WINONA LADUKE

LAST STANDING WOMAN

25th ANNIVERSARY EDITION

Fidelity to White Earth's history, love for the Ojibwe language, and joy in the strength of women mark this enthralling new edition of Winona LaDuke's Last Standing Woman.
— **LOUISE ERDRICH,** Pulitzer Prize–winning author

LAST STANDING WOMAN

WINONA LADUKE

HIGHWATER
PRESS

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to the memory of Fred Weaver, Dick LaGarde,
George Aubid, Charlotte Jackson, Margaret Smith,
Elaine Kier, and the people of White Earth.

ORIGINAL EDITION AUTHOR'S NOTE

(EDITED FOR CLARITY)

This is a work of fiction. Although the circumstances, history, and traditional stories, as well as some of the characters, are true, they are retold to the best of my ability.

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Preface

HISTORIANS SAY THAT the "last Indian uprising in Minnesota" was on Round Lake, omaa akiing, here. In 1902, the Skip in the Day family challenged the loggers who stole the forests of White Earth by manoeuvring the felled trees, stacking them high on the lake, and keeping them from passing down the Ottertail River. The Ottertail River is not wide as it leaves the lake, and it would be choked with logs, the bones of a forest. As it is, the single largest logjam in American history was near Little Falls, Minnesota, in 1894. Those were our logs. The logs were jammed for six miles upriver. Those were our forests.

The Indian uprisings are not over; they will not be over until things are right again, right with the Creator and right with our land. I say that we are not done rising: far from it. I say that we are returning, that's what the prophecies speak of—the Oshki Anishinaabeg, the new people who will remember, who will find those drums and songs stolen and cached away in research institutes, colleges, and churches. That time is now.

Miwenzha, long ago, I noticed that there seemed so little writing about Native people in the future. Most futuristic writing was stark, no longer based on Earth, and full of terror. Armageddon is a concept from another culture. Indigenous Peoples talk about a life which is cyclical: birth, life, death, and rebirth. Prophecies speak of a time when we will have to make a choice between a scorched path and a green path. Other prophecies speak of new worlds coming, markers like a gourd filled with ashes and a web in the sky. Those are Hopi prophecies. Those are stories about a time which is now. Stories of a new world that is to be made by the people, the Indigenous Peoples.

So, thirty years ago, when I first wrote this story (published in 1997), I knew that it should be not only in the past, but also in the future, because we are those people of the prophecies. We live between generations, hearing voices of those from the stars and those who have not yet arrived, seeds to be born. As we quiet ourselves, we can see the new generations coming; we can see those people and this land in the future.

The story of *Last Standing Woman* began in the stories of the elders and through my own family's remembrance of how our lives and our land were stolen. *Last Standing Woman* is the story of how our families became landless, how we became refugees in our own land with two-thirds of all tribal members living off reservation. The story was written by a thirty-year-old woman who collected stories. That was once me. Earnest and clumsy, I continued to collect and to write stories.

Very rarely do you get a second chance at writing and editing a book—or a chance to correct the language in a book. I am eternally grateful for the careful attention of Anishinaabemowin speakers who have helped our language to come alive throughout the book, honouring the story and our history. Chi Miigwech to Mary Fong Hermes, Mike Sullivan, and the Anishinaabemowin scholars who took to the book, correcting and adding nuance to our language.

This book was initially written in Moose Factory, Ontario, Canada, where, a lifetime ago, I lived with my husband, Randy Kapashesit, and my very young children, Waseyabin and Ajuawak.

The first draft was written almost entirely when I was pregnant with Ajuawak Kapashesit. Now a screenwriter, actor, and director, the son who came with the first draft of the book continues a story and seems to be instilled with the creativity of fiction found in this book. My daughter, Waseyabin, like my other children, lives the stories of this book, for a story does not end when the pages close. She tells the new stories, just as every day we make new stories for our land and people.

Now I see my grandchildren, and we live on Round Lake, the same Round Lake of this story. The years have gone by, but the land and the people remain. And new stories are born from our lives. I am grateful to share this book again. Miigwech.

Winona LaDuke
Waatebaaga Giizis 2022.

PROLOGUE

The Storyteller

I WAS BORN EXACTLY eight years to the day after George Asin took out the logging equipment. I was born two weeks after the old man, Mesabe, walked down the pathway of the souls to the next world.

As a child, I was bold. It is a trait I believe I inherited from my mother's Clan, the Makwa Doodem, the Bear Clan of the Mississippi. My dad, however, was a Loon, and through him came my formal Clan. Suited him funny, the Loon. He was a man who stumbled with words and was cheap with them when he did use them. But on occasion, he would fulfill his own destiny, and his voice would echo loud, long, and far.

The Bears are different. In times past, they were warriors, the ogichidaag, those who defended the people. Sometimes they still are. We are what we are intended to be when we have those three things that guide our direction—*our name, our Clan, and our religion*.

The name I have was given to me by Lucy St. Clair. It is her name also, as well as the name of one of our ancestors. I am named Ishkwegaabawiikwe, Last Standing Woman.

There were two women once, a long time ago. One was a Bwaanikwe, a Dakota woman, called Situpiwin, Tailfeathers Woman. A woman from the West, she found refuge on White Earth. Another woman took her in. She was the one from White Earth, the Anishinaabekwe, the Ojibwe woman. The White Earth woman took in Situpiwin because they were both widows. One was a widow of the white man's war, another a widow of a man's war with himself, the war of a fool. Somehow, they survived. They survived because of their own strength—and also because they had a friend that helped them, a friend who later was a husband to them, a husband to them both.

That was where the name came from. It was originally given to the Anishinaabekwe. She was a strong, proud woman. She had a generous heart, and she prevailed through hard times and kept that heart. I remember her in mine. She was not my actual relation by blood, but she was by name, and by spirit. They named her Ishkwegaabawiikwe, Last Standing Woman.

