

Part 1: Wi Ile Anpo

Sun is Burning at Dawn

Chapter One

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The warrior, Wanbli Zi, quietly smoked a pipe at the fire. Before him the fire crackled and popped, warming the lodge. He was not alone.

Three women worked there as well as his uncle who sat nearby. The first woman – his wife’s mother – sat near the fire, her aged hands carefully sewing a pair of moccasins. She had come to visit through winter, and would return to her family’s band when the snows melted. The next – his first wife – finished preparing the evening meal, dividing her attention between two small girls and a baby in her arms. The third and youngest – his second wife – assisted with shy docility. She had only come to his family after the summer gathering, and remained uncertain of her new status.

Of the children, the younger was four winters, playing with a toy person among the sleeping furs. The oldest was nine winters, on the verge of learning her place in society.

His first wife handed the eldest girl a clay bowl of stew. “Here. Give this to your father.”

With an eager smile and nod, she carefully took the steaming bowl, and approached the warrior. “*Ate?*”

Wanbli looked up from the fire. “Yes, *cunksi.*” He took the food from her with a smile. “Thank you, little one. Now go help with your sister.”

Stopping only long enough to give her father a hug, the girl returned to the duties of keeping her little sister occupied.

He set the bowl near the fire to keep it warm, and finished smoking in contemplative silence. His uncle, one of the finest arrow makers in the band, set aside the thin strips of feathers he used for fletching to eat.

Beyond the buffalo robes of his wife’s lodge, a late winter snow drifted to the ground. Around this lodge huddled the winter camp of the Maka band of the Oglala Lakota. Thirty *ti ikceyas* lay around a large cleared area in a near circle. The only open space in the hoop stood at the eastern side where the entrance faced the rising sun. At the exact opposite of the entry stood a larger lodge, used as a meeting place for the elders.

Finishing his tobacco, Wanbli emptied the ashes into the fire, so the spirits could share the sacred smoke, and set the pipe into a rack. His second wife now fed the younger child and his older daughter sat nearby, watching everything with large brown eyes as she ate her meal.

His first wife, the mother of his children, postponed eating as she bared her breast to feed the baby. He watched, remembering his pleasure when Gi presented this newest person to him a few short days ago. Three daughters, all beautiful like their mother. Not many men were blessed with such. Perhaps some day he would also have a son to teach hunting and tracking. He eyed his second wife in speculation. Even if he had no son of his seed, he vowed to consider adopting or capturing one. Surely someone had an over abundance of children, and would be willing to allow Wanbli to

adopt one. Or perhaps he would find a child during a raid on an enemy encampment, one he could raise as his own.

He heard a knocking of wood on wood outside, someone tapping the stick put there for this purpose. Calling a welcome, he was surprised to see the shaman push aside the leather covering and step inside. Hiding his puzzlement, he invited the visitor to sit in the honored place beside him.

The shaman, Inyan, declined an offer of food and drink. Instead, he opened a pouch, producing a pipe and tobacco as flakes of snow melted across his shoulders and hair.

Wanbli refrained from raising his eyebrows at the pipe. The bowl was of polished stone, white and gleaming, while the stem was dark wood, carved with a likeness of a mountain lion. This pipe was very old and important, used only in rituals, and Wanbli wondered why the shaman brought it to Gi's lodge. What could be so vital as to bring about its use?

He and his uncle sat in silence, watching as Inyan carefully loaded the bowl with tobacco.

The shaman crouched forward and, with nimble fingers, used two twigs to lift a burning ember, lighting the pipe. The glow from the fire lit his fairly unlined face. He was young to be a shaman; only thirty-four winters. His father had taught him since he was a boy and, with the elder's death this past winter from the coughing sickness, the younger had taken over his father's duties in the camp.

He sang a song of joy as he offered the smoke to the four directions, his voice soft. Then he touched his lips to the stem, using his free hand to guide the smoke towards his head and behind. Smoke was sacred and of the spirit. It imparted wisdom, and those who smoked could see their words, only able to speak truth under its influence.

The shaman handed the pipe, stem first, to the warrior who repeated the process of smoking and guiding the cloud closer. It then passed to Wanbli's uncle who did the same. The men sat in silence, finishing this ritual. When the bowl held nothing but ashes, Inyan tapped it into the fire, releasing the last of it for the spirits that lived in their world.

