MRT-GEN
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An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature in English

Second Edition

Edited by

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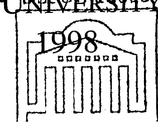
Université d'Ottawa
BIBLIOTHÈQUES

James Tyman b. 1964

MÉTIS

From *Inside Out*

I was alone in the house one Saturday afternoon when I got the impulse to enter my parents' bedroom. I knew they kept our old report cards there, and I wanted to see the kinds of things the teachers used to write about my two older brothers. I didn't think they'd had as much trouble in school as I was having, but I thought comparing my behaviour with theirs might help me understand why I acted the way I did.

I was fumbling through some papers when I came across a large brown envelope marked 'Saskatchewan Social Services Department'. My head went light. There was a letter with 'Adopt Indian Métis' in dark blue letters across the top. I must be a Métis Indian, I thought. I wondered what tribe that was. I knew we had Sioux Indians all around us on the reserves. But where was the Métis reserve? I read on: 'Born in Ile-à-la-Crosse, Saskatchewan'. Where the hell was that? My mom said I was born in Saskatoon. The letter gave those two bits of vital information: the rest was details of meetings for parents to attend in Regina. I read it three times. There was no hint of who I was, no name. But its impact on me was staggering.

Up until then I'd felt very close to my mother and father. Now I felt alienated; it was a mixture of love and hate, and my resentment was building. I wanted to know who my biological mom was, but who could I ask? My adopted mother? I couldn't figure out why they'd never told me anything.

It took a few days for me to realize I should look in the encyclopedia for a map of Saskatchewan and find out where Ile-à-la-Crosse was. I flashed through the index. There it was! 'Ile-à-la-Crosse, G-5'. I put one finger on G and the other on 5. Ile-à-la-Crosse was 200 miles northwest of Saskatoon. One road went there, and according to the map that's where it ended. Ile-à-la-Crosse was the end of the road, the end of civilization. I shut the encyclopedia. I was more confused than ever. I was alone in the house, so I went back to the drawer which contained my past.

I looked through the letters from the Social Services Department. Again there were meetings for my parents to attend, and one letter listing all the diseases I'd contracted. It was a long list. I tried to remember being so sick. There were no names on these letters, just 'the subject'.

'I'm a subject,' I smiled to myself. Then I finally found some news: 'Kenny Howard Martin was placed with William and Cecile Tyman on September 17th, 1967. His new name will be James Kenneth Tyman.' I felt a heat rush. That was it! Now I know who I am. I have another family. But where are they?

My mind flashed back to the day I walked into the Tymans' house, the time I hid up in the crawl space, the time my sister showed me how to ride a bike

in the dusty street out front, which was now paved. I remembered the first bike the Tymans gave me: it was red and had training wheels. I smiled at that thought. I used to spend hours roaring around the house, almost running into my mom's afternoon visitors. I remembered all the questions the kids asked about my 'real' family. Now I could tell them where I was born. I sat on the back fence mulling over my memories. They were pleasant, the ones about growing up in this house.

When Mom and Dad came home I watched them as they talked about their day's accomplishments at the new house. I wondered why they had taken me. I wondered why I had been put up for adoption. I wondered, more than anything, why I hadn't been told anything. That question was always with me. I'd say, 'This is the day I ask what's going on.' But I didn't know how to approach them. I thought, 'If they didn't want to talk about it, then maybe I shouldn't bring it up.' That was my reasoning. What it was, really, was my means of escaping what I concluded would be some pretty painful memories. Why else couldn't I remember a thing?

My emotions were in turmoil that summer. I felt cheated by a mother I didn't even know. I felt deserted. I felt angry because the Tymans hadn't told me the truth. I felt resentment toward people who gave me a hard time about who I was. What did they know? 'No one cares about me!' I shouted out one day. 'So I don't care about anyone!' I was walking through Valley Centre Park, just below where my parents were constructing the house. I looked up and saw them working away. 'Why you guys?' I asked myself.

