

Sequel to *Gray Rainbow Journey*
NATIONAL BEST BOOKS AWARD WINNER, USA BOOK NEWS

JOURNEY BY THE
**SACKCLOTH
MOON**

K. B. SCHALLER

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About Journey by the Sackcloth Moon

Conflict and struggle form the literary mortar that keeps readers of modern fiction entranced. Inner turmoil is common enough fodder for conflict, but rarely does an author examine the mystery and mysticism of the endless psychic battles of being one's self from a Native American and Christian perspective.

In *Gray Rainbow Journey*, author K.B. Schaller introduced the mesmerizing plight of Dina Youngblood, a young Seminole woman who struggles at once with dreams and demons, romance and religion, tradition and transition. Dina and her adventures blossom in Schaller's sequel, *Journey by the Sackcloth Moon*.

Continuing where *Gray Rainbow* ended, *Sackcloth Moon* plunges the reader deeper into Dina's dreams and spiritual conflicts as the very human and down-to-earth Dina finds new ways to delight with wit and sass. BelMonte-Schaller **deftly hooks the mysterious and mystical to the message of Christianity**. She uses the same agility in showing the yanking pressures Christianity puts on Indian tradition and culture.

Message aside, the story is fun to read—it intrigues and holds the reader's attention. The characters are vivid; they show whimsy and depth. *Journey by the Sackcloth Moon* firmly roots Dina Youngblood as a memorable literary character with, one can only hope, more adventures to share.

CAROLYN G. KINGCADE

Journalism Lecturer, Southern Illinois University Carbondale

Journey by the Sackcloth Moon offers the reader **a glimpse of the cultural difficulties faced by a young Native American woman seeking her place in modern America**. Dina Youngblood is part Cherokee, a people who tried but failed to live comfortably in the white world, and part Seminole, proud men and women who never surrendered. This dichotomy is her heritage.

A professed Christian, Dina's life is a daily struggle to serve her people without being drawn into the dark shadows surrounding her. She openly acknowledges the mystery of her people's culture and uses her religion as a bulwark against it. Sometimes she is successful, and sometimes the forces overcome her.

Moving from one culture to the other, Schaller artfully weaves Dina's life dilemma into an enthralling story of a young woman's struggle to choose between two loves. One is a prominent and respected man who represents all that is good and safe in her life; the other is an old flame who represents all that is dark and wild and exciting.

Dina's struggle to find peace and her true place in life is compounded by the hidden treachery of supposed friends. She is helped and protected in her quest by her strong belief in God and by unseen forces she will never understand. *Journey by the Sackcloth Moon* is a good read—a real page-turner.

ANNE H. HOLT, Ph.D.

Author (A.H. Holt) of *Blood Redemption*, *Riding Fence*, and other historical novels

K.B Schaller swept me away into Dina Youngblood's world! *Journey by the Sackcloth Moon* includes the perfect blend of enticing, vivid narratives filled with romance and suspense. I cried and laughed as I was captivated by the struggles and victories of the young and beautiful Dina. Schaller powerfully portrays Dina's spiritual battles as she immerses us into her intense conflicts for love in her life.

The Indian's world and The Jesus Way are perfectly communicated. Schaller's readers will be instantly endeared to the main characters as they seek to take a stand for God's Word despite the various roadblocks they encounter. *Journey by the Sackcloth Moon* is a **must read for those who love TRUTH, mixed with thriller-sweet anticipation!**

BECKY KEW

Columnist for *Indian Life* newspaper, Youth Minister to Sandy Bay Ojibway, First Nation, Manitoba, Canada

Journey by the Sackcloth Moon is colored by a Native American's cultural perspective that helps the reader see the character's struggle in coming to terms with the Christian faith and Native Spirituality, a tension often experienced by Native American believers in Christ. The story is **enjoyable and informative.**

KATHERINE TWISS

Co-Founder, Wiconi International

Journey by the Sackcloth Moon is a **suspenseful, profoundly moving odyssey through a young Native American woman's heart**. Dina Youngblood's conflict mirrors the challenges faced by many and cuts across cultural, ethnic, and national lines. It is a novel for our times. Excellent reading that will appeal to young adults and all who share an interest in the many facets of Native America.

ALMA P. JOHNS

Member, Native American Christian Church Cherokee, North Carolina

K.B. Schaller has a passionate commitment to the Native American to strip away the façades that exist in the two worlds and to challenge society's perception of the first Americans. *Journey by the Sackcloth Moon* is **illuminating, thrilling, riveting**, and has an excellent plot where imagination meets reality. This piece of artistry will leave a lasting impression on all its readers.

