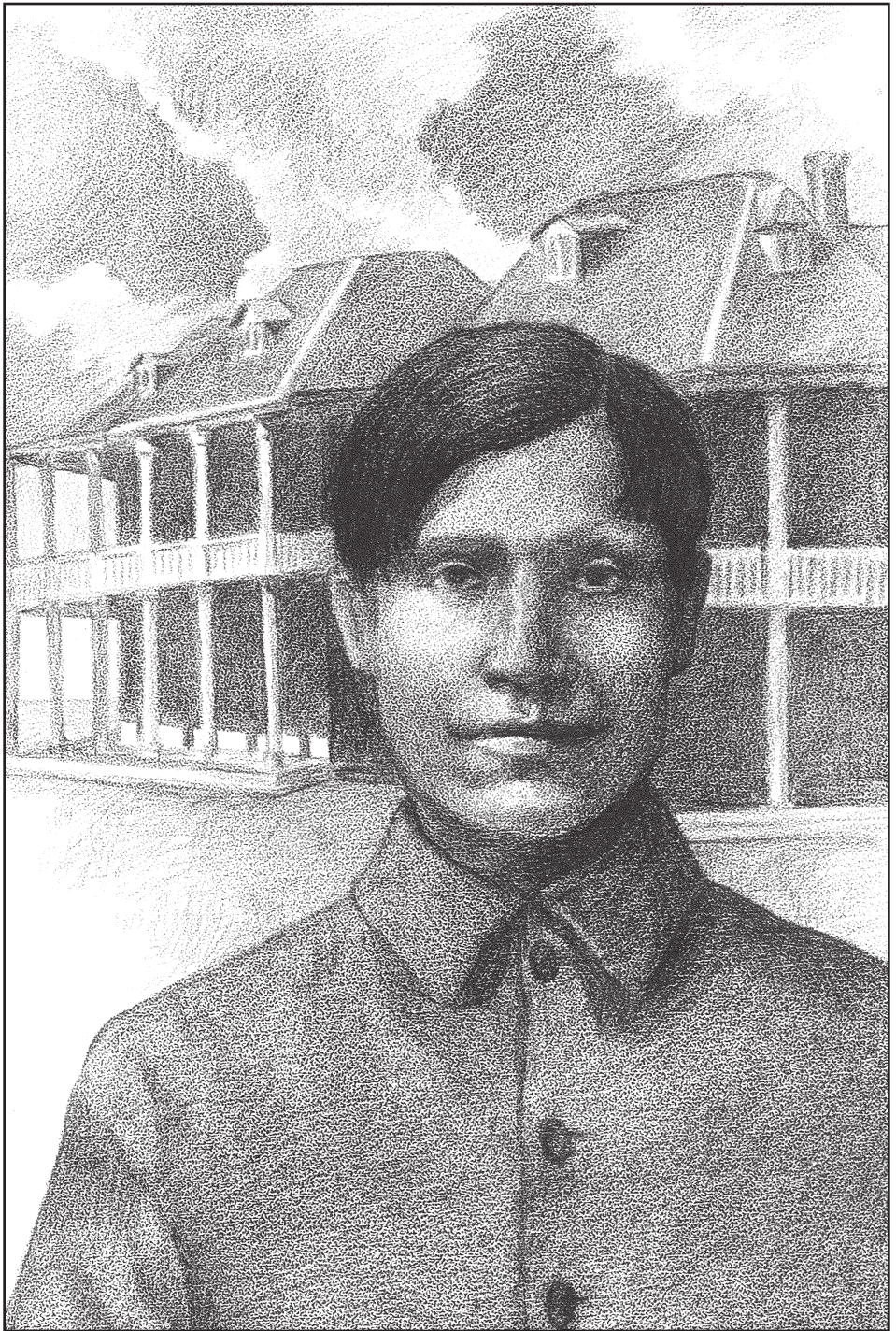
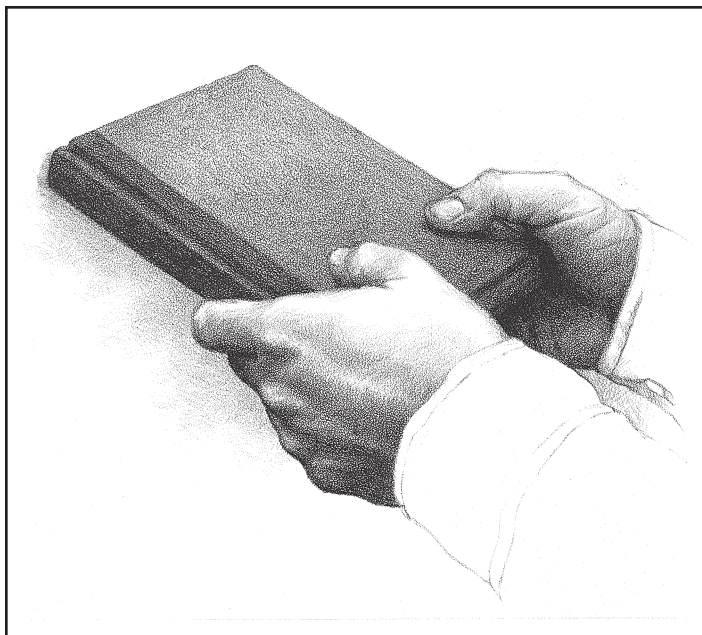