Wanbli waited patiently, knowing that soon Inyan would make his words known. Still, curiosity beat strong in his heart, and it thumped with relief when the shaman began to speak.

"I sat in meditation for four days," Inyan said. "I wished to ask the spirits of winter questions about the coming seasons, hoping to understand what our future holds. Instead I received a vision of a newborn child." He leaned forward and peering intently at Wanbli. "Your woman's child."

Inyan's eyes snared Wanbli's. A sense of waiting filled him, certain something of great import directed the shaman's vision.

"I saw a female *igmu*, giving birth to a human. When the baby cried out, I could hear the scream of the mountain lion in the voice, and knew it to be a girl child. I stepped closer, the mother lion ignoring me as she licked the afterbirth from the baby's frail body. In the baby's heart burned the fire of a warrior. I could hear it in her voice, see it in her eyes."

Wanbli frowned. "What does that have to do with my wife's child?"

"The baby born of the lion is your wife's daughter."

He leaned onto his backrest, trading a glance with his uncle. "The lion is a strong spirit for a girl child," he said. "Do you foresee what will happen to her as she grows? Will she find a man strong enough?"

The shaman carefully rewrapped the pipe in his hands. "Her destiny does not lie in women's work," he said softly. "She is *wicakte*, a two-souled person."

The warrior looked at his uncle in puzzlement.

The older man shrugged. "It has been so before, though not for many, many winters – a woman raised as warrior and hunter for her family. She could be this thing."

“Yes,” Inyan agreed, putting the now bundled pipe back into its leather pouch. “And you will have a son, to care for you – to hunt when you can no longer, to protect you from war, to support you in your elder seasons.”

Wanbli sat in silence, contemplating this odd turn of events. The two other men remained quiet, giving him space to think. If what Inyan saw was a true vision. No man would be able to tame his daughter. No man would want her.

After a time, Wanbli waved his first wife close, reaching for the newest member of her lodge. The lively bundle squawked once at the interruption to her feeding. He instantly covered the baby’s mouth with his, counseling silence which she obeyed.

With surprising gentleness, Wanbli further unwrapped the bundle, revealing his daughter. Her tiny hands balled into fists, she flailed them around, shivering in the cooler air. He held a finger out and one fist swatted it before grasping with a strong grip. She brought the digit promptly to her mouth and he could feel tiny gums against the finger pad.

Dark eyes stared back at him.

Inyan was young to be shaman. The possibility remained that he misinterpreted his vision, though Wanbli could not see how any other conclusion could be made. His wife’s was the only child born in the last two moons, and no other woman in their village carried one. The shaman seemed certain of his understanding; why else would he come bearing the sacred pipe? Perhaps he did so to indicate the importance of his words.

Wanbli studied his offspring. She still held his finger and suckled, though hunger would not be abated in such a manner. Despite this, she remained silent, watching him as he watched her. He smiled.

He looked to the two men at his fire. “This is Cinksi, my son of the heart. She will grow strong. She will learn the arts of war and how to speak with the spirits. She will become a fierce hunter and provide for her family.”

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Cinksi fought her natural instincts to fidget. Her father’s activities were quite interesting. The pack of boys rampaging past distracted her with their whooping as they brandished small weapons at one another.

“Watch closely,” Wanbli said, drawing his daughter’s eyes back to the task at hand. “This is the knot we use.” He slowly demonstrated as he tied the wet rawhide strip on the spear haft. Once complete, he turned it to study the handiwork. “When the rawhide dries, it will tighten and the spearhead will not fall out.” He used his other hand to gesture the girl closer.

She scooted forward on the buffalo robe and peered at the spear. With careful hands, she tried to wiggle the head but it held fast. She looked at her father, impressed. “It is already so strong, Wanbli! Even *wakan tanka* could not move it when the rawhide dries.”

The warrior chuckled. “If the great powers were to want this spear in pieces, it would be so, child,” he said.

The boys trotted past, intent on some game, and Cinksi’s attention again wandered from the spear. She watched as they disappeared behind the lodge of her father’s second wife. Craning her neck, she tried to see past the structure, but they remained out of sight.

“Cinksi.”

She turned back to her father. He held a second, smaller spear in his hand, one that was not there when she first looked away. A miniature version of his own, the antler tip was blunted. Cinksi's joy spread across her face as he handed the small weapon to her.