J. WAUGH

President, Christians in Action International Network

K.B. Schaller does it again! The supernatural forces of Good and Evil are powerfully presented in this fascinating, riveting novel. *Journey by the Sackcloth Moon* portrays a different facet of contemporary Native America. It compares the Native integration of the natural world and the spiritual, with the compartmentalized thinking of the mainstream. **Edgy and suspenseful**, this story has staying power long after the reader puts it down.

WILLIAM RATTLESNAKE JACKSON

Principal Chief, American Cherokee Confederacy

K.B. Schaller writes with passion, warmth, suspense, and a unique brand of humor. Densely plotted and explosive, *Journey by the Sackcloth Moon* is a **roller-coaster ride with electrifying twists and turns**. The characters all but leap from the page. It gives us a view into the challenges faced by Christian Indians who "live in two worlds." A story powerfully rendered by this gifted storyteller.

JUDY BAKER

Tribal Elder, Seminole Tribe of Florida, Native American Christian Church

In the minds of Native believers, there are gray areas where many are caught and sometimes don't know which way to go. We as Native teachers need to be truthful when presenting the cultural ways of our people to tell the truth about both the good and the evil.

Journey by the Sackcloth Moon is clear, excellent writing, and **I would recommend the Native audience read this book.**

REV. DR. JERRY YELLOWHAWK

Lakota (Sioux) Evangelist, Cheyenne River Reservation, South Dakota,
Former District Superintendent, Wesleyan Church

I

Who Speaks in Dreams?

The strange blackness had come like a Dark wind. It oozed through every crevice until it filled the entire room—a suffocating blackness that was as ominous as the thunderhead that had stretched before me all the way from my home in the Root.

“Dina, My Dearest...”

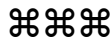
The eerie whisper, that greeting from Marty’s still-unread letter buried in my suitcase, was like the touch of a feather against my ear, or from some disembodied spirit. And in my paralyzing half-sleep, I struggled to breathe...or even to move a finger. Because *It*—whatever this force was—continued to hold me in its suffocating grip. Dread overpowered me, and a strong sense of impending death.

Metallic clamor and murmurs, snarling and unintelligible, shattered the quiet. Just beyond me—so close I could feel the fire of their raging—powerful, unseen forces clashed in battle, and neither would yield to the other. Icy sweat coursed from me and onto Three Magnolias’ crisp white sheets.

Curled on the pillow next to me, in the darklight that beamed through the slender opening where the motel’s curtains met, Eddie Was’ sleek feline silhouette rose and fell gently with each contented purr. Didn’t he *hear* the deadly combat—*feel* this Ninth Plague blackness?

And just as I surrendered my last breath, the jagged edges of three guttural words sliced through the darkness:

“...you—power—destroy...!”



The long hot shower was supposed to clear my head, quiet my trembling. But as I toweled dry and slipped into jeans, T-shirt and loafers, I was still shaking because, after a three-year hiatus, *IT* was back.

Ever since I had vowed not to read Marty's letter until after I had settled in as a missionary to other Native Indians in Broken Bow, it seemed that *something* was protesting my decisions...and with a vengeance.

I tossed my PJs and other belongings into my duffel bag even though it was only 3:20 a.m. by the bedside clock. But further sleep had been impossible, so resuming my trip before my planned 6:00 a.m. exit seemed the most prudent use of time.

No pets were allowed in Three Magnolias, so I wrapped Eddie Was snugly in his "smuggle" blanket and was just about to switch off the light when I remembered one more thing: the journal.

Generally, I completed my entries at bedtime, but too soon the previous Night, without even turning on the television, I had faded into the luscious, deep slumber of the dog-tired...and then *IT* invaded the room.

But my first solo trip had to be chronicled so, as Eddie Was engaged in stealth-search beneath the bureau, I rummaged for a pencil—which was also the instrument of choice for my mother, Cheha—and sat on the side of the bed. My hand still trembled, so I bore down with more force than usual:

June 16, 1986

Left Bitterroot at dawn. In secret. Mama would have pressured me to stay in Florida to complete my nursing degree:

"If you want to compete out there where Whites call all the shots, you'd better arm yourself with their weapons. And that means finishing school, because they're not going to cut you any slack!"

My mother's fierceness about Break Free Indian education was, I realized, rooted in her own experiences: many of the Whites teaching in the boarding schools where Native kids were sent in those days determined to transform their charges into brown-skinned Anglos, with short hair for the boys, and shortened locks for the girls. Loafers. White socks. Blue uniforms—plaid for the girls. And to wear ribbons in her

hair—blue, white, or yellow, Cheha learned—earned a bonus. But she endured the attempt to stamp out all vestiges of her Indianness, played by their rules, and rose to the top of her class. All she had to do was graduate, and the best of the two worlds was hers.