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## *The Journal*

I held my breath as I stood before the captain. My grandfather stood silently next to me. The paper the captain held would decide my future.

I wanted to follow the vision of the *inipi*, the sweat lodge. I needed to find an education in the wider world so that I could return to help my people, the Lakota.

## THE FIRE CARRIER

“The school in Virginia can’t take you until next term,” said the captain. “However, the director writes that there is a new school in Phoenix. It is called Blackstone. They are willing to enroll you now.”

“Then it is settled,” I replied without hesitating. “Where is Phoenix?”

“To the west. It’s very far,” the captain continued. “The new commander from Blackstone will be traveling through this area. He will take you to the school. You are to leave next week.”

“Good luck, Red Fox,” the captain said. He held out his hand. I knew to take it and test my strength to his.

“Thank you, sir,” I replied.

I followed Grandfather from the small wooden building into the bright sun. We crossed the dusty parade grounds of the fort. Then we left through the tall wooden gates. Grandfather walked ahead of me. I did not disturb his thoughts.

We slowly walked back to our village. As the small scatter of *tipis* came into view, I thought about our lives. The white men no longer thought of us as a threat. We were allowed to move through town and over the surrounding prairie. It was almost as if we were free people.



My name is Red Fox. I am Lakota. I go to school at the Blackstone Indian School. The headmaster gives

*The Journal*

each new student an English name when we arrive. He starts at the beginning of his alphabet with Adam and Amanda. They are the oldest students. I am called “Joe.”

Headmaster Willis started on the “M” names this month. That is when my only friend, Small Bear, arrived at the school.

Small Bear and I shared in the happiness of again being *kola*. But he brought with him the grief of losing his mother. He is called “Marcus.”

Miss Percival is our English teacher. She, too, has just arrived at Blackstone Indian School. Small Bear said Miss Percival has a pinched face. He thinks she looks as if something smelled of skunk. But I hear a softness in Miss Percival’s voice.

The first day, she spoke to us in English. We kept our heads down and our eyes low. She handed each of us a small book that was bound in red cloth. I looked inside. There were no words in it—only clean pages.

Miss Percival said, “I want you to write your own words in these books.”

“What do we write about?” asked Bertha Proud Doe.

Bertha is one of the oldest students. She isn’t afraid to ask questions. I held my breath, hoping that we would not all be punished.