The story, though, was our shared story. Lucy St. Clair who named me was afraid we would forget. But when the story flew into my ears, it made a picture in my mind that I could never forget. A picture of how strong those old people were and a picture of how we had these gifts we should keep.

There is a starkness in January. Gichi Manidoo Giizis, the Great Spirit Moon. The starkness of a searing cold, trees and limbs and all of the forest wrapped with thick ice and snow, piled higher and higher until it takes on the forms of the woods, bears, buffaloes, moose. But they are really asleep. When all the animals and spirits are asleep, we talk. We tell stories about them when they are asleep.

There were stories all along. The same prophecies that directed the movement of the Anishinaabeg told of the coming of the light-skinned people and the hard times for the Anishinaabeg. Those same prophecies spoke of the Oshki Anishinaabeg, the new people, who came later. But that is not where this story begins.

PART I

THE REFUGE

White Earth

There were many migrations that brought the people here. Omaa, omaa, here. Here to the place where the food grows on the water. Anishinaabeg Akiing, the people's land, the land where the manoomin, the wild rice, grows. It had been perhaps a thousand years since the time the Anishinaabeg had left the big waters in Waaban aki, the land of the East. They now turned Ningaabii'anong, to the West.

Each day the miigis shell appeared in the sky, and each day the people followed it. The shell was luminescent, gleaming in the sky. They travelled by foot on the land and by canoe on the rivers, travelling farther and farther to the West until they turned home. Endawaad. So it was that the families, the Clans, and the head people of the Anishinaabeg came to the headwaters of the Mississippi. Here, Gaawaawaabiganikaag, White Earth, named after the clay, the white clay you find here. It's so beautiful, it is. Here the people would remain, in the good land that was theirs.

The Anishinaabeg world undulated between material and spiritual shadows, never clear which was more prominent at any time. It was as if the world rested in those periods rather than in the light of day. Dawn and dusk, biidaaban, gashkii-dibikad. The grey of sky and earth was just the same, and the distinction between the worlds was barely discernible.

In the season round, the small camps, villages, and bands would plan their hunts by dream and memory, fill full their birchbark makakoons with wild rice, maple sugar, berries, dried corn, and squash. By snowshoe, canoe, or dog team, they moved through those woods, rivers, and lakes. It was not a life circumscribed by a clock, stamp, fence, or road.

But there was a law just the same, the Creator's law that still is, and with that law was the presence of ancestors, spirits, and magic. Always magic. Hunting magic, love magic, fighting magic, and the magic made between people. The spirits and the magic travelled with the Ojibwe to their hunting camps, traplines, maple sugarbushes, across lakes, and into the small lodges warm with fires and stories.

Forget the law, forget the magic, and you will be reminded. Hot fingers touched a face and burned a mark into the skin that stayed until you remembered why the mark came. Bony fingers reached through the ice to pull a greedy hunter down to Mishinameginebig, the Great Horned Sturgeon.

"Gegoo waanendaanken gidasemaa," those old spirits whispered. *"Do not forget your asemaa, your tobacco."*

The white man's law was different. The white man's law was all paper. A series of twenty or so Treaties by the 1860s would leave the Anishinaabeg less land and more priests. One Treaty took the copper and the big copper boulder. Another Treaty took the iron ore. Yet another, the trees. The Anishinaabeg parlayed in good faith and to survive. The white man parlayed to get more than what he needed. Those old people—Martens, Cranes, Bears, Kingfishers, the Clans—all went to see the white man and to talk with him. They received "assurances," but in the end, the assurances were just paper, just words. The old people, however, by some fortune, did secure White Earth. That reservation was to be the refuge for all those Clans. It was a good land.

The Anishinaabeg were mystified and astounded by the appetite of the light-skinned men—and by their folly. Strange words, stranger ideas. The white man's government would have flicked the Anishinaabeg aside, flicked them all aside with the stroke of a pen on a sheet of paper. Except the paper, the masiniaigin, was not the land, and it was not the people, and it was not the magic. It was just the paper.

The Border

1862

SHE WAS A woman drawn to the border. She was drawn to battle, into that cycle of war and revenge. She never professed to understand war or understand revenge. As a woman, the fury puzzled her, but something inside of her pulled her there, and she could not explain why. It was burned into her heart, burning like a fire, unquenched by any snow, by any ice, by any cold. Perhaps the magnetism of the border and the battles of others came to her because she was a veteran of her own battle, her own war.

Ishkwegaabawiikwe travelled to the border of Anishinaabeg Akiing, to where the land of the Anishinaabeg met the land of the Dakota, Bwaan Akiing. With her brother Wazhaashkoons, they paddled their canoe, fashioned from the skin of two birch trees, a canoe as beautiful and smooth as anything you could imagine. They canoed down the Ottertail River to the Pelican, and then crawled on their bellies up the side of a small hill and looked over at the Dakota camp. They could have killed them, those Bwaanag, but they did not. Instead, they watched.

The Dakota's camp of hide tipis and their herd of horses was a marvel to their Anishinaabeg eyes. Accustomed to bark lodges, dogsleds, and canoes, Ishkwegaabawiikwe was mesmerized at the first sight of the mishtadim, the horse, called the “big dog” by the Anishinaabeg. The animals caught her eye: They were fleet of foot, liquid in motion, and they pranced proud with their manes glinting in the sunshine.

Then Ishkwegaabawiikwe saw her, a Dakota woman as tall as any man, with long braids hanging far past her waist. A woman whose strides were quick and bold.

The Dakota woman glided into the herd of horses, walking between them as if she was their friend. Then she leaned forward and put her head near one of the horses. The horse’s ears shifted, and then it lifted its head. The woman’s leg flew across its back, and Ishkwegaabawiikwe saw her ride. She saw her ride and could not draw her eyes away. The woman rode simply for delight and seemed to float through the air just above the tall grass. Ishkwegaabawiikwe and her brother watched the Dakota woman’s joy and saw a child run after her, a young boy of ten or so, running fast to catch his mother. She stopped the horse, leaned over, and plucked the boy up as he scrambled over the rear of the horse.