But life had other plans for Cheha....

Eddie Was completed his covert explorations and leaped on the bed beside me. I stroked his striped coat idly and reflected on how quickly and completely my own life had changed, when, like my Grandmother MaryJim, Uncle Donnie had also completed his journey in the blink of an eye.

Doubt and Fear of the unknown edged in, for in spite of my burning desire to become a soul winner for The Jesus Way, suppose I was wrong, and missionary work was not my real calling?

And although I had dutifully tried to suppress such thoughts, suppose, instead of running to a life of service, I was merely running? Or worse, all my missionary zeal was really about being near Aaron—doing penance for the pain I had caused him? It was an awkward memory. Painful. But Marty and I had hurt him deeply three years ago, and I could only hope that, as a man of God, he had forgiven me.

But I had become good—too good—at sublimating things, so I tabled the troubling questions and completed my entry:

Today's highlight: after three years, a letter from Marty with picture enclosed, but will read it only *after* I'm established as a missionary. Those classic features and that slight dimple in his left cheek have proven to be a snare too many times before. Only distance from him helped. And Prayer.

But when I entered the last passage my pulse picked up its pace again:

...terrifying Dream—or was it another encounter? I was suspended in an infinite void while a war raged around me. The windows were closed when I turned in. But when the blackness and the heaviness released me, they were open, with the curtains being whipped about by the winds. And not one item in the room was displaced! But I did understand three of the words in the raging: *You. Power. Destroy(???)*. So it happened all right. In the spirit realm.

To end on a note of confidence, though, I added one last thought:

If there aren't any setbacks, I should reach Broken Bow sometime tomorrow, where I'll be staying with Aunt Bett.

I closed the notebook and glanced at my watch. Nearly twenty minutes had passed. I needed to get going. But I could not shake the feeling that something ominous, something that had no clear description—awaited me. And I remembered the stern warning Aaron had issued to us newly baptized converts three years ago: *“The Enemy of God wants you to give up. He does not want you to win souls for the Lord—especially not among our Indian people!”*

I tucked in the journal, zippered the duffel, and, bundled kitty held close with only his full-cheeked striped face showing, switched off the light and kicked the door shut.

Outside, the heavy air smelled of rain. Distant thunder continued to call to rains that would not come, and an occasional flash of lightning revealed the same black, disgruntled expanse of bad mood that had stretched before me all the way from my home in Bitterroot. The Root. In Florida's Everglades. *Pa-hay-okee* as the Natives once called it. Grassy Waters. The River of Grass. No other place in the whole world was quite like it.

Car keys in hand, senses on high alert, I quick-stepped across the rough-and-tumble blacktop. My shifting gaze inspected each corner, each dapple of shadow, as I unlocked my seven-year-old preowned Caprice and placed Eddie Was inside his wooden taxi—for once, without his usual backpedaling. And as I headed for checkout, the previous Night replayed through my head:

Mute and paralyzed, unable to breathe, I could only lie there on that narrow bed; and as that spirit war raged around me, my conscious self seemed to detach. I drifted...and, horrified, screamed inwardly: “Jesus...Jesus!...”

Just as I surrendered my last seconds of existence, the heaviness released me. The frenzy around me ceased. I sprang bolt upright then and heaved in the sweet, precious air like one who had been drowning....

The screen door squealed on its hinges and the main door slammed shut behind me. Inside the motel office the jolting aroma of pastry and

coffee reminded me I had not had breakfast.

Seated behind the counter, the balding fifty-something clerk, heavy-lipped and puffy-eyed, sat on a stool. His spare tire hung over his belt and his full attention was glued on his newspaper as he slurped from a steaming, king-sized Styrofoam cup. At reach, an open box of scrumptious-looking jelly donuts awaited their last moments of being.

He barely glanced up; and with precision no doubt honed by countless repetitions, processed my AMEX card, then handed me the receipt and motel paperwork for my signature with fingers encrusted with donut icing—in one fell swoop—while barely glancing away from that newspaper. “Come back to see us now, you hear?” And that pleasant Alabama drawl was his only comment as he continued reading and slurping.

As I strapped on my seatbelt, I considered how, after all my cat-smuggling precautions, that clerk probably would not have noticed if Eddie Was were perched on my head, wearing powwow regalia and performing a Fancy Dance.