I felt alienated from the Tymans and 'their relatives', as I put it. I felt awkward at family gatherings. I stuck out like a sore thumb in family pictures. I wanted to talk, to ask questions. But I didn't want to rock the boat. The family members were in a jubilant mood most of the time, building their new home. It was my father's dream house. I didn't want to bring up such a sensitive subject and disrupt the harmony of the family. I kept it inside. My conflicting emotions were eating me up like a cancer.

* * *

The Regina Correctional Centre was the most unfeeling, violent, and desperate place I had ever come across. You didn't need a master's degree in sociology to see the desperation and hatred in people's faces. The jail was divided into four 'units', all connected. The first one you encounter is the oldest and the most violent unit in all of Saskatchewan's correctional system. Knifings are common. Beatings come the same way as the afternoon soap operas: regularly and on time. Inmates mutilate themselves with razors, or with nails smuggled from the carpentry shop, or just by banging their heads against the wall till either they're dead or they've knocked themselves unconscious. Extortion is as common as insects. The smell of sweat, feces, urine, and dried blood fills my nostrils, clouding my already perplexed mind and emotions.

The unit I'm supposed to head for is Unit Four C and D. When I ask a harmless-looking guy about it, he smiles smugly. I figure out why when I

walk into Unit Four C and D: it's for first-timers, 'fish', virgins. I'm ushered to the back of Unit Four, where there are four bunk beds set up for overflow inmates. As I walk along I notice most of the inmates are younger than me, like that snot-nosed Howard. I'm shown my bunk and start going through the kit I was issued in the shower room: one very used towel, one comb, one toothbrush and toothpaste, one razor and shaving lotion, and a complete change of clothes. Other inmates come to check me out. Some of the bolder ones stop and chat. One kid of sixteen, his forearms a maze of criss-crossing scars, is very talkative. Within minutes I know his age, his home town, his place of birth, his grandma's ailments, his charges, and his release date. Finally he stops verbalizing long enough to ask me my name. I'm in no mood to talk to him. For one thing he's white, and white people are at the bottom of the social ladder in here. I'm not about to make friends with one of them. It could come back to haunt me.

After his performance, along comes an Indian of the same age and size. He's quick to point out that the honkies watch their step in here: 'It's not like the street for them racist fuckers,' followed by raucous laughter. I nod. This is different, I'm thinking. The honkies are the oppressed minority in here. Yep, this is a different world, all right.

I was quickly accepted among the inmates. I was a solid guy, good people, a bro to my fellow Indians who made up 75 per cent of the unit's population. But the young white kid, Kelvin, was the range's punching bag. Everyone made snide remarks to him about his baby face, or the fact that he was going to get fucked in the ass if he was ever sent to main population, or that he didn't have enough guts to kill himself when he slashed up. He was offered assistance if he ever wanted to try it again.

'I'll slash your wrists for ya! Make sure you bleed to death this time, honky!'

'Come to my cell next time. I'll hang you and fuck you!'

It was always followed by loud, coarse laughter. I'd been expecting raw behaviour, but the racism was blatant. 'You stinking honky!' would erupt from a card game where both whites and Indians were playing. I'd wait for a fight, some retaliation from the honky. There was none. The white race was definitely on egg shells in Four C and D.

Unit Four C and D had its own gym time slot, its own weight room time slot, even its own time to pick up fresh clothing. It was the administration's way of keeping the first-timers away from the harder and more damaging influences of the repeat offenders and career criminals. I noticed the fear it struck among first-timers when a guard threatened to move them into the general population if they didn't comply with unit rules and the orders. It worked on me, for a while.

We had our own gym period four nights a week, and that gave me a chance to play floor hockey. I received thunderous cheers from the Indian congregation whenever I rammed a white person into the wall, the floor, the net, or up three rows into the bleachers. I was blowing off steam. I was always seething. I couldn't put my finger on it, but once my blood was pumping in a game I'd become obsessed with hurtling my 220 pound frame at anyone on the opposite team. The guards watched in delight when one inmate tried to harm another. That was acceptable. But I had to even the odds a few times, so I'd ram Indian boys into the walls, too, so the guards couldn't label me a racist.