The sister and brother lay and watched for a long time, watching in giimooj, secrecy, as they knew how. And they enjoyed themselves. They would report back that the border was safe, that the Anishinaabeg’s most honoured enemies were at peace, and that they had beautiful horses and beautiful women.

* * *

ISHKWEGAABAWIIKWE WAS A woman drawn to the border and to battle, and she attributed this to her husband. Her husband and his ways.

She had been married to a fool. Not unusual in the spectrum of time, but mournful nevertheless. He was a man constantly at war with himself, at war with the spirits, the Creator, and his wife. He was a man whose common sense was compromised by the fact that he had three testicles. Ishkwegaabawiikwe attributed his actions and features to his close relationship with his Clan, Ma'iingan, or Wolf.

He had come from the North, met Ishkwegaabawiikwe on a trading party, and secured her as his wife. There had been a number of men in her own village who sought her companionship, but she did not show an interest. There was medicine for this. That was what her husband used, medicine, and that was how she fell for a fool. He had captured her with medicine, but he did not truly want her. He liked her by his fire and in his bed, but he did not care for her soul. He did not truly care for *her*. She was just his possession, one of many.

It was not right to strike a woman. No one would have dared to do so then. No one but he. Foolish. He did not care and he had no remorse.

She had delicate features once. Fine bones, angular cheekbones, and eyes that curved upward. She had those features until he beat her. Angry with whisky, he tore her face with a sharp stick and a hatchet he got from the white man traders. He beat her and he cut her. Beat her until she could not see and could not feel.

She went inside herself, and in her pain, she laughed at her husband, belittled his person. She knew he was less because she knew he was the weak one then. At first, she thought she should simply place his belongings outside her lodge, but she thought again. She remembered that every mark on her face had been earned and every mark had to be taken away.

In those times, a woman's relations would have avenged such an act. A husband would have been banished, sent to the deepest of the woods, or sent to the border with the Bwaanag. But Ishkwegaabawiikwe and her husband lived deep in the woods that winter, so it was long before her family saw her again.

Her relations did not see her until ziigwan, spring, when the snow and ice were less treacherous and daunting. Then everyone went into the sugarbush and would visit and share news, but by then her cuts had healed—she looked different, less delicate now—and with her silence, her relations did not comprehend what had befallen her. She had her pride, and she kept a silence, but her soul did not heal.

She told her husband, "You will never touch me again. You will freeze in your own glory," and showed him her skinning knife.

She had got the skinning knife long ago at the trading post at the head of the Shell River, paid for it with furs she had skinned. The knife was as sharp as the winter was cold, and she had a case for the blade quilled by her mother. Ishkwegaabawiikwe had taken all of this with her to her marriage. Her knife was her pride.

She held up the knife and let him look at the long blade as she told him, "You touch me again and you will be a waabooz, a rabbit. Giga-aboodinin, I will turn you inside out."

Ishkwegaabawiikwe kept to herself then, throughout the seasons. He tried to win her back, but he had already done enough damage. He had stolen her with love medicine, taken that which he could not and should not have, and then not taken care of it.

So, she took herself back. She reclaimed first her hands, the soft touch. Moccasins she still made for him: it was the duty of a wife, the example for the family. But leggings and shirts he could fashion himself. And her beadwork designs changed ever so slightly, the flowers of her beadwork becoming bitter and sharp. He would not notice, but she knew. A woman would know.

Then, slowly, she took back everything that they once did together, and took back all else: meat, hunting, fishing, syruping. She could set her own snares, and her snares were always full, as she had hunting magic. She had plenty of dried meat, berries, and sugar cakes, and all of them were her own.

He had lost his place. She took it from him. He would never reclaim it, no matter how brave he was, no matter how he begged.

He used to come to her at night, asking her to lie with him. She just sneered. Flicked her eyes in the dark, smouldering in the firelight of the lodge. Once she awoke to his hands on her dress. She reached quick as a snake, grabbed that knife, and held it against his neck. Slow, slow like a man who sees a bear and has no weapon, he backed out, backed away toward the fire.

He was a fool and he died like a fool. He was a brash and boastful hunter, one to flaunt his gifts. He always gave meat to the elders, the poorest people of the Clan, and the widows. But he always took too much from the woods and kept too much for himself. He spoke too loudly about the animals, at all times of the year. He boasted he could kill the cannibal, the Wiindigoo of Round Lake. He boasted he would kill him easy, easy with the medicine. That was an easy thing to say, and much harder to do. The Wiindigoo had power, and the Wiindigoo had an agreement with the lake and the Mishinameginebig, the Great Horned Sturgeon.

No one ever saw him again. He never got to the Wiindigoo, never even got close. Icy fingers reached from deep within the lake and pulled him down. Round Lake spoke to him, louder and louder, a roar into his ears. Until he saw Mishinameginebig. He saw him and knew him.

When he died, Ishkwegaabawiikwe did not cry. She had been a widow in her heart for almost two years already. She cut her hair short to mourn, and kept her secret. Then she burned his belongings, his moccasins and leggings, and she saved only a few of his best hunting tools. She saved them for herself. She had seared her pain with his and cleansed her soul.

* * *

THAT WAS WHERE it came from, she was sure—her fascination with the border, with the others, and her interest in the battles of others came from her own battle. Her brother, Wazhaashkoons, was kind and accommodating. He had sensed the discord of her marriage, but modesty had kept him from prying. Her own stubbornness kept it a secret and kept it well.

Her brother sensed her unrest and offered that she should go scouting again with him. It was the second time, later that fall. He asked her if she would accompany him to scout the border with the Dakota. She joined him, and again they canoed down the Ottertail to the West, Ningaabii'anong.

The Anishinaabeg all knew of Little Crow's War. Who could not? The Gichimookomaanag, the white men, or the Big Knives as they were called, despised the Bwaanag, the Dakota. If the white men resented or disliked the Anishinaabeg, they hated the Dakota.