Just across the street, I topped off at the gas pump and bought a bag of Fritos, a cinnamon bun, coffee, and a packet of Kitty Krunchies. Thirty dollars and change I stuffed into the pocket of my jeans. The AMEX card and my 223 dollars subsistence cash I left in my wallet, which I kept inside my suitcase in the trunk of my car. “*Never carry it all in one place,*” Uncle Donnie had always advised.

I rechecked my map route and, satisfied, tossed it on the backseat next to Uncle Donnie’s unloaded *efche esh fah yee ke*—we kids shortened it to *efche*.

“*A good shooter like you can always hunt if times get hard, and defend yourself if you have to,*” he said frequently enough. But barrel up and wrapped in his favorite Seminole patchwork jacket, the old rifle was now just a keepsake, because I had pulled up roots from The Root.

Ignition fired, I glanced over my shoulder to where Eddie Was, having relished his breakfast, performed delicate strokes over his face with a white-slippered paw.

“Okay, boy, let’s get rolling again,” I said.

As I searched for a station to keep track of the pending storm, I caught the tail end of a news story:

“...in DiamondIce perfume heiress Peggy Lane Ashton’s mountainside estate. The blonde socialite has not been seen since attending a Manhattan concert with an unidentified man some two weeks ago. Authorities have so far declined to say if they suspect foul play...”

II

Hard Rain

“Well, well,” Aunt Bett said over the pay phone in that endearing, rough-edged voice during one of my gas station rest breaks. “Where are you?”

“Not too far from Mississippi,” I replied as I munched a bag of Fritos. “I left Mobile a little after three. The sky’s still pretty black, but if the storm holds off I should be in Broken Bow no later than tomorrow evening. If I push it.”

“Hey, no pushing it. You drive the speed limit, you hear me? No talking to strangers, and—”

“No stopping on the roadside unless you break down.”

“Yep. Ol’ Donnie’s walked on, but that’s still the family rule, Deenie.”

Warmth surged through me. My childhood nickname made me feel connected again. Safe. The hug in Aunt Bett’s ample-armed voice always made you feel safe.

“Listen. If you make it in by Sunday, pastors from all around will be holding a revival down at the arena,” she said. “Most folks’ll be coming to hear Aaron, though.”

I shivered inside. So he still had the fire and the thunder...

“He’s a good preacher, I hear,” she went on. “I’ve even been thinking about going myself. You know. Just to see the who’s who of who’s there.”

I managed a laugh. “Who knows? Maybe he can win you to The Jesus Way. And just remember. I don’t want the family to know I’m coming to Broken Bow right now, because Mama would bug me about returning to nursing school. So keep it secret for now, okay?”

“Okay, but don’t be too down on her, Deenie. She knows firsthand how hard life can be for an Indian without that piece of paper. All her big Dreams died when she had to drop out to care for your grandma, Maryjim.

And as smart as Cheha was, she ended up marrying that ol' witch, Jack Turner, and never did go back to earn her diploma."

I sighed. "Just like I dropped out to take care of Uncle Donnie, so she wouldn't have quit her job. It was tough, going back to earn mine in the Night program. But I knew how much my becoming a nurse would mean to Mama. Up till then, I guess I never considered there were other ways to Break Free and still follow your own path than the mainstream nine-to-five. There's God's work. I mean, nursing is a great profession, but it was what everybody else wanted for me and my heart wasn't in it. I couldn't live her Dream."

There was a long pause. "Just know this—I kept your sister's secret when she ran off and stayed here till she could work her way to California to be in modeling. So I can keep your secret, too. Can't wait to see you, though. And listen to this—the word's out that Aaron's congregation is also itching to meet you."

But what would he think of me, I wondered, after all this time?

"You still there, Deenie?"

"Uh...sure. And I can't wait to taste your frybread again. It's been a long time, Aunt Bett."

"It sure has. And about that letter from Marty you said you got. Did you read it yet?"

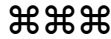
I answered with nonchalance. "Nope. I found it in our box on my way out, mailed from Spokane. I was running late, so I just stuck it in my suitcase. I'll wait to get settled first. Oh. And thanks again for taking me in. I have some money saved till I can find a job, though, so I won't be too much of a burden."

"Family is never a burden, Deenie."

Tears welled in my eyes. "I love you, Aunt Bett. But remember—even though I'll be based in Aaron's church, I'm coming strictly as a missionary to work with our people. All Saints just happened to be the best choice for me because I'll be with family."

After a few more minutes of small talk, we hung up.

I tapped the bottom of my Fritos bag for the last corn chip, and with an icy, tingling jolt from my can of Coke, was on the road again.