I was assigned a job within a week of my arrival. I was to work in the carpentry shop. It started at eight-thirty and ended at three-forty-five, with one hour off for lunch and two regulated, fifteen-minute coffee breaks. I was expecting stiff commands and harsh work. I thought of the beatings the guards could give you. I thought of the possibility of being shanked or piped. I thought of the rumours of prison rape. I had those fears when I walked in, but after a week I drew my own conclusions. A lot of the stuff you hear about jail does happen in the Regina Correctional Centre. But for some strange reason I had the impression that I'd learn a trade, start a new life. I'd been tried, convicted, and sentenced; now I thought the system was going to train me, give me parole and push me in the direction of a new life. I must have still been on acid when I was thinking up that scenario.

I walked to work on a cold January morning with thoughts of learning to be a carpenter, a new beginning. I waited eagerly for the shop boss to give me instructions, or a work project. I waited. And I waited. I spent two weeks waiting. Finally I resigned myself to making sure the other inmates had coffee and keeping the coffee area clean. After that I'd lean back in a chair, pull my baseball cap over my eyes, and catch a few winks.

* * *

The shop boss was a man in his later years who was obviously just waiting to retire—no hassles, no confrontations, just do what's necessary. I found a lot of staff with this attitude. Others were there only to aggravate you, to frustrate you, to make sure you hated every goddamn day you were there. Jail is full of bitter men, and that type of bull just ferments the bitterness inside a man. I guess it's their version of rehabilitation.

My shop boss was a walking ghost. He never said more than was necessary. He never rose from his desk unless it was necessary. One day he called me over to look at my progress report. He had filled in 'good work habits'; I never did a thing in there. He had filled in 'follows orders well'; he had never spoken to me in the three weeks I'd been there. Then near the bottom he had me down as a 'sloppy dresser'. I looked at him for an explanation, but he was busy staring into space. I shrugged and signed my name, confirming that I was a good worker who could follow orders but I needed guidance in dressing myself.

I got tired of the monotonous routine of the carpentry shop, so I put in a request to see the counsellor. I went to see him about the same time I had my progress report. He was interested in getting me paroled, and asked me about it. I told him maybe. I was learning from other inmates that when you're only doing ten months you're supposed to be solid and say, 'I'll do my time.' I'd have to do the entire ten months on parole, or do seven months in jail and be

released with no restrictions. The more I thought of that, the easier it became to think, 'Fuck your parole. I'll do my time.' Eventually I said it, too.

'Well, Jim, I'll contact your local police and get their opinion.' I snorted with laughter. 'You don't think that's a good idea?'

'They've come to the jail twice since I've been here, trying to get me to confess to crimes I've never heard about. I don't think they'll be keeping open arms for my return.'

'Oh, I don't know. Well, I'll still see.' The counsellor always talked with a cocky grin on his face. 'If not, how about CTR?'

'What's that?'

'Community Training Residence. It's a halfway house for guys who aren't quite ready to be released from custody. The house enables you to look for work, and if you're planning to go to school, they'll let you live there. Do you have your grade twelve?'

'Yeah.'

'That's a change. How did you get it?'

'Going to school. How else?'

'Most guys don't have grade twelve. Even fewer got it by graduating from school. You're one of the rare ones.'

'I'm honoured,' I said. 'Now how about getting me a job where I can use all my worthy talents, instead of sitting on my ass waiting to die.'

'I'll have to see. What do you want to do?'

'Anything where I can keep busy. I hate doing nothing. I thought jail was a place where they busted your ass, or trained you for something.'

'If you were in the pen you could get training,' he said. 'But this is a provincial institution, and there are no funds for it.'