How many daso biiboon after they had come, she did not know, only that the white man called it the year 1862. By that year, the Santee bands of Dakota had learned much from fifty winters of Treaty making with the white man's bosses, his headspeople. The Anishinaabeg watched them and learned as well, but some things no one would ever believe.

The Dakota had learned about the relationship between money and land. For one of the white man's nickels in trade for each of their "acres" of land, the Dakota had signed away over thirty million acres of Iowa, Minnesota, and the Dakota Territory. Suddenly, the Santee had the white man's nickels, but most of that money would go to traders, men who conveniently called in debts at Treaty payment time. In the end, the Dakota received nothing except an understanding of the relationship between their poverty and the white man's wealth. They had retained only a "reservation" ten miles wide and 150 miles long bordering the Minnesota River. And, like red coals below the ashes of a fire thought to be extinguished, they had retained a deep and smouldering resentment toward the white man's bosses, the traders, and the settlers.

Ishkwegaabawiikwe did not believe that one should ever wait for the white man, but people said that the Dakota did wait that year. People said they had put off the annual buffalo hunt past Abita Niibino Giizis, the Midsummer Moon of July, while the people awaited the arrival and distribution of their Treaty goods at the agency. The white man had begun to massacre the buffalo and so a shadow had set upon the prairies. Ishkwegaabawiikwe was not surprised to hear that the goods—the salt pork, flour, bolts of fabric, and sugar—were late in coming from the white man. Nor was she surprised to hear that the Dakota grew hungry. A local trader refused them credit on food, telling them to their faces, "Go and eat grass."

The Anishinaabeg knew the Dakota as a proud people. And the Dakota were not accustomed to being treated poorly in their own homes. Weary of intruders in their land and the hatred of the white traders, a group of young Dakota men went forth and broke down the door to a warehouse and began carrying out sacks of flour, sugar, and goods. The Anishinaabeg heard that the white man's soldiers fired on the Dakota and killed them. In retaliation, other Dakota killed five white settlers.

The Dakota called a council at the house of Little Crow, Tahoahtadoota, of the Santee. There was heated debate. While people wanted peace, they knew from experience that many Dakota would be punished for the actions of a few. The Dakota decided to attack first in hopes of discouraging the white man from waging a war.

The Dakota then sent messengers to their most honoured enemies, now strategic allies, the Anishinaabeg of the North. The Dakota messengers came to the Anishinaabeg, crossing the border into the Ojibwe's lakes and woods. They brought the war pipe and asked for help. The messengers told of trouble at Fort Snelling, the big fort at the convergence of the Mississippi and Minnesota rivers. The Anishinaabeg were not surprised. Forts were full of hatred.

The pipe was brought first to Bagonegiizhik, Hole in the Day, asking him to join the Dakota against the white man. Bagonegiizhik respectfully considered the appeal and smoked the pipe, agreeing to join. Other headsmen followed Bagonegiizhik, who was a respected veteran from the wars between the Dakota and Anishinaabeg. This time, however, the Dakota needed their help.

Bagonegiizhik had no power to commit the Anishinaabeg. He was a lieutenant, not a general. Shagobay was the Anishinaabeg's oldest War Chief, and he possessed the authority to make war. His lodge was near Mille Lacs where several large wigwams adjoined each other, housing his large, extended family. As scouts returned to the village reporting that a peaceful party of Dakota was nearby, Shagobay moved to the Council House to await them. The Dakota tentatively approached the great War Chief.

The four Dakota men placed the war pipe in front of the leader and earnestly made their plea. Solemnly, Shagobay heard the Dakota out, observing their demeanour, rank, and the gravity of the problem. He listened, noting with empathy their situation. It was then that he instructed them to take the pipe to Flatmouth—Ishkwebagoshe—and the other sub Chiefs while he considered the request. The Dakota were to return the next day.

Ishkwegaabawiikwe heard tell of how Shagobay summoned his jiisakiiwinini, the man who could see into the future. Two helpers came to the jiisakiiwinini and tied and bound him tightly in blankets and ropes, covering even his face. The helpers carried the old man inside the jiisakiiwigamig, a small triangular hide lodge known as the shaking tent. They laid the seer on the floor and left him there while Shagobay waited outside. The songs began. Singing, the jiisakiiwinini summoned his familiar spirits and Clan relatives, seeking them to divine. Slowly the tent started to move. Now drums, voices, shrieks, growls, all came from the tent. Drums again, as Shagobay heard the jiisakiiwinini talking over the sounds. Singing again, then drums, and growls all emanating from the tent. It was two hours later when, finally, the shaking tent was quiet.

Shagobay watched the door expectantly. The jiisakiiwinini emerged, absent of ropes and blankets. All those present nodded in approval, and the Chief walked with his adviser slowly back to the lodge, where deer meat, corn soup, and tea awaited the men. After refreshments, counsel was held in soft voices for several hours. Shagobay respectfully questioned the old man, and listened with his head bowed intently. Then he slept.

When the Dakota returned early the next morning, Shagobay summoned them into the council lodge for their answer. Ishkwegaabawiikwe heard tell of the great Chief's words:

"I won't fight," he said firmly. *"I have seen what will happen. If we fight, all the Treaties we made with the white man will be void. And, if we lose the battle, they will get the land. They are too numerous, they are coming across the water, swimming onto our land. And, when they defeat us, for they surely will, with their numbers and guns, who will carry on? Who will carry on for future generations?"* He spoke solemnly and with great pain. Finally, he paused. *"I'm going to turn the pipe down."*

He shook his head and passed the war pipe back to the Dakota. Shagobay would not smoke.

The Dakota left despondent. This was a bad omen. The Anishinaabeg were more numerous than the Dakota and would have improved the odds greatly. Shagobay's decision meant there would be no armed support for the struggle from the Anishinaabeg.