The miles of forest moved by in a blur, and the sky turned more and more ominous. Right outside Mississippi, without any warning, an explosion of thunder rattled my windows. The black clouds that had threatened for so long finally unleashed their fury, and the winds began pitching a psychotic fit. Eddie Was yowled in his carrier.

“Settle down, boy. It’s only a rainstorm,” I said. “It’ll soon blow over.” After what seemed like unending hours of inching along, blurred by flying windshield wipers, I made out snatches of a sign: *Mississippi Welcomes You.*

But just as the rains had come without warning, over the drone of the crackling radio static, barely audible, the guttural Voice from the previous Night slammed me with almost physical force:

“You’re going to crash, Dina Youngblood, so pull over and read Marty’s letter—now. It is your only chance!”

I wanted to believe it was only my imagination, but that suffocating feeling was closing in on me again; and that eerie greeting from Marty’s letter was pulsing in my brain like a heartbeat. Then the Voice spoke again, but this time was cloying and poetic:

“You are ignoring your feelings, Dina. Remember when your love for him was new, his voice like liquid silver rushing over the senses? And you were both perfect in each other’s eyes?”

Oh, I remembered it all right, but also our two tortured souls that were forever locked in combat. And there was also Aaron’s conscience-rending warning as he stood in the pulpit under the revival tent that summer three years ago:

“Hear it from the Scriptures, my people: ‘Do not become unequally yoked together with an unbeliever.’ They can draw you away from the faith and lead you down the pathway to hell!”

New convert Uncle Donnie was in full agreement with what many people were saying about Marty: *“He’s a witch! How else can you explain the owls that speak to you, the Nightmares—and all the other crazy things that have been happening since you started seeing that boy?”*

And that was the full explanation of my conflict: the church condemned relationships between Jesus Way believers and such people.

But I loved Marty then. We would marry, he said; have our own “little warriors.” And the thought of giving him up shattered my heart.

The memory was still painful. The winds, howling like vengeful spirits, manhandled my Caprice. I gripped the steering wheel firmly even as Uncle Donnie’s advice edged through my carefully corralled panic: *“There’s power in moving on....”*

Night had crept in early. My stomach roared in discontent. With one eye on the road, I trawled the glove compartment, popped a couple of Tums into my mouth, and recited Scripture to encourage myself: “I can do all things...”

Another deafening boom pummeled my eardrums. I gripped the steering wheel even more tightly and completed Philippians 4:13: “...through Christ which strengtheneth me.”

The radio announcer crackled through the static, *“So go slow out there, friends. And pull over if you have to, ’cause this is a real soaker that isn’t gonna let up soon!”*

And out of the storm’s raging, a deafening blare trumped even the rumbles of thunder. Eddie Was yowled more loudly. I glanced in my rearview mirror. Coming up hard behind me, a monstrous rig gleamed in the half light like the plumes of crows and ravens. Great surf spewed from beneath its mammoth tires. And it was barreling toward me like a fog-shrouded Behemoth looming out of a bad Dream.

As it courted my rear bumper, the gigantic headlights reflected from my rearview mirror and stabbed into my pupils. I shielded my eyes with my free hand.

Maybe, I decided, I was impeding the trucker’s speed, so I eased over into the right lane. But to my mounting unease, he changed lanes also and continued to tailgate and blast that horn. My mouth went dry. The speed limit would be much too fast for the existing conditions, but it was either speed up or risk my Caprice’s becoming road kill.

I turned on my signal, gripped the wheel even more tightly, and eased back into the left lane. But the trucker, his face hidden in the shadows, pulled behind me yet again; those hideous headlights were all but smack against my rear window. I sounded my horn.

“Hey, give me a break, please. What are you trying to do—kill me?” But my flare of temper only fueled his rage, and he responded in another continuous blare.

There's one thing a rig cannot do, I managed to strategize through my mental gridlock: *make sudden stops*. If I quickly pulled onto the shoulder, that trucker would be forced to keep going, and I could ease back onto the highway a safe distance behind. Maybe by then he would have tired of his sick amusement.

But the narrow shoulder sloped too sharply downward to where the rushing storm waters surged into a ditch. Too risky. And too late, I saw that a section of the highway was washed away. Just in time, I slammed on the brakes...and my tires took on a mind of their own. I was in a spinout. Swerving. Reeling. I fought to control the wheel. Bile rose in my throat.

"Oh, God, help me!" I prayed. And in the nanosecond that I skidded off the road, that trucker's face, half-hidden in the shadows...was I seeing things? Fiendish. Hideous. Ghoulish-green. Frog-ugly and twisted with Rage.