'Next time I'll make sure to tell the judge to give me pen time, so I can become a mechanic or something.'

'You plan on coming back?'

'No, but if they're going to throw you in jail, they might as well give you something to hope for. You know, there are guys on our range asking other inmates for money so they can get their General Education Diploma. The province would rather spend thousands of dollars keeping you inside than give you $20 to help you write your grade twelve final.'

'Write to the premier. See what he says.'

'Ah, fuck you too.'

His smirk disappeared. 'Watch yourself, Tyman. I could charge you and . . .'

'Don't be so ignorant. You're supposed to be a counsellor. Why don't you write to the premier and tell him a few things?'

He stared hard at me for a moment, then changed the subject. 'Let's talk about your history.'

I sighed. It was no use trying to explain anything to him. He wasn't going to listen.

One afternoon I started banging on the barred gate that separated the counsellor's office from the main prison. Then I rang the bell until he came out, red-faced, to demand an explanation.

'I want a job! I want a job where I can work and sweat and feel like I'm doing something useful!'

'Have you heard of requests?'

'Don't give me that bullshit!' I didn't flinch under his threatening gaze. 'You're right here and I'm right here, so fire me or transfer me to another job. I want to work, Christian! There are guys here who don't want to work and you're forcing them to work, so don't give me the run-around about no jobs to be had.'

'Okay, you're fired until further notice!' He turned and stalked back to his office, slamming the door.

Things could have been worse. At least now I could sleep in and watch television all day. And the counsellor eventually did get me a job working in the greenhouse, planting flowers and vegetables that would later be transplanted into the gardens around the jail. There was only one problem: he didn't inform me when I was supposed to start. So one day I found myself being escorted to kangaroo court, the committee that handled internal discipline in the institution. Failing to report for work placement was the infraction.

'The counsellor didn't tell me I had to report for work today,' I pleaded to the discipline panel members.

'According to him, he informed you yesterday. Why didn't you report?'

'I'm telling you, he never let me know.'

'Have a seat outside for a minute.'

I sat in the hall, expecting that the counsellor would be phoned and he would explain that he had made a note to phone the unit and had simply forgotten. They did phone him, but he confirmed his earlier report. I was speechless. The counsellor had got his revenge on me for disturbing his afternoon. I had heard they did this type of stuff, but I didn't believe it till now. I was told that I could be charged with lying to staff members, but would be given a warning this time.

'Five days remission will be placed over your head,' said the Assistant Deputy Director, 'The Five', as he was called; I don't know why. It was just part of prison slang. 'Further charges will result in your losing five days, plus new sanctions brought up at that time.'

The next morning I walked to the greenhouse in plenty of time, sure that the counsellor was just giving me another bogus job to shut my mouth for a while. I sat with the other inmates on the detail: two brothers who were doing two years less a day each for robbing a man on a busy Regina street, a quiet burnt-out Indian who obviously measured your gas tank with his lungs, and Larose the comedian, who kept everyone's ribs sore with his remarks about guards, politicians, churches, and of course white people.

I was pleased with the work. 'That damn counsellor came through,' I thought to myself. I was pleased that I was doing something useful. We planted onions, tomatoes, flowers, and even some marijuana, but that was quick-

ly discovered by the greenhouse boss. He surprised me by not firing the lot of us; he just told us to plant it in a better place next time.

Our shop boss was a good man. He kept us busy, and he'd sneak fresh pineapple from the kitchen for us every Friday afternoon. He talked to you as if you weren't an inmate but simply another human being. He was retiring in a year, but unlike the carpentry shop boss he wouldn't let you sit on your ass even if you were tired. If you didn't follow his rules, you were fired. He wasn't one to do meaningless work, either. He told us at coffee break one day how he'd just had a beef with the administration over some work project he concluded was absurd.

'They want to fire me, good for them,' he said. 'I'm getting out of here next year anyway. They can take their job and stuff it! What do you say to that, Larose?'