But for the Anishinaabeg, the future did not bode well either. In spite of Anishinaabeg neutrality, government informers reported that the Dakota brought the war pipe to the Anishinaabeg and surmised that the Anishinaabeg wanted war as evidenced by Bagonegiizhik's smoking of the pipe and Shagobay's deliberations, whatever the outcome.

But Chief Bagonegiizhik had a son, named for his father and also called Bagonegiizhik, Hole in the Day. This son of the Chief was the flamboyant leader at White Earth, and he, like the Dakota, had grown weary of his people being treated as children by the great white men. One morning at dawn, he and a group of his ogichidaag took over the land office of White Earth, and later St. Columba Mission, the new Episcopal church enclave. They were tired of being ignored by Washington and wanted to show that they too could send the white men away. Bagonegiizhik's raid coincided with those of the Dakota in Little Crow's War.

While the white man's government left White Earth alone for the time, within a year, the government would terminate the Anishinaabeg reservations of Gull Lake, Sandy Lake, Pokegama, Oak Point, Rabbit Lake, and others. All those actions were perceived by the Anishinaabeg as punishment for having parlayed with the Dakota and for Bagonegiizhik's raid. All of those actions also augured poorly for the future.

At dawn on August the eighteenth of the year 1862 by the white man's calendar, the Dakota attacked Lower Agency on the Minnesota River. Moving swiftly before full morning light, they began by killing the traders, including one named Andrew Myrick, the one the Dakota now remembered as Let Them Eat Grass. Myrick leaped out the window of his store and ran for the shelter of some nearby trees. But a bullet found him and pierced him. The Dakota pulled a handful of prairie grass from the ground and stuffed it into his dead mouth. And so it began: Little Crow's War. In that bloody time, more than five hundred settlers and many Dakota perished.

A month and a half later, Colonel Henry Hastings Sibley marched up the Minnesota River Valley with an army of more than a thousand soldiers to destroy the Dakota resistance. Within four weeks, Sibley decimated the Dakota villages. He sought to arrest any adult male even considered remotely capable of resistance, and in the end, collected more than two thousand Dakota prisoners.

* * *

NOW ISHKWEGAABAWIIKWE ACCOMPANIED her brother to the border again. She wished to see the border. The Anishinaabeg knew that the white man would punish all Indians for the actions of a few. The white man chose not to tell the difference. The Anishinaabeg also knew that the Dakota would need help, that there would be refugees. They were the Anishinaabeg's most honoured enemies, and centuries of sharing a border meant generations of war, retaliation, trade, hostages, love, and marriage. A sorrow for the Dakota would be a sorrow for the Anishinaabeg. And so Ishkwegaabawiikwe and Wazhaashkoons travelled to see and to understand.

The sister and brother moved carefully in this time of war. They moved by watching the stars, watching the fisher, the path of souls, watching them as they all traversed the night sky. The sister and brother moved in the daylight when they were able, travelling deep in the woods and along the rivers, hidden from the eyes of the white man. They promised their father that they would be safe, promised him they would not venture into the open. They were invisible in the woods, and they travelled to the edge of the Anishinaabeg world to the open plain that was the Dakota world.

The sister and brother climbed up the same hill on their bellies to look down in giimooj, in secrecy, on the same Dakota village. It was gone. There was nothing left of the gathering of hide tipis but charred remains spread throughout the small valley. There was not a sign of life: All of the people and all of the mishtadimag, the horses, were gone.

The sister and brother climbed back down the hill, stomachs sick with fear and pity for the Dakota. They looked and wondered at where they had all gone. Slowly and silently, they returned to their canoe and dipped their paddles into the water to make the journey home.

Ishkwegaabawiikwe was not surprised when she found her again, that Bwaanikwe that she had watched long ago. Sibley's troops had scoured the countryside by horseback, galloping up the routes they knew the Dakota traversed. When the soldiers found Dakota, they captured them to bring back to their town of Mankato, or they killed them.

When Ishkwegaabawiikwe found the Bwaanikwe, she thought the Dakota woman was dead. Huddled near the river under a tree, she had hidden herself poorly.

"I will take her," Ishkwegaabawiikwe said boldly before she even knew if the woman was alive.

Her brother looked at her in surprise.

"I will take her with us," Ishkwegaabawiikwe said again. "I will take her in."

Her brother moved close to the Dakota woman now and poked at her gently with his paddle. She shifted and moaned. His eyes wide now, he saw the blood covering her front.

"Help me," Ishkwegaabawiikwe said to Wazhaashkoons, as she wove her arm under the Dakota woman's and around her shoulders. Her brother lifted the woman from the hips, and they loaded her heavily into the canoe. Blood-drenched and exhausted, she murmured once, then slipped back into unconsciousness. Ishkwegaabawiikwe took her home, across the border, back to the woods, back to the lake, back to the refuge.

Ishkwegaabawiikwe was weary of the wars, the battles between the Dakota and the Anishinaabeg, the battles between the Indians and the white men, the war in her own lodge. Having seen one war ended by attrition, her husband's own folly, she was perhaps in need of ending another war with a small gesture. Ishkwegaabawiikwe took in the Dakota woman, her most honoured enemy, her war trophy, her sister.

It started slowly. The love medicine worked its magic on Alanis. Some nights a dream, others awakening from a night of tossing in her bed in Denver, she had Willie's name on her breath or his face imprinted in her mind. Willie had got under Alanis's skin, and he intended to stay there.

Alanis, for her part, looked at the world through slightly puzzled eyes. For a woman who prided herself on being in control, this new set of emotions and a growing adoration for the reservation boy jostled her senses. Coming back to White Earth "only to visit," as Alanis told people, she found herself drawn to Willie's quiet allure, and Willie swooped in while he had an advantage, asking her to lunch, the movies, and even once, to accompany him in checking his leech traps. The medicine set in. Willie persisted, and Alanis was in love.