Worse, in that terrifying half-breath of time, he had actually slowed down—to watch me die in the crash. Then the mammoth tires spewed great cascades of surf as he passed me...and disappeared. Just like that. All traces of that metal leviathan with its menacing occupant was simply...gone. In a blink of time, the darklight, the gloom, had swallowed it up.

I skidded sideways down the embankment: End-over-end. Thundering heart. My four-legged's panicked yowls. Horrible metallic *thump thump thump*. Woods below. Impact. Rear-ended a bush. Stopped upside down next to a slate-black gully, its surface leaping beneath pelting rain, like thousands of tiny jumping frogs.

The radio announcer still commented through the crackle of static: "*When weather conditions permit, volunteers will search all wooded areas in the tri-state region for the missing heiress...*"

Then, silence.



Huddled beneath the trees on higher ground, I propped the umbrella over Eddie Was' taxi and draped the blanket over it to calm his panicked yowls. My head throbbed from our rough landing, but I thanked God we were both safe. Having regained my bearings, I shielded my face with my arms and trekked back down the slippery embankment.

Amazingly, that small bush had prevented me from plunging into that gully. But the soil that held it was quickly eroding, and I could only stand in helpless horror as my cash, clothes, AMEX card, everything—including Marty’s unread letter—inched toward those leaping frogs dancing in liquid Night.

How I wanted to dismiss that Voice as a figment of my mind! But so far it had prophesied rightly. And half-blinded by the rain, I slogged back over to the road and shouted and waved at every passing vehicle: “Hey, help me—please!”

But each merely plowed along. Finally, heavy with exhaustion, I made my way back and crouched beneath the umbrella next to my yowling companion.

I gave him a gentle chin scratch. “Hey. I’m sorry, boy, but we’re stranded. And if you really do have nine lives, how about letting me borrow a couple?” He purred loudly and nuzzled me.

By now I was shivering too; for although it was early summer, an unseasonable coolness had settled in and made itself at home....

High on life in the lush morning, I traipsed behind Uncle Donnie on gangly twelve-year-old legs through the Everglades thickets. The early sun was at our backs....

“The *efche*—are you holding it like this?” he demonstrated without looking back.

“Just like you told me to.”

“I am teaching you how to survive. To hunt. Fish. Trap. Take from the land and live like the Old Ones lived. That is why *Feshahkee Ommehche* placed these things on the earth—to take care of His children. Remember that.”

“Is the Breathmaker the same as Jesus—the White man’s Lord?”

He was thoughtful. “The White man says that his Jesus is coming back again. So I guess I will just have to wait till then and ask Him. If He’ll talk to an old Indian like me.”

“They say He loves everybody, Uncle Donnie. Maybe one Sunday we can go to church and find out?”

But he stopped in his tracks then, and his voice was suddenly soft, urgent. “Look. Over there!” We both stood stock-still. He raised his hand slowly, almost like a Dream-dance. And his voice was barely a whisper: “Now!”

I aimed; for although still a pre-teen, I was a crack shot who took

pride in showing off her growing skill. But this time something came over me. I was captivated by the stateliness of this young buck—his beauty, his dangerous innocence. I lowered the rifle. My voice was barely a whisper. “He’s so...beautiful.”

“You cannot think that way. You must do what you have to do to survive! The time will come when you will have to continue on your own. But you must remember: when you take the life of a four-legged, or one of the winged fellows so you may live, you have taken something sacred. So take the wisdom of the old ones to heart: Once you release an arrow, you cannot call it back. And that is true for words as well.”

He picked up his pace down the clearing. “This is as far as you can go with me. Go on back now. You know the way!”

I ran after him. “Wait, Uncle Donnie. I don’t know the way!”...

I sprang awake then, unsettled. The Night had faded to a gray dawn, and the rain continued to beat down in torrents. Uncle Donnie had left me suddenly and without warning, just as he had in life. And crouched there, teeth chattering, I wondered why, in the Dream, he never looked at me.

By now, Eddie Was just sat on his haunches, his eyes barely open, shivering too and purring loudly. Unless this situation turned around quickly, we were both going down for the count.

The rain had let up slightly, so I trudged down the embankment again, to the edge of the highway. I waved and cried out at every vehicle that plowed by: “Please—could you give me a ride to the nearest gas station?”

What I gained was more drenching from the wake left by their tires. Exhausted at last and completely dispirited, I dropped to my knees. “Dear God, help me,” I sobbed. “Please don’t let us die out here!”

And at that very moment, from behind, a hand clamped down on my shoulder. The hand of God? I yelled, tried to scramble to my feet, lost my footing, and splattered face-forward to the ground: “Please forgive me. I repent for everything!”

