HERE BEGINS THE ENGINEER'S PROLOGUE: “My story is a little different. It’s about perfection,” stated the Engineer. “I always felt so driven to achieve it in my own life and so constantly let down that I thought about its true meaning quite frequently. Here’s what I contemplated and figured out:

“Perfection. What does the word mean? Without flaws? Without regrets? Without emotional distractions from things that are seemingly more important? With great beauty . . . . without great beauty?

“Perfection is, in fact, all of these things. Whatever our definition of perfection, we as humans strive to achieve it. We are, in a sense, consumed by this desire, this innate need to achieve the ultimate goal, the end of all ends: perfection.

“We may never understand our unquenchable thirst for perfection. Nor will we ever achieve it. But we do know the toll perfection can have on us and the ones closest to us. Once we have our eyes set on attaining whatever our definition of perfection is, nothing else seems to matter. Old dreams are forgotten. Old loves are lost. Old trust destroyed. When we have our intentions so focused on a single goal, we overlook all of the things that once were important. We miss all of the opportunities, big and small, to do something great. We lose each other . . . . and ourselves.”

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HERE BEGINS THE TALE OF THE ENGINEER: Anita Goldstone seemed to have everything. She was popular, friendly, and gorgeous. A constant barrage of compliments about her ravishing looks had inflated her head as she grew older and more beautiful. These qualities overshadowed that which she clearly lacked in other areas, namely intelligence. Her mother told her not to worry, that someday she'd marry a smart man who could do everything for her. In her heart, Anita was convinced this would happen, that some charming suitor would come to sweep her away out of the empty nothingness of impoverished, rural Saskatchewan and give her life adventure and purpose.

The promising possibility of a future better than that which had been provided by her parents utterly dissipated in her sophomore year of high school, when her vanity allowed her to be seduced by a testosterone-laden twelfth-grade flatterer. Within one month of their meeting, she was a pregnant, high-school drop-out forced to marry an unbearable man with a criminal record for theft that he constantly found new ways to add to. She moved into his shanty on the outskirts of town and took a waitress job at a greasy truck stop. It was the only place, she was told, that she was good enough for. Every pinch and inappropriate comment from the diner's customers embittered her to the core. She lay awake on nights her husband sat incarcerated for his latest thefts wishing he was home to break her loneliness, and days that he was free wishing he was still in jail to end the battery of verbal abuse he bestowed upon her.

On a frigid January morning late in Anita's eight month of pregnancy, she made a resolute oath to herself. She vowed in one fateful moment that her daughter would not suffer the way she had. Her daughter would never be incapacitated by lack of intellect, or become dependent on an emotionally incompetent man. The human being inside of her would be everything she wasn't: intelligent, adept, successful, and independent. She wouldn't let beauty and arrogance impede her chances of becoming great, leaving Saskatchewan, and bringing her poor, wronged mother along for the ride. *My daughter*, Anita told herself, *will be perfect.*

As soon as Anita thought these thoughts, a feeling of comfort descended upon her. She sighed, and immediately went into labor.

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She was called Tamma, a name whose meaning reflected that which was expected of her: perfection. As Tamma grew, her mother defined every aspect of that word for her. Anita told her daughter to be perfect countless times, so many that the word became painful in her ears. Tamma was to be studious, conscientious, focused, and disconnected from nature, because the future would most certainly lie in technology. Her wardrobe was limited to the dull and unattractive, so as not to distract her from what was more important. Tamma learned quickly that ordinary childhood petulance resulted in a beating, a B grade earned a week-long deprivation of food, and a gaze in the mirror

warranted a reprimand about throwing away her future with useless frivolities such as beauty. And, despite her mother's assertions that this torture was best for the both of them, Tamma realized that her mother did not love her.

Tamma was confused from the start. She knew her mother's motives behind her demand of perfection, but she didn't understand them. Doing exactly what her mother said, earning top grades, gave Tamma no satisfaction at all. She was convinced that perfection lie in something else. Longing to feel accepted, comfortable, and loved, Tamma secretly believed that these feelings defined perfection. She searched for them futilely for years.

Not surprisingly, Tamma reached high school without a friend to her name. Her unkempt appearance and seemingly obsessive intensity towards schoolwork and grades garnered enough skepticism to ward off most potential friends. Having a pilferer as a father, who had stolen from nearly every one of the town's families, scared off the rest.

Even the teachers, who should have been proud of their star student, judged her as cruelly as her classmates. The town was so small that everyone had heard her mother's and father's stories. Everyone speculated at social gatherings as to what befell the family behind closed doors, why Tamma was so socially inept. Tamma sank further into herself, into her own thoughts and dreams, dreams that ironically lay in the same place as her mother's: somewhere

else. She found brief solace only in all things foreign, things untainted by the misery of life similar to hers.

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Then, in the eleventh grade, one of those moments, those Romeo-meets-Juliet, Imhotep-designs-the-first-pyramid, Columbus-discovers-America moments, happened. When Tamma entered her Native American history class on the first day of school, shortly after being laughed at because of the unfortunately placed hole in her Levis, her world suddenly changed. Stepping into the room, she breathed in the same air as she had all her life, but something was different. She felt welcome and more at home in that room at that moment than she had her entire life. There is a difference between being alive and living, and in that fated instant, Tamma began to live.