The quandary of love medicine is tenure. A heart captured under a cloud of chant and medicine, procured with the help of powers unseen, is a difficult one to keep. There the medicine must be renewed or in the most favourable of circumstances, the medicine only removes obstacles to affection and love. Then a clever suitor can, with a careful and ardent courtship, woo his or her subject and secure the desired love.

Willie Schneider, although not practised in the wooing of women, had taken some lessons. There was the initial exchange of goods with Lucy St. Clair. That secured Lucy's assistance. A later exchange got him some tutoring in pre-bedside manners. Moose Hanford, Willie's most long-term friend, offered a few more suggestions as well. "You could drop a deer on her doorstep," he suggested, thought the better of it, and adjusted his advice, "or maybe just a hindquarter."

So it was in a somewhat clumsy but earnest manner that Willie Schneider courted Alanis Nordstrom. He did so successfully. And, as was frequently the custom in White Earth courtship, Alanis happily became pregnant with Willie Schneider's child.

At her house in Denver, Alanis tossed and turned until she finally turned home. Giiwe. She drove her Saab past the prairies, past the border, and into the woods. She was coming home to White Earth. Not just for Willie, although he was quite the persuasive and persistent fellow, but for herself as well. Weary of wandering, the smell of pines and the glitter of deep lakes made her breathe easy and feel at peace. Giiwe. Home.

LUCY ST. CLAIR smiled as she named the child. She had done well, and felt in some way a resolution to her part of the sequence. That was why she passed on the name. Ishkwegaabawiikwe, Last Standing Woman, was her own name, a good one at that, and now it, like her, could have a new life.

There were other gifts she passed on to her wen'enh, the person whom one names. She also passed on her skinning knife and its sheath, quilled in yellow and blue. She said it went with the name, and it too was a good one.

It was a year later when Alanis sat next to Elaine at the powwow. She held her daughter close to her chest and turned her so she could watch the people dancing to the drum.

Afterword

THERE IS A lake near us called Onemi Lake. There, the manoomin, the wild rice, was flooded out for decades, flooded out by the white people and their lake cabins. Fifty years it was flooded, and then one year a drought came, and the waters were lowered. The manoomin returned. That is our story—dormant, drowned, we return. We are seeds, cached away, until it is our time.

Since I first told this story, some things have changed, and some have not. In 1981, White Earth tribal members formed Anishinaabe Akiing, a land rights organization made up of allottees who wanted their land back. It was a simple proposition. We fought through the courts and through the legislation. We never did get back our land, but we did get back *some* land. That's because we, the people who formed Anishinaabe Akiing—and later the White Earth Land Recovery Project, another nonprofit—bought the land. We bought some as community members, and some people also donated land to us, that is, land that had been stolen from our people early in the twentieth century. The federal, state, and county governments still hold a third of our reservation. Justice is getting our lands back. The only compensation for land is land. The Boy Scouts organization discussed in this book holds 2,400 acres of our reservation. Corporate farming operations like R.D. Offutt Farms (RDO) are buying up the farms of the reservation and consolidating them into big agriculture monocrops, with deadly consequences.[12] The tragedy of land and water theft continues in White Earth and our land calls to us for help, to stop the polluters and the Wiindigoog, the logging companies. There is still life here in our forests and our lakes, but that life must be protected.

Today, our Land Back work continues. The most recent efforts include our work at Akiing, our regional community development initiative, which has secured 860 acres of land so far. We hope to double that acreage by buying the land back from corporate farming operations that have contaminated it, both on the reservation and in the 1855 Treaty territory that surrounds our people. We also intend to grow hemp, restore prairies, blueberries, and bring back buffalo, because that is what the land wants. We also see a future of renewable energy, as the winds continue to blow from the west across our reservation, bringing change, and in the future, we hope, energy.

We rematriate, that is to say, we rematriate land, we rematriate ancient seeds that need to come to our land, and we bring back our relatives. Over the past thirty years, we have seen the return of the big drums to our people—seven of the thirteen are home from museums and faraway places now. Our birchbark scrolls have also returned, teachings from ancestors for this generation, now cached in our own sacred places, omaa akiing. We dance with our relatives from old at our ceremonies and our language is heard in ceremonial dance halls made for our people. We heal, we recover, and we make prayers for our future.

We know that we must save our forests and our lakes for future generations. We know that our hemp can sequester carbon and remediate soils. We see a green future and a green path. That's the path our ancestors outlined in our prophecies and our birchbark scrolls. We've built nonprofit organizations like Akiing, Honor the Earth, and Anishinaabe Agriculture, which are doing some of the work described in this book—the work our ancestors foretold.

From my house on Round Lake I can see the Many Point Scout Camp, which sits on land taken from our people. I know the families who live in the housing projects, who are from that land and deserve the beauty and solitude of its forests and lakes. So do our refugees in the cities. The people and the land belong together. Our land is still here, as are our lakes and forests. Our relatives await our prayers and our protection. Sometimes, when I close my eyes, I can hear and smell the buffalo.

Winona LaDuke
Waatebaaga Giizis 2022.

c. 1000 CE Anishinaabe migration to the place where the food grows upon the water

1810

■ The Civilization Fund Act
March 3, 1819

1820

■ Treaty of Prairie du Chien
August 19, 1825

1830

■ The Removal Act
May 28, 1830

■ Treaty of La Pointe (Treaty with the Chippewa)
July 29, 1837

1840

◇ Wemitigoozhi arrives at White Earth
1840

■ Treaty of La Pointe (Treaty with the Chippewa)
October 4, 1842

1850

● Sandy Lake Tragedy
1850

■ Treaty of Mendota
1851

■ Treaty of Fort Laramie
September 17, 1851

◇ Father Xavier Pierz sent to Dakota Territory
1852

■ Treaty with the Chippewa
September 30, 1854

■ Treaty of Washington
February 22, 1855

■ Minnesota Statehood
May 11, 1858

■ Treaty with the Sioux
June 19, 1858

Event Map

■ Law/Treaty

◇ Narrative Event

● Mortal Conflict

◆ Institutional (Residential School; Asylum)