'Hail Messiah. You have spoken. It will be written.'

I had one friend in there, an Indian from Meadow Lake who was doing two years less a day, the maximum for a provincial jail. He had forty-three breaking and entering charges against him, so they gave him a break and ran every other charge concurrent after he received two years for the first. We went outside when the snow melted and played horseshoes or walked the track together. My first impression was that he was a hardcore racist, but after talking to him for a while I learned that I was the one who really was not informed. It was like meeting Lorne all over again, the Indian back at Bert Fox Composite High School who'd told me to get some Indian bros and quit hanging around with honkies. 'Maybe you'll see what the truth really is,' Lorne had said, and now, finally, I was ready to hear it. I had learned about Indians from white people. I hadn't bothered to question their analysis because I was afraid of rejection. After talking to Herbie about Indian people and their beliefs, I found that I was myself a hardcore racist. I felt disgusted with myself, remembering all the snide remarks I had made over the years about Indian people. They weren't a bunch of bloodthirsty savages. They were my own people. I hated my own people. My own people hated white people. I didn't know who I was or where I was going.

'You're an apple, Tyman,' Herbie was quick to point out.

I wanted to ask him if he knew any Martins from Ile-à-la-Crosse. I thought that could be what I was looking for—the past I couldn't recall, a sense of identity, of who I really was. You can't take someone's past away and expect him not to miss it, or not to look for it. It was eating at my insides. Finally I did ask him, and he replied, 'There's lots of Martins up there. Why? You related to them?'

'Uh, no. I just knew a couple. I was wondering if there were quite a few of them up there, that's all.' I never told people I was adopted unless they saw my family, and then it became obvious. It was sure to prompt a horde of questions I couldn't answer. I wanted to avoid that lost feeling I had when someone asked me, 'Who are you?'

I had been there two months when the counsellor sent word up to the unit

that he wanted to see me. I went to his office. He had his smirk in place. 'Jim, how about going to CTR?'

'When?' I felt excited. I could get out on the street and see people.

'You're appealing your sentence, aren't you?'

I was appealing the sentence for the simple reason that it got me out of jail for a day. 'I go up in two weeks. Why?'

'We can't do anything till your court appearance is dealt with.'

'Oh.'

'I see what you mean about the police in your town.' He broke formation and looked serious. 'They object strongly to your release there. They say you're a menace.'

'Parole is out of the question, then.'

'I would say so. Your mother says she can't control you, and the community would rather see you on TV than on the street, if you know what I mean. The best alternative is to get you to the halfway house in Regina.'

I told him that would be fine with me. He handed me an application and told me he'd be in touch. Three days later he told me I was accepted, but I had to wait for the court decision concerning my appeal.

March 14th was the date of my appeal. It was beginning to cause me sleepless nights. I was more than a little upset with my sentence after learning that other inmates were doing only six months for their third break and enter.

I had made contact with a lawyer who ran a small organization of work projects for ex-cons and who in fact had been a con himself before taking hold of his life and becoming a lawyer. I wanted to ask him how he'd done it, but when he was interviewing me he never once looked at me. He'd ask questions and scribble down my replies. He left telling me not to worry, I'd win my appeal. I didn't see him again till I walked into appeal court.

I sat through the whole session. Everyone who went up got some time knocked off his original sentence. My lawyer was also representing three others, and he was doing a whale of a job. Hell, I thought, if I was one of the judges I'd probably be giving his clients money and a place to live, let alone a lighter sentence. Finally it was my turn to enter the little box below the judges' podium.

'Your Lordships, James Tyman has just recently turned nineteen years old. This is his first incarceration. James has informed me that he was a meat-cutter for nine months, and hopes to go to school to continue his training. James is also a talented football player and has received offers to try out with the Saskatoon Hilltops organization. As you can see, Mr Tyman's release date is set for the end of July. I have been in contact with the organization to find out their starting dates for training camp. As a rookie, Mr Tyman would have to report at the beginning of July, since that is the date set for newcomers. I would also like to point out to your Lordships that the usual sentence for first-timers on a breaking and entering charge is from three to six months. I feel Mr Tyman's sentence is harsh, and would ask the court for compassion in light of these facts. Thank you.'