Tamma searched for the source of this comforting aura as she chose the center seat in the first row. She quickly found it: he sat behind his desk, casually observing the students as they filed in, unconsciously fingering the long, dark locks of his ponytail. His chestnut brown eyes met with her crystal blue eyes hiding behind untended blond curls, and he smiled, a small sign of recognition. He did not look down upon her, nor assume anything based on her appearance. He seemed to accept her in an unconditional way. Tamma returned her first tentative smile.

"Okay everyone, take your seats," he said, rising and walking to close the door on any stragglers. "This is advanced Native American history, and I'm Mr. Motega. I'm honored to have so many of you sign up for a class dedicated to the study of the Native American men and women of North America's past. This is a demanding course; we'll be doing more than comparing longhouses and tepees, or going on class field trips to reservations. This is a class about culture, and about what happens when cultures collide. I am going to immerse you in the traditional culture of the Native Americans, hammer you with a barrage of information, and tell you things so real that you'll feel like you're in an Indian village hundreds of years ago. Plus, we're going to have one hell of a good time."

The entire class sat enraptured by this new, mysteriously engaging teacher, but no one was as captivated as Tamma. She clung to his every word, trying unsuccessfully to place his accent, following the movements of his dark hands as his emphasized his interest. He exuded a passion for everything around him and a sense of purpose in life.

"As you probably already know, this is my first year teaching. I'm not perfect, and I don't expect any of you to be." Tamma instinctually winced at the word before realizing the positive connotation in which it had been used. "What I do expect," he continued, "is for you to be willing to learn from this class a new way of looking at history, to try to look at the facts from a view other than that of

the winners. Remember, history is written by the victors, and you're in a class about a group of people that certainly did not win.

"Now before we begin, does anyone have any questions? Is there anything that you'd like to know about the history of the Native Americans?"

Nearly every hand in the class shot up. Tamma listened as if from atop a cloud as Mr. Motega answered questions about his own Native American ancestry (to which he was very vague) and various local legends. One sparked considerable interest.

Troy Parker, easily the most arrogant and self-involved person in the school, inquired about the most intriguing of the town's local myths. He said: "Hey, my father's a hunter, best damn hunter there ever was, and he heard some strange stuff. He said one of his hunting buddies told him about this witch doctor place, this settlement in the middle of nowhere where Indians live that no one knows about. He said that they do everything possible to keep it secret from whites so that they can live the way they want to, that they even capture and eat people who come within five kilometers of it."

"That's not true," Priscilla Wilkins shrilly retorted. "They tie anyone who comes too close to their homes to a tree, cover them in honey, and let the bears eat them!"

"That's not what I heard. I heard that. . ." Soon everyone but Tamma and Mr. Motega had erupted into the version of the tale that they had heard.

"Silence!" Mr. Motega yelled to quell the noisy uproar. "I can tell you the original form of the tale you speak of, for it contains many elements that apply to all parts of Native American culture. I cannot, however, tell you from whom it originated or to what extent, if any, it is true. Are you sure you want to hear it?"

The class implored him to tell it. Tamma moved forward in her seat, bursting with curiosity about this strangely foreign and untouched place.

"All right," he sighed, "I'll tell you the story.

"As early as the late 1700s, the Native American populations were being pushed further and further west in both the United States and Canada to make room for the growing influx of foreigners. They were moved from the land that meant so much to their traditions and history, for in all Native American cultures dead ancestors must be worshipped on the site of their burial to ensure their presence on the spiritual road. To be forced to live somewhere else was an unparalleled cultural offense.

"Most gave in, resigned themselves to move out west where they could continue all aspects of their culture except ancestral worship. But some resisted. Do you know of the Iroquois nation in modern-day western New York?" The class nodded. "Well, the Iroquois people formed themselves into an alliance, a confederacy of strength, a mere one hundred years before the arrival of the Europeans. A Huron prophet, Deganawida, had seen the arrival of the English and the subjugation of his peoples in a vision.

"As the English established themselves as a power in the thirteen original colonies, the Iroquois Confederacy fought valiantly to retain control of their lands. But some willingly traded with the newcomers and adopted white ways. Unfortunately, the most common adaptation from white culture was an affinity for alcohol. This brought devastation to many a Native American family, not just the Iroquois."

"Wait a minute," interjected Troy, "what does this have to do with the settlement supposedly in the Canadian forest in our backyard?"

"I'm getting to that just now, Troy. Be patient. So, among the Iroquois a little-known movement was started. A Seneca woman, Ninema, spread the word among her peoples of the importance of retaining their traditional culture and the rejection of all white ways. Only by doing so would they return to the stability and happiness of their former days. They would have to voluntarily move away from the land that had been irreversibly pervaded by European culture.

"Her words appealed to many, but few were willing to leave until they were forced to do so. Ninema's idea was that they would be forced to move eventually, and it might as well be on their own terms and to their place of choice. She believed