The reply came with a raspy belly-laugh. “Take it easy. ’Fraid I can’t help you with your sins, but I’d be happy to give you a lift!” He steadied me to my feet with a skeletal but deceptively powerful hand. His face was sunken-eyed and nearly fleshless.

I recoiled inwardly as I squeezed water from my hair and smoothed my clothes. “I’m...sorry I yelled like that. I’m kind of jumpy. I...didn’t

hear you pull up.” And I could not help but think that he could sure use a double helping of my Aunt Bett’s famous pork chop and frybread dinners, with a helping of my mama’s swamp cabbage on the side.

He glanced at my topsy-turvy car, at me again, and then broke into another raucous laugh. “Well, looks like it’s true—what they say about women drivers!”

Not funny, I thought and tried not to stare at that death’s head face and those glittering misplaced orbs in their cavernous sockets. “A truck ran me off the road, and I just need a ride to the nearest gas station to use the phone.”

He jerked his head toward his faded red pickup. “Sure. Hop in.” Although a one-generation-ago throwback, it rumbled powerfully on four massive tires.

I pointed toward the wooden taxi. “Uh, my cat over there. Could he...?”

Another belly laugh. But this one was followed by a deep wheeze and a rasping cough. “Missy, you sure picked some bad weather to be traveling with a cat. ’Cept for drinking it, they got no use for water!”

He strolled over, lifted the carrier easily in his wiry strength, shoved it onto the bed, and threw a tarp over it. Eddie Was hissed and growled in a feeble tomcat bluff to protest the indignity, but our benefactor only grinned and nodded again toward the truck. “Chariot’s waiting, missy. Hop in!”

Every instinct within me objected, but I was at his mercy. So, in spite of Aunt Bett’s warning about strangers, I climbed in, huddled on the front seat, and stole my first real look. Up close, those sunken, glittering eyes were really more like an infant’s intense blue-whites, pilfered and plopped into his dead man’s sockets.

But he did not head for the highway. Instead, he turned onto a narrow, upwardly winding path that led into the woods. I sprang bolt upright. “Hey, where are we going? You said you’d take me to a gas station!”

“You need to dry off first. My trailer’s back a ways. I could make you some coffee. Warm you up. Get you into some dry clothes.”

“Look—I can get coffee at the gas station. I just need to get my car towed before it...”

“Ah, no need to spend what’s left of that thirty bucks in your pocket

on coffee. Save it for something more important; and that 223 in your wallet is not gonna be usable for quite some time, either. And I'll bet your four-legged could use a bowl of warm gravy about now."

He knew my cash reserve? And he called Eddie Was a four-legged. Why would a non-Indian use such a term? Maybe he was a shaman or something. A witch. Like Jack Turner was at the zenith of his fearsome powers.

"By the way, my name's Shamgar, but they call me Sam 'cause it sounds better than Sham!" He belly-laughed again.

Oh, I have myself a real jolly one here, I mused.

He glanced at me. "And what do they call you...what's your name?"

"Dina." Resigned, I settled back on the seat. My car was lodged on the bank of that creek back there like a beached whale and sinking fast. With Uncle Donnie's *efche* inside. His jacket. Along with my AMEX card, cash, and the rest of my belongings. But Sam drove on and whistled some engaging, nameless tune. I managed to conceal my inward panic as it rose to critical mass.

"Look—uh...Sam, could you turn around and take me to a gas station? I'd be happy to pay you. Please? My auto insurance can send a tow for my car. I could..."

"In this kind of weather, all the phones are more'n likely dead as doornails." He glanced at me. "Yep. Dead as doornails." And, relaxed, his voice matter-of-fact, he continued down the path.

I peered through the window. *What if I bailed out?* He was driving slowly enough. The trees would make it difficult for him to run me down, if he were of that inclination...so it just might work!

But what about poor Eddie Was? Half-starved, he had appeared at our door one evening as a scrawny kitten. We had nursed him back to health, so he was family now. I couldn't abandon him.

Sam glanced at me and smiled. "Don't even think on it. See, these paths out here will deceive you. Lots of forks and twists and turns. It'll be pitch Dark before long, and there are no streetlights out here, missy. Nope. You'd never make it to the highway. Besides, there's lots of mean critters in these woods. Hungry ones, too!" He gave an expansive wave of his free hand: "Headline: 'Half-chewed bones of Indian girl found in woods!'"

I shift-eyed him. "Who said I was Indian?"

"Well you are, aren't you?"

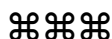
I shrugged. “Maybe.”

He laughed again. “I’ll tell you what, Miss ‘Maybe’ Youngblood. The Night world is starting to wake up about now. And believe me, Indian or no, you won’t survive out here. Besides, I’m your Defender. So just relax and be thankful that old Sam happened along.”