I felt this had all been rehearsed before I got here, including my lawyer's bullshit about the Saskatoon Hilltops. The three judges looked at each other, they nodded, and I was told to stand up. 'Mr Tyman, the court is merciful and understanding. Your nine-month sentence for breaking and entering will be reduced to six months. Dismissed.'

I walked down the narrow flight of stairs to the holding cells where a jubilant bunch of cons were celebrating their good fortune. I could hear them behind the steel door, slapping each other on the back and planning their futures. I guess it was then that I realized where I really was. I saw two names carved into the wall, and recognized both of them right away. One had just received a life sentence for killing a local prostitute; the other had just received a life sentence in a well-publicized trial for the murder of a university professor. This was the real thing.

I told the counsellor about my victory in court. 'Really!' He had a look of astonishment. 'Well, I'll get hold of CTR and we'll get you out of here as fast as possible. How's that?'

I walked onto the range shouting, 'Justice has been done! We live in a free society where fairness and honesty are put on a pedestal! We the people should be . . .'

'Ah, shut the fuck up!' an Indian from Alberta spoke up.

'Just because you're dogging it, doesn't mean I am,' I said. 'So go lock yourself in your drum and write poetry.'

He gave me a half smile. 'You won your appeal, I take it.'

'Justice has been done!' I raised my hands in true preacher fashion and walked down the range, telling everyone my new release date.

My enthusiastic entrance did not in the least impress Gord Farrow, our little general. He was one of the regular guards, and his sole purpose was to ensure that before he got off his shift someone would be pulling his hair out in frustration over some act he had pulled. He looked daggers at me as I went singing around the range, telling everyone that the justice system was fair and honest. He was going to carry the flame of his own justice and deliver the message from the correctional centre.

It was Saturday morning two days after I came back from my appeal when Farrow came barging into my cell. 'Tyman! You're locked up for sleeping in!' I rolled over and sighed. I knew my release was soon and I didn't want to screw it up because of one man's ignorance. I closed my eyes and made myself relax.

But Farrow wasn't done with me. The following week I slept late. I jumped to my feet, throwing my clothes on. I raced to the gate. It was open from 8:20 to 8:30 to let us out for work. I got there at 8:28, but according to Farrow I was too late. He placed me on charge for sleeping in. He was giggling when he slammed the gate, and still giggling when he handed me the charge sheet. 'Justice has been done, Tyman. Justice has been done.' I was placed on room confinement till the disciplinary panel could hear my case the next day.

I almost hooked that five-foot-eight-inch bag of hot wind. But my instincts told me I was headed for a world of trouble if I laced this guy. We did have one guard who was more than willing to take you on. It was simple: you wanted a fight, he would oblige, and there would be no administration problems after. He had a handful of black belts, and he never smiled unless he was belittling you. General Farrow was just the opposite: he insulted you and degraded you till you swore at him or, like Kelvin finally did one day, took a swing at him. Then he'd scoot like a spooked mouse to his office and dial for help. Soon the goon squad would come and haul your carcass to the hole, all because this guy had an attitude problem.

I walked to kangaroo court resigned to say nothing, for the simple reason that it did no good.

'Three days remission lost.' The Five put on his best threatening face for me. 'I suggest you get up in the morning from now on.'

One day I had a few choice comments for Farrow, who threatened to move me off the unit and into main population. I laughed at him, and that made him madder. Then he turned to answer the phone ringing in his office.

'The counsellor wants to see you, Tyman,' he spat.

'Well, Jim,' said the counsellor, 'you go to CTR tomorrow.'

