

From “Conflicting Roots” by Robert W. Spencer

In this excerpt from Conflicting Roots, Matty Wheet is starting to realize that her ancient ancestors lived in a world with long lasting influences on her own life. Let me know what you think. – Robert

On waking the next morning, she was confused and struggled to make sense of her surroundings, feeling that she had just returned from living in another world. It seemed as if she hadn't slept, but she couldn't be sure. She was no longer on the bed but sitting instead in Granny's stuffed easy chair staring out at the bright sun, which made her eyes hurt. It was difficult to focus on anything.

She noticed a post office special delivery truck pull into the driveway. The driver walked to her door and rang the bell. She went to the door, even though she knew that she must look a mess.

“I have a special delivery parcel for you, ma'am,” said the young man who looked somewhat familiar. Perhaps it was the Shanks boy from Pratt Free School days, but she couldn't be sure.

Taking the package, she inspected and saw it was addressed to Abigail Wheet.

“This is for my grandmother. She's been dead for a few months now.”

“Very sorry for your loss. You're Matty Wheet, right? I remember you from elementary school. Do you remember me, Brandon Shanks?”

“Of course I remember you,” she tried to put her hair back in place and straighten the necklace, which was twisted. She placed the gems in her pocket.

“Miss, if you look at the small label beneath the address, you can see that whoever sent this included you as Abigail Wheet's caregiver.”

“Well, I guess I'm next of kin, after all. There isn't anyone else left in the family who could sign for her.”

Shanks couldn't take his eyes off her as she signed the receipt. It bothered her, so she quickly stepped back and started to close the door.

“Miss Wheet, I love that tattoo on your forearm. The turtle. I have one almost the same on my ankle. Wanna see it?”

“What tattoo? I don't have a tattoo on my arm, do I?”

She looked down and it was there. A willow branch long enough to reach from wrist to elbow. It was huge! A turtle crawled along the branch. How did it get there? She acted so shocked that the man backed away.

“Oh, I’m sorry to be so personal. We mail carriers are not supposed to upset our customers. It’s just that your tattoo is so much more detailed than mine. Take a look.”

She peeked out and watched him roll up his pants leg to reveal a small turtle just above his ankle.

“Who made yours? It’s so much better,” he said.

“I’m not sure how I got it,” she answered in a confused whisper.

“Miss Wheet, please forgive me. I didn’t mean to upset you,” he said as he covered his leg.

“It’s not that you’ve upset me. I really don’t know how I got this tattoo. It wasn’t there yesterday.”

At that he hurried back to his vehicle, threw in the satchel, and drove away in a rush. Matty hadn’t meant to chase him away. He was just a friendly guy who wanted to compare body art. But how did she get it? If it had happened during the night, wouldn’t she have felt something? She went to the sink and with a wet sponge tried to wash the tattoo away, but it wouldn’t fade. It was permanent.

Turning her attention to the parcel, she noticed that there was no return address and the date stamp was illegible because it had been smudged out. The entire envelope was so stained and wrinkled it looked as if it had been rained upon, then dried. All four corners were curled, and when she stuck a finger behind the glued flap, a particle of dirt fell to the floor. Afraid that she might damage the

contents, she placed it carefully on the kitchen table and pulled a letter opener out of a coffee cup on the counter. When the opener sliced through the top of the envelope, the ragged edges of what appeared to be a drawing were revealed.

Matty lay the paper on the table and blew on it to clear off a layer of grit. It was a faded pencil sketch of a simple cabin with one window and what looked like the opening of a door with a blanket partially draped across it. Attached to the sketch with a rusty paperclip was a note. “Wenunchus’s cabin” was all it said.

“It must be from Tim,” she said aloud. “Damn him! Is he trying to torture me? But what if it’s not from him?”

She wondered how anyone could have even the slightest idea what that cabin from Granny’s story might have looked like. She gasped, shocked to think that the drawing might have something to do with the tattoo appearing mysteriously on her arm. If body art could come out of nowhere, why not a ragged, faded drawing? She walked slowly toward the bedroom. She needed some real sleep before she went crazy. As she lay back on the pillow, the visions continued to come out of Tim’s story, running through her brain.