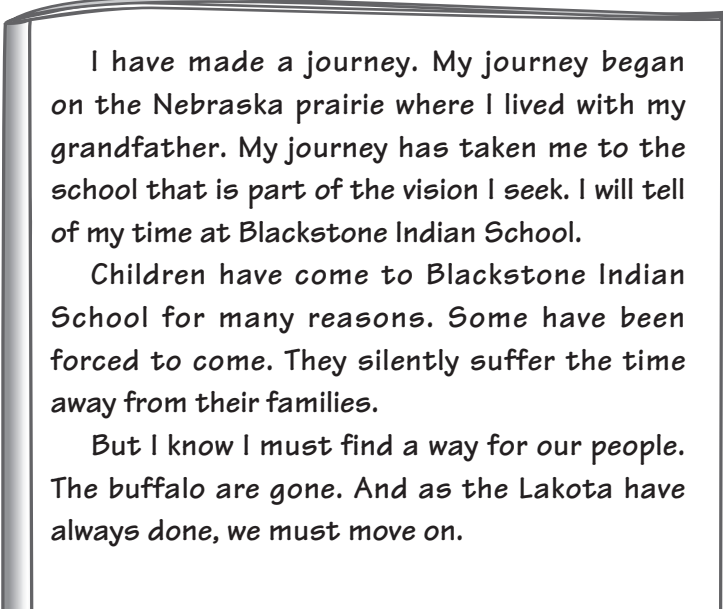
## THE FIRE CARRIER

Miss Percival smiled at Bertha. “You may write anything at all,” she replied. “Your thoughts. Your ideas. What you did on Sunday. I want you to write something every day.

“You can tell me what you had for dinner if you can’t think of anything else,” Miss Percival continued. “Sometimes I will write back to you on a little slip of paper. But this will be *your* book.”

I raised my eyes a little to look at the new teacher. I did not want her to see me looking. I did not want to be disrespectful. I noticed that she smiles with her eyes.

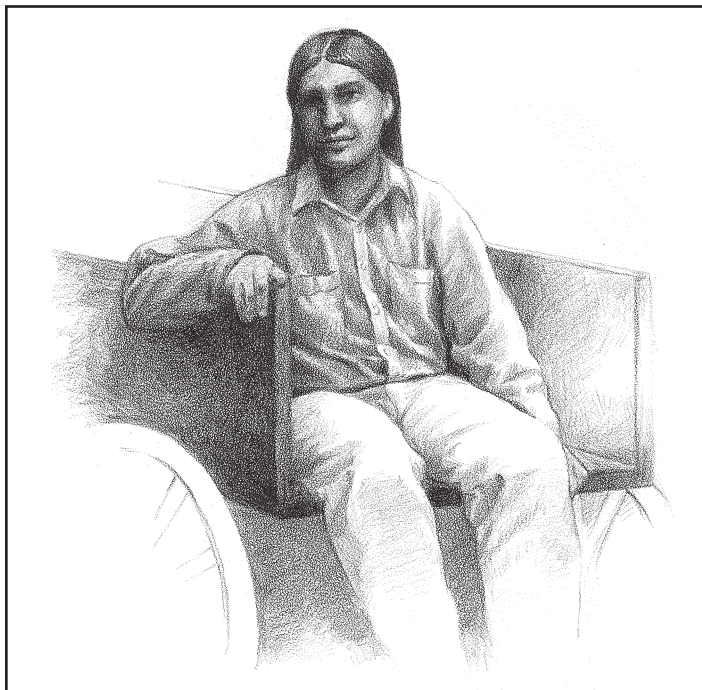
I have decided that I will write my story in my new red book.



*I have made a journey. My journey began on the Nebraska prairie where I lived with my grandfather. My journey has taken me to the school that is part of the vision I seek. I will tell of my time at Blackstone Indian School.*

*Children have come to Blackstone Indian School for many reasons. Some have been forced to come. They silently suffer the time away from their families.*

*But I know I must find a way for our people. The buffalo are gone. And as the Lakota have always done, we must move on.*



2

*Kola*

I remember the day that Small Bear arrived. I waited for him in the hall. A lone, hard bench stood guard against the wall. There was little noise on the polished wooden steps. All the children were at their chores.

## THE FIRE CARRIER

The shiny, hard walls of the building were the color of a doe's skin. The gaslights did not yet hiss. They would be turned on when the last of the sunset melts down in the western mountains.

A wagon approached, hauled by two brown mules. Headmaster Willis pulled the reins to slow the animals. I saw Small Bear leap over the worn, wooden side of the wagon. He ran up the steps.

Small Bear and I grabbed each other's arms. Small Bear shouted in Lakota, "Kola! I have come!"

The Lakota words were strange to my ears. I had not spoken my native language to anyone in more than a year.

"Kola, it is a wonder to see you," I said to Small Bear in English. "But we must speak English before the headmaster."

"I understand," said Small Bear in English. "But I am so happy, that I forgot. I have practiced speaking English at the mission school at home. But it is hard to think and talk at the same time."

"Joe," said Headmaster Willis as he climbed from the wagon. "Take your friend with you. His new name is Marcus. He will live in your dorm. You will show



him what to do. Make sure he follows all the rules. No Lakota!”