The halfway house was located in a lower-class area of Regina between Alberta and Broad Streets, two blocks from the YMCA. I didn't know it at the time, but a few of my old schoolmates were boozing it up and dealing with drugs a block and a half away. It was convenient.

The first person I saw was the former owner of the café from my home town, the same café where my parents used to take us after church. She was the cook at the halfway house. She recognized me right away, and was visibly surprised to see me in a house for cons.

'You were such a good boy, Jimmy,' she said in her heavy Greek accent. 'Your papa was such a good man, and your mama was such a nice lady. Jimmy, Jimmy, you stay outta trouble.'

I was confined to the house the first night, as per policy, but the second day I awoke with a sense of excitement and expectancy. I was allowed out for the entire day to look for work. I never looked for work those first two days. I just walked the Cornwall Centre mall in downtown Regina. It felt odd to see all these people, and not some desperate cons. All I could think about was jail and what my fellow cons were doing back in The Hill. Now that I was out, I knew I was different from other people. I'd come from a place few have been, and fewer know what it is really all about. 'Come on Jim,' I kept telling myself. 'You were only there three months. Forget it and start fresh.' But I kept thinking that everyone knew I was a criminal. They wouldn't give me a chance.

When I did look for work my old fears were there instead of my new ones. I was met with cold stares or stunned expressions when I asked for work. 'Well, I don't know, really. How about filling out this application and we'll give you a call?' I knew what they were thinking. Being an ex-con wasn't my problem. My problem was that I was an Indian.

I contacted my old chum Terry who was living with his mother. I felt companionship with him more than ever now. We understood each other. We talked briefly about my incarceration, but it was more of a silent conversation. I mentioned the racism and he nodded his understanding. I mentioned the bulls, and he nodded. He mentioned the filth, and I nodded.

Jordan Wheeler b. 1964

MÉTIS

A Mountain Legend

The school bus drove into a small summer camp at the base of a towering mountain. Boys and girls between the ages of eight and twelve, who had signed up for the three-day camping trip, poured out of the bus. Following instructions from counsellors, they began hurriedly preparing their camp as the sunset dripped over the rock walls towering above them. For many, it was their first time away from the city, which they could still see far off in the distance. Tents were put up and sleeping bags unrolled before the last of the twilight rays gave way to the darkness of night.

Roasting marshmallows around a large campfire, the young campers listened intently to stories told by the counsellors. Behind the eager campers, the caretaker of the camp sat on the ground, himself listening to the stories.

As the night grew old, the younger children wearily found their way to the tents, so that by midnight only the twelve-year-olds remained around the fire with one counsellor and the caretaker. Their supply of stories seemingly exhausted, they sat in silence watching the glowing embers of the once fiery blaze shrink into red-hot ash.

'The moon is rising,' announced the caretaker in a low, even voice. All eyes looked up to the glow surrounding the jagged peaks of the mountain. The blackness of the rock formed an eerie silhouette against the gently lit sky.

The caretaker's name was McNabb. He had lived close to the mountain all his life and knew many of the stories the mountain had seen. He threw his long, black braided hair over his shoulders, drew the collar of his faded jean jacket up against the crisp mountain air, and spoke.

'There is a legend about this mountain once told by the mountain itself,' he said, paused for a moment, then continued. 'People claim that long ago it told of a young boy who tried to climb up to an eagle's nest which rested somewhere among the many cliffs. He was from a small camp about a day's journey from here and when he was twelve years old, he thought he was ready to become a warrior. His father disagreed, saying he was too young and too small. But the boy was stubborn and one morning before dawn he sneaked out of his family's teepee and set off on foot toward the mountain. There were no horses in North America in his time. They were brought later by the Europeans.

'It took most of the day for him to reach the mountain. The next morning, he set out to find an eagle and seek a vision from the mighty bird, as that was the first step in becoming a warrior. But as he was climbing up the rock cliffs to a nest, he fell to his death, releasing a terrible cry that echoed from the mountain far out across the land. The legend says the boy's spirit still wanders the mountain today.'