"For you, Cinksi. Now, go. Show the *boksila* that you are stronger and wiser than any of them."

Cinksi needed no further prodding. She took the spear and raced away to catch up with the boys.

They huddled behind the furthest tent on the north side of camp. There were seven of them, ranging in age from six to nine winters, dressed in breechclouts and moccasins. They heatedly debated something among themselves, their voices trailing off as the newcomer's presence was noticed.

Cinksi slowed to a walk when she got close to them. Her heart beat loudly in her chest as seven pairs of eyes stared at her. She could hear her father's voice in her ear. "*A true warrior feels fear yet moves through it, becoming brave.*"

"Become brave," she murmured to herself. The girl threw her shoulders back, and raised her chin to stare haughtily back as she marched forward. She wore only breechclouts and moccasins, as well, looking every inch like another boy. Stopping before the biggest of them, she glared up at him and set the butt of her new spear on the ground by her foot. A small puff of dust arose from it and settled back down.

The taller boy examined her much like she was a particularly fat bug underneath a rock. "Who are you?" he demanded, knowing the answer. No one was a stranger in the camp.

"I am Cinksi. My father is Wanbli," she said, her tone regal.

*He looked her up and down. With a playful tug at her breechclout, he snickered, "I heard you were a *wicincala*."*

The others chuckled as well, but the girl in their midst refused to be daunted. She did not flinch away from the tugging on her clothing. "I am not a girl. I am *wicakte*."

Immediately losing interest in her, the boy said, "Go home, little *wicincala*. We do not play with toy persons here." His dark eyes fell on the spear she held. "And you do not play with weapons." He plucked it from her hands.

Cinksi stared at him, stunned. She watched the boy heft the spear her father had given her, checking its weight and balance as he turned away. The other boys in the group were laughing, preparing to follow. It was utterly inconceivable that the boy would do such a thing, let alone think he could get away with it. The world seemed to slow down as the adrenaline of anger sparked the fire the shaman had seen so many winters ago.

No thought crossed her mind. At first frozen in place, her next awareness was of dust, a startled grunt, and aggressive movement. Teeth gritted, Cinksi fought for a good grip on the boy, attempting to wrest her spear back from him. Before she could do so, however, arms grabbed hers and pulled her off. She struggled against her captors with a growl.

The boy did not appear angry. He rose to his feet and dusted himself off. His friends held Cinksi tight, though she did not fight as hard for release. Still, she made anger noises in her throat, and they seemed loath to release her. The others stood back in awe as they watched the altercation.

The spear thief crouched down in front of her, studying her curiously. "You are crazy, *wicincala*," he said. "You should not fight me. I am older and stronger and bigger."

She lessened her scuffle a bit and glared back at him. "I am not *wicincala*!" she insisted. "I am *wicakte*, and I will still fight you! Until the day I die!"

"But, you will lose, Cinksi."

"I do not care! Someday I will be bigger and stronger and then I will win."

He picked up the spear that had fallen to the ground at her attack. He looked it over carefully, brushing it off a bit and adjusting a feather adorning it. "All this for a spear?"

The girl's nostrils flared, her lips twisted into a scornful expression. "My father gave me the spear as a gift. It would dishonor him and myself to let it be stolen from me." She left unspoken the thought of who else would be dishonored.

Looking to the boys holding her arms, the boy said, "Let her go."

Cinksi nearly stumbled at her sudden release. She caught herself and pulled her small frame upright in a proud stance. "I will fight you now."

The boy silently handed her the spear instead.

Frowning, the girl took the spear back into her possession. Her dark eyes narrowed as she studied her tormentor.

"My name is Nupa. My father is Wi Sape. I return this spear to you."

The rest of the boys stared at him as if he had grown two heads.

Cinksi thought about it for a few seconds before taking the child's weapon from him. "I will still fight you," she offered in a calmer voice.

Nupa smiled at her. "If you wish. Can you and I have a peace? Until you get older and stronger?"

She considered his request with utter seriousness. "Yes. You and I can have a peace until then."

"Good!" He straightened and looked at the other boys. "Cinksi stays with us." He inhaled deeply of the summer air. "I go hunting!" he yelled before turning and running off.

The boys hared off after him, accepting his leadership. Cinksi hesitated. *That was much easier than I thought it would be.* Then she raced after them, adding her own voice to their whooping and calling.