“Yes, sir,” I said. I pulled Small Bear up the wooden steps to the dorm rooms.

*I showed Small Bear—I mean Marcus—the large open room where the boys sleep. The small iron beds line the long wall. Each is topped with a sagging mattress.*

*We each have a gray blanket to cover our beds. The matron insists we fold the corners of the sheets in a straight line.*

*A few pegs hold our clothes. Each boy has a small metal box, stored under the bed. In it he puts his possessions.*

*I have traded three hours of work with the Hopi boy, David, so that Small Bear could have the bed next to me.*

Marcus gazed around in wonder. He gently touched the bed and walls.

“What is this?” asked Small Bear. He was holding up a soft, small square.

“That is a pillow,” I replied. “It is one of the nice things about the school. You put your head on it to go to sleep.”

## THE FIRE CARRIER

“I thought that we would sleep inside,” said Small Bear. He peered over the high, screened railing. He looked out to the grassy school grounds.

“We will when the rains come,” I explained. “In the hot weather we sleep on these covered porches. Matron calls it a sleeping porch. It is much cooler than being inside.”

Small Bear had already changed his clothes. He was wearing the plain, rough pants and blue work shirt that all the boys wear.

Small Bear spoke in a low voice so that no one would hear the Lakota. “The man already took my clothes and gave me these,” he said. “I do not like these moccasins. They are very hard. How can I walk quietly in these?”

“You will get used to them,” I assured Small Bear. “They are called ‘boots.’ You will find that many things are different here. It will take you time to understand. Just stay with me. We must only speak Lakota when we are truly alone. Then I will try to explain things to you.”

Small Bear smiled.

“Tomorrow there is something you must do,” I continued. “You must cut your hair. It is a rule that all boy students must have short hair.”

“I had heard that,” whispered Small Bear. He hesitated. But then he pulled back his shoulders. “But I do not mind. I will think of it as a ghost-owning

ceremony to honor my mother. Will you sing a song with me before I must do this?"

"I had heard about your mother's death," I said. "Grandfather had the preacher at the mission write to me. I am sorry, Small Bear. It must be very difficult."

"They called it tuberculosis," Small Bear sighed. "I heard that many of our people have it. In a way, cutting my hair will make it easier to accept my mother's death," he whispered. His eyes could not meet mine.

"Come, I will show you the dining room," I said in a cheerful voice. "We used to call it the mess hall before Headmaster Willis came last year.

"The food isn't too bad now. Headmaster Willis talked the Bureau into letting us raise more of our own food. So at least there is enough to eat.

"We each do a job at school," I continued. "You will probably work in the garden. That is where every boy starts."

"Where do you work, Red Fox?" asked Small Bear. We clumped down the steps to the main hall.

"I work in the horse barn," I replied. "I have been there since the Moon of Frost on the Tipi. I could have gone on to another job. But I asked to stay there. I love the horses. I have given the headmaster's horse a Lakota name. No one knows."

"What do you call her?" asked Small Bear.

## THE FIRE CARRIER

“I call her Clover,” I whispered. “It was the name of my father’s horse. The one he took in the Pawnee raid. This horse is very clever and beautiful. I ride her sometimes to exercise her. She is like Clover on the buffalo robe.”

“Where is the buffalo robe?” asked Small Bear.

Just then, a bell sounded. It echoed down the wide halls and through the building.

“Come, kola,” I said. “It is time to eat. It may not be roasted deer and wild berries, but it fills the empty places.

“Have they taught you to eat with a fork at the mission school?” I asked Small Bear.

Small Bear shook his head.

“Just watch me then,” I said. “Headmaster wants everyone to have manners.”



After lights out, Small Bear whispered, “Red Fox.”

“What?” I asked.

“Where is the buffalo robe?” Small Bear asked. “Did they let you keep it?”

“I have it in a safe place,” I whispered. “I will show you sometime. Now go to sleep. You have much to learn tomorrow.”

Dear Miss Percival,

I hope you do not mind that I call Marcus by his Lakota name. He is a brother sworn to me by that name. I can call him no other unless he chooses it.

Joe

**Dear Joe,**

**You may call Marcus his native name in your writings. But please use his English one in class. Whatever you write in this journal is just between you and me.  
E.P.**