1860

● Cantetinza hung
1862

● Bagonegiizhik's raid
1862

● Little Crow's War
1862

◇ Thunderbird Drum
1862

● Crow Creek Exile
and Internment
1862–1863

● Knights of the Forest
est. c. 1862–1863

■ Emancipation
Proclamation
January 1, 1863

■ Treaty of Peace
1867

■ White Earth
Reservation
created
1867

● Bagonegiizhik II
assassinated
1868

1870

◆ The Flandreau
Indian School
est. 1872

1880

■ The Religious
Crimes Code
(The Code of
Indian Offenses)
March 30, 1883

■ The Dawes Act
February 8, 1887

■ The Nelson Act
January 14, 1889

1890

● Wounded Knee
Massacre
December 29, 1890

◆ Fergus Falls
State Hospital
est. 1890–2005

◆ St. Benedict
Boarding School
est. 1892

◇ Attempt to
outlaw drum
ceremonies
1898

1900

◇ Dr. Ales Hrdlicka
arrives
1900

◇ Settler families arrive
1900

◇ Norman Grist's
grandfather
buys stolen land

◇ Lumber camps form
along Little Falls
1900

◇ Lumber camps raid

● Round Lake Uprising
1900

■ The Clapp Rider
1906

◆ Hiawatha Asylum
est. 1901–1934

◆ The Agwajiing
Sanatorium
est. 1907–1962

1910

■ Moorehead–Linnen Report
1912

◇ Mindemoyen borrows a loan from Lucky Waller
1912

◇ Minnogeeshig hides a drum near his trapline
1912

● WWI
July 28, 1914–November 11, 1918

1920

◇ Oshkinnah sisters taken to Agwajiing
1920

■ The Indian Citizenship Act (The Snyder Act)
June 2, 1924

◇ Father Gilfillian desecrates graves
1925

◇ Naytahwaush committed to Fergus Falls
1925

● The Great Depression Begins
October 24, 1929

1930

◇ Mesabe hides Ishkwegaabawiikwe's drum
1930

◇ Boodoo Graves taken to Flandreau Indian School
1930

■ The Indian Reorganization Act (The Wheeler-Howard Act)
June 18, 1934

1940

● WWII
1939–1945

● D-Day
June 6, 1944

1950

● Korean War
1950–1953

■ Termination Policy
1953

■ American Civil Rights Movement
c. 1954–1968

● Vietnam War
1955–1975

■ Indian Relocation Act
August 3, 1956

This event map represents significant historical and narrative events affecting *Last Standing Woman*. It does not reflect a comprehensive history of White Earth.

1960

- ■ War on Poverty **June 8, 1964**
- ■ Voting Rights Act **August 6, 1965**
- ■ Indian Civil Rights Act **April 11, 1968**
- ■ American Indian Movement founded Minneapolis, MN **July 1968**
- ● Occupation of Alcatraz **1969–1971**

1970

- ● Wounded Knee Occupation **1973**
- ◇ Jim Nordstrom drives food van into Wounded Knee
- ● Shootout at Oglala **June 26, 1975**
- ■ State v. Zay Zah **October 21, 1977**
- ■ American Indian Religious Freedom Act **August 11, 1978**
- ● Red Lake Reservation Conflict **1979**

1980

- ■ White Earth Land Settlement Act **1986**

1990

- ■ Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act **November 16, 1990**
- ● Oka Crisis **1990**
- ● The Rez War **1991**
- ◇ Deer Woman Spotted **1991**
- ◇ Land Consolidation begins in White Earth/Claire St. Clair wins the lottery **1996**
- ◇ Boodoo Graves and Father Thomas die/Fred Graves sentenced **1996**
- ◇ Anishinaabeg Health Center **est. c. 1996**

2000

- ◇ Wipe Away the Tears Ceremony **2001**
- ◇ Ishkwegaabawiikwe named **2001**

Cast of Characters

George Agawaateshkan: grandson of Zay Zah, a traditional war chief. Midewiwin leader.

George Asin, Sr.: husband of Janine Littlewolf, father of George Asin.

George Asin: son of Janine Littlewolf and George Asin, Sr.

Georgette Big Bear: wife of Selam Big Bear.

Selam Big Bear: great-great-grandson of Chi Makwa.

John Brown: Korean War veteran, church janitor, and caretaker of the drum.

Bagonegiizhik (Hole in the Day the elder): war chief of the southwestern Anishinaabe.

Bagonegiizhik II (Hole in the Day the younger): son of Bagonegiizhik the elder, a leader of the White Earth Anishinaabe.

Cantetinza (Firm Fist): Dakota man, husband of Situpiwin, hung at Mankato.

Chi Makwa (Big Bear): great-great-grandfather of Selam Big Bear.

Claire St. Clair: second cousin to Jim Nordstrom, bingo player, and Minnesota lottery winner.

Lucy St. Clair: cousin to Jim Nordstrom. Versed in the art of love medicine and the cupid of White Earth. Given the name Ishkwegaabawiikwe (Last Standing Woman).

Philomene St. Clair: grandmother of Jim Nordstrom, great-grandmother of Alanis Nordstrom. Wolf Clan.

Maura Coningham: English teacher, wife of Jim Nordstrom, mother of Alanis Nordstrom.

D-Day: World War II veteran and buffalo hunter.

Kwe Dole: gill net fisherwoman and deer hunter.

Ikwezens (Little Girl, aka Mary): wife of Mesabe.

Flatmouth (Ishkwebagoshe): Anishinaabe leader.

Boodoo Graves: father of Fred Graves, grandfather of Frances Graves.

Frances Graves: granddaughter of Boodoo Graves, daughter of Fred Graves.

Fred Graves: tribal councilman, son of Boodoo Graves, father of Frances Graves.

Moose Hanford: great-grandson of Namebin Minogeeshig and Ishkwegaabawiikwe, Vietnam veteran, best friend of Willie Schneider. Marten Clan.

