof with a touch of anger,* Joe thought, climbing out of the truck. "Good morning, Claire," Joe said.

"That your crew?" Claire nodded toward the station wagon, where a young man and woman stood awkwardly outside the car.

"Yes," he said waving the two over. "This is Scott Carlson and Gabriella Cortez, graduate students in anthropology at WSU. This is Claire Courtney, owner of the property."

Scott wore tortoise-shell framed glasses beneath a headful of curly, brown hair.

Gabriella was petite, with dark eyes and brown hair cropped short. "Call me Gabby," she said.

"You'll want to see the cabins," Claire walked down the steps and past them.

The pickers' cabins were about a half a mile west from the dig site. Six identical, wooden cabins sat in two rows of three, compact and freshly painted white.

"They're nothing fancy." Claire opened the door to the first cabin, stepping aside so the three could peek in. "One room, two beds, a kitchenette with sink, small refrigerator and stove top. No ovens."

She pointed to a building made of concrete blocks in the center between the two rows of cabins. "Showers and bathrooms – his and hers. State law requires adequate sanitation and cooking facilities. That little piece of legislation tacked a second mortgage onto my house."

"This will be perfect." Joe turned to Gabby and Scott. "Let's grab our gear and choose a cabin."

Joe wanted to make sure everything went smoothly. Clearly, university administration didn't think they had the eighth wonder of the world at stake here, or he would never have been assigned to lead the project. Eight years of college and a year of teaching behind him, his time had come.

The three of them made a few trips back to his truck for equipment and supplies, then they roped off an area four and a half square meters and set up two sifting stations.

Joe hesitated before they began, savoring the moment. A ceremony seemed appropriate. He cleared his throat. Gabby and Scott watched him expectantly.

"We need to be meticulous, as you both know, because every square inch of soil could hold something important."

Gabby and Scott glanced at one another. "Don't worry about us, Professor," Scott said.

"Why don't you call me Joe." So much for ceremony. He picked up a sod lifter, a long-handled garden tool much like an edger. "Let's get started."

Joe began at the trench where the artifacts had been unearthed, and carefully cut and removed sod. He handed each patch of sod to Scott, who placed it dirt-side down on the flat screen of a sifter, shaking it until the last remnant of dirt sifted through, then he studied the underside of the sod for any sign of artifacts.

Gabby leaned over her own sod lifter and excavated on the opposite side of the trench from Joe and Scott. Although she knew the theory of excavation, she watched Joe's every move, and copied him. When he sliced into the earth, she sliced. When he lifted out sod, so did she.

They worked for an hour, digging a small area down nearly a foot. Then Gabby's shovel clinked. "I hit something," she said. "Probably just a rock."

Joe walked over and squatted down, troweled dirt away from around the object while Gabby grabbed a small brush and began to sweep the away the soil. Millimeter by millimeter the tip of a large, flaked point emerged from the dirt.

"It looks like the other three," Joe said. "Let me grab my camera."

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Joe took off and returned with a camera strapped around his neck, and knelt at the edge of the trench. He focused the lens and began snapping photos.

"Nice Nikon," Scott said. "I did photography for my high school newspaper, and for the Daily Evergreen as an undergrad. I have a Canon."

"Are you good?" Joe asked, still snapping photos.

"Yeah, I've won a few awards."

Joe sat back on his heels and studied Scott, then he lifted off the camera strap and held it out. "The job's yours," he said.

"Job?" Scott asked.

"Photographing the dig. The artifacts and our progress."

Scott reached out for the camera, looking shocked. "You would trust me with this? Trust me with the photography on the project?"

"You said you're good." Joe said. "I'll take you at your word."

"Wow. I mean, thanks," Scott turned the camera over in his hands. "I won't let you down."

"I'll give you the rest of the gear later—lenses, filters, and more film."

Gabby and Joe resumed digging, while Scott snapped a photo now and then, adjusting the settings on the camera. They didn't need to sift dirt to find these artifacts. Each centimeter of dirt brushed away revealed another sculpted rock.

"There's several points here, clumped together," Joe said.

"What does it mean?" Gabby asked.

"Maybe this was a storage pit," said Joe. "They're piled on top of one another, as if someone put them here for safekeeping."

"How old do you think they are?" Gabby asked.

"Don't know yet. We'll study the soil layers and see if we can piece together the geologic history of the area, and hopefully find some organic material for carbon dating." Joe said.

"Are they spearheads?" Gabby asked.

"Spearheads, scraping tools," Joe replied slowly, "and they could be very important."

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At the end of the day, after Scott and Gabriella drove off in search of dinner, Joe drove to a 7-11 in downtown East Wenatchee, if you could call the few blocks of old businesses *downtown*. He pushed a quarter into the outside pay phone and dialed Bradley Randall's home number. Bradley answered on the fifth ring.

"It's Joe Running."

"Joe. What's going on?"

"I'm calling with good news. We found several more artifacts already, many of them similar to the first three. It looks like it could be a tool cache."

"Bring the samples in," Bradley said.

"I think you should see the artifacts *in situ* and have a look around."

"Yeah, okay. Let me check my schedule and see when I can get away."

"Thanks."

"And Joe." Bradley said. "Keep up the good work."

Joe drove back to the orchard, excited and doubtful and thrilled and cynical. The artifacts just seemed too good to be true. He changed into shorts and a t-shirt, and jogged up Grant Road, toward the distant basalt cliffs. Nothing like a good uphill run to dampen a swirl of emotion. He had run a lot after Janet left him.

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---END OF SPECIAL SNEAK PREVIEW. THANK YOU.---