I pondered his words. “Tell me. How did you know my name’s Youngblood?”

He grinned. “Anybody on the green side of thirty, to me, is a Youngblood.”

Who—or what—was this man? For not only did he know my name and my thoughts, he was also making light of my Fear...



Sam’s trailer was a simple thing. A dingy coffin in the deep woods strapped to concrete blocks in the midst of standing water. And it was that very starkness and the fact that I did not know what was behind those flimsy walls that made it so menacing.

He pulled up to his front door, threw the tarp over yowling Eddie Was, sprinted easily up the concrete steps, and shouldered his way in. When he returned for me, I hopped out and, sharing the oilcloth, we both dashed inside.

He kicked the door shut, shook the water from the tarp, and redraped it over the carrier while whistling that tune—mystical, otherworldly...beautiful.

“There,” he said. “Covering him for a spell’ll give him time to settle down.” He disappeared down the narrow hallway then and reappeared shortly with a threadbare towel and a blanket—red and black like a hunter’s jacket. The blanket he tossed to me. “Here. Wrap up.”

Then, towel in hand, he lifted Eddie Was from the carrier.

Toes splayed, tail curled between his legs, he growled and tried his Tough Tom Cat bluff again. But, unimpressed, Sam dried the wet fur with a gentleness that belied his gruffness.

“Okay, Mr. Stripey with those nice white boots on, settle down. You’re in no position to argue. Hmm—looks like you got a few fleas, too, big fellow.”

I could barely speak through my chattering teeth. “I bathe him with residual action *Flee Fleas*. He *does not* have f-fleas!”

But Sam continued in his offhanded tone, “Yep. He’s got a few, all right. All furry critters get ’em.”

I was both a guest and a beggar, so I just huddled in silence on the frayed couch next to stacks of yellowed newspapers and a box of clean-picked Kentucky Fried Chicken remnants. Not even during the Oklahoma January visits of my childhood had I ever been so cold.

Sam glanced at me again. “Tell me. Do you spell your name D-e-e-n-a, D-e-a-n-a, or what?”

“D-D-*I*-n-a.”

“Well, Miss D-*i*-n-a Youngblood, I’ll get the coffee going. It can seem pretty cold when you’ve been stranded in the rain for a while—and scared stiff of some old codger who you’re not sure of what he’s up to.”

It required no response. Plus, my bladder now felt like a bowling ball, and I was sitting there with my teeth clenched, too embarrassed to ask to use his restroom.

He placed Eddie Was back into his taxi, glanced back at me and, again, as though reading my thoughts, gestured ahead. “Toilet’s right down the hallway. And go change into some dry clothes. First bedroom. Any of those things in the closet will fit you.”

The first item that caught my eye was the dreamcatcher on the bathroom door. To own one, a person would at least have to have some interest in Indian lore.

After washing my hands, I searched without success for a clean towel, because the only one available was a dingy thing draped over the side of his bathtub. There was a hamper beneath the sink, though, perhaps with fresh supplies inside. But when I attempted to open it, I found the lid padlocked. And that piqued my curiosity.

It was not too heavy and felt sort of like a full laundry hamper would feel. I placed it back beneath the sink, shook my hands free of water, and made my way to the bedroom.

It was surprisingly neat, with the single bed covered with one of those old-fashioned chenille spreads, kind of threadbare, yellow, with faded green and pink accent pillows, equally as ancient. I eased open the closet door. No skeleton tumbled out, but what I did see left me thunderstruck....

For more of the story, read on...

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GRAY RAINBOW JOURNEY

K. B. SCHALLER

WINNER, NATIONAL BEST BOOKS 2009 AWARD

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*Torn between two worlds,
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if it doesn't kill her first.*

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About the Author



K.B. SCHALLER'S *Journey by the Sackcloth Moon* further dramatizes Native American beauty Dina Youngblood's monumental clashes between opposing worlds. Her novel *Gray Rainbow Journey* was a USA Book News National Best Books Award winner for Multicultural Fiction, and *Journey by the Sackcloth Moon* continues to challenge many popular perceptions of Native Americans as it further defines the angst-ridden, many-faceted characters in their struggles as they

“walk in two worlds.”

A former classroom teacher, Schaller is also a conference speaker and an independent journalist who contributes largely to Native publications. She is also a published poet and painter whose works have won Best in Show and other recognitions. She and her husband, Jim, have a blended family of four children, and along with her mother, Lilly, and the family's three cats, reside in South Florida. She plans “at least one more” novel in the *Journey* series.

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