Hawk Her Many Horses: Vietnam veteran, killed during the tribal offices occupation.

Ishkwegaabawiikwe (Last Standing Woman): wife of Namebin Minogeeshig, friend of Situpiwin. Great-grandmother of Moose Hanford.

Ishkwegaabawiikwe (Last Standing Woman): name given to Lucy St. Clair.

Ishkwegaabawiikwe (Last Standing Woman): the storyteller, daughter of Alanis Nordstrom and Willie Schneider. Loon Clan.

Maggie Jourdain: eternal caretaker and matriarch of White Earth village.

Little Crow (Tahoahtadoota): Santee Sioux leader in the 1862 war with the Minnesota settlers, known as Little Crow's War.

Janine Littlewolf: wife of George Asin, Sr., mother of George Asin Jr.

Elaine Mandamin: great-great-granddaughter of Mindemoyen, granddaughter of Mesabe, daughter of Geraldine Mandamin.

Geraldine Mandamin: daughter of Mesabe, mother of Elaine Mandamin.

Mayzhuckegeeshig: White Earth leader.

Mesabe: grandson of Mindemoyen, father of Geraldine Mandamin, grandfather of Elaine Mandamin, and revolutionary elder.

Mindemoyen: grandmother of Mesabe. Great-great-grandmother of Elaine Mandamin.

Namebin Minnogeeshig: husband to Ishkwegaabawiikwe and Situpiwin. Great-grandfather of Moose Hanford.

Naytahwaush: grandson of Mindemoyen, brother of Mesabe.

Alanis Nordstrom: great-granddaughter of Philomene St. Clair, daughter of Jim Nordstrom and Maura Coningham, mother of Ishkwegaabawiikwe, the storyteller. Bear Clan.

Jim Nordstrom (Jim Good Fox): Hollywood movie extra, grandson of Philomene St. Clair, father of Alanis Nordstrom. Bear Clan.

Charlotte Oshkinnah: revolutionary elder.

Margaret Oshkinnah: sister of Charlotte Oshkinnah, died from the coughing sickness.

Izola Pemberton: sister of Philomene St. Clair and fellow church maid.

Willie Schneider: Vietnam veteran, best friend of Moose Hanford, father of Ishkwegaabawiikwe, the storyteller. Loon Clan.

Shagobay: the Anishinaabe's senior war chief at the time of Little Crow's War.

Situpiwin (Tailfeathers Woman): Dakota woman, wife of Cantetinza, friend of Ishkwegaabawiikwe, wife of Namebin Minogeeshig.

Browning Teaman: Comanche friend of Alanis Nordstrom and nationally famous powwow emcee.

Jim Vanoss: Roy Orbison lookalike.

Danielle Wabun: the rummage queen, daughter of Warren Wabun.

Warren Wabun: White Earth political leader, American Indian Movement leader. Crane Clan.

Wabunoquod: White Earth leader.

Lance Waagosh: White Earth tribal chairman.

Wazhaashkoons: brother of Ishkwegaabawiikwe.

Glossary of Anishinaabe Terms

Glossary Note

The Ojibwe language used in this novel is the dialect of White Earth Reservation, utilizing the double-vowel system. Several small exceptions exist in the text, including some common names, historical names, and the excerpts from the St. Columba Episcopal Church Ojibwe hymnals.

aababishkaw: inside out, as in to skin a rabbit.

aanikoobijigan: ancestor.

Abita Niibino Giizis: Midsummer Moon, July.

Agwajiing: literally "outside," the Anishinaabe name for the Minnesota state sanitarium at Walker, Minnesota.

Anishinaabe: literally "the people," but also used for a person, an Indian, Ojibwe. Anishinaabeg is the plural form.

Anishinaabeg Akiing: the people's land.

Anishinaabekwe: Anishinaabe woman.

asabikenhshiih: literally the "Spider," the Anishinaabe name for cancer.

asemaa: tobacco.

awakaanag: domesticated animals.

bawa'iganaak oog: wild rice harvesting stick.

biboon: winter.

biidaaban: dawn.

boozhoo: hello, greetings.

Bwaan Akiing: land of the Dakota.

Bwaanag: Dakota people.

Bwaanikwe: Dakota woman.

Chimookomaanag: white people, Americans.

Chippewa: a corrupted term for Ojibwe.

dakoniwewininiwag: literally "the Men Who Hold Someone," referring to tribal police. Dakoniwewinini is the singular form.

dewe'igan: drum.

dibaajimokwe: a storytelling woman.

dikinaagan: cradle board.

doodem: clan or totem.

Gaawaawaabiganikaag: White Earth, named after the white clay found in the area.

Gashkadino Giizis: Freezing Moon, November.

giga-waabamin miinawaa: see you again.

Gichimookomaanag: literally the "Big Knives," referring to white people.

giimooj: secrecy.

giiwe: home.

giiwanaadizi: crazy, insane.

Gichi Manidoo Giizis: the Great Spirit Moon, January.

ininaatig: maple sugar trees.

Iskigamizige Giizis: Sugar Making Moon, April.

jiibay: ghost.

jiibayag niimi'idiwag: northern lights.

About the Author

WRITING, FARMING, AND working in her community for more than 40 years, Winona LaDuke is one of the world's most tireless and charismatic leaders on issues related to climate change, Indigenous and human rights, green economies, grassroots organizing, and the restoration of local food systems. A two-time Green Party vice-presidential candidate, Winona has received numerous awards and accolades, including recognition on Forbes' first "50 Over 50—Women of Impact" list in 2021.

Winona is the author of many acclaimed articles and books, including *Recovering the Sacred: The Power of Naming and Claiming* and *To Be a Water Protector: Rise of the Wiindigoo Slayers*. A Harvard-educated economist, hemp farmer, grandmother, and member of the Mississippi Band Anishinaabeg, she lives and works on the White Earth Reservation in northern Minnesota.