

## Part 2

When the first streaks of dawn light filtered down into the bear trap, I decided it was safe to continue. With my last arrow, I was within arm's reach of the top.

Hoisting myself out of the trap, I lay exhausted on the ground.

My only choice was to go back to the village. Thankfully, the bear's prints showed it had gone in the opposite direction.

I set off and had been walking for a couple of hours when I had the uneasy feeling that something was watching me. I turned and there, on the path behind me, was the grizzly. It had doubled back!

Ducking behind a boulder, I watched the bear stare toward where I was hiding. Then, with slobber dripping from foam-flecked jaws, it came for me.

With a burst of adrenaline, I ran up the mountain trail only to come to a dead end. A gaping chasm stretched in front of me and, far below, a river rushed through the narrow canyon.

Looking around, I noticed a hollow log lying beside the trail. Manoeuvring it to the edge of the gorge, I stood the log on end and let it fall. It hit the far side, forming a crude bridge. Crawling cautiously across, I'd just reached the far side when the bear burst upon the trailhead.

It moved toward the bridge.

"No you don't!" I yelled and shoved the log. It plunged down into the river as the bear thundered its rage.

Laughing, I ran down the trail towards the plains that were one step closer to home. I was crossing a meadow, and thinking of my mother's moose stew, when a movement in the tall grass made me turn. I gasped.

There, again, was the accursed bear!

The wide field was empty except for one lone tree. With luck, I could make it. Sprinting for my life, I scrambled up the tree, grasping for higher branches.

The grizzly was on me in an instant. A giant paw raked my leg and I screamed as the razor-sharp claws ripped through my flesh.

Slashing at the monster, my blade sank deep into the paw with the missing claw. Bellowing, the bear doubled its efforts and then unexpectedly stopped. Dropping to all fours it sniffed the air and lumbered off into the pines.

Was this a trick to lure me out of my tree? I wouldn't be able to climb back up, not with my injured leg. The bloody flesh was torn open.

Unbidden, my tears started to fall. "There will be no honour song for you, Wind Runner."





I'd lost a lot of blood and dizziness blurred my vision. Across the meadow, I saw shapes shimmering in the afternoon heat ... figures on horses. *It must be the spirits of the ancestors coming to take me to the land beyond the stars ...* I watched as the ghosts silently came toward me.

"Wind Runner!" one spirit called.

Frowning, I shook my head. That was no spirit; that was my father's voice!

"I am here!" I rasped.

His big hands gently helped me out of the tree and eased me to the ground.

"Father, a grizzly – it's been stalking me ..." My eyes darted around fearfully.

"We know, my son. We've been hunting your bear. It's terrorising the villages, killing horses – and one warrior has died. That's why you couldn't come on this hunt. It's a man killer." His voice was grave. "This bear has outsmarted our trackers, avoided traps and been impossible to catch, but our warriors can hunt it down now. It's left a blood trail into the trees."

"The warriors can thank me and my trusty knife for that." Although my voice was weak, it rang with pride. "I stabbed the beast as it tried to claw me out of the tree."

Blinking, I swiped at my tears. "I'm crying like a papoose. I have shamed you, Father."

"No. I am pleased. You've faced an enemy few have dared to challenge. It is of you we will sing around the campfires and it is you who will have a place of honour at the feast."

"I couldn't have done it without your gift." My hand rested on the worn hilt of my knife and my eyes met his. "Father, I should not have come after the hunting party. I disobeyed you. It will never happen again."

My father smiled. "That is the truest mark of a warrior, my son. You made a mistake – but, with your acknowledgment, you have corrected it."

I felt relieved, and then grinned. "Mother will be surprised to learn there is a new warrior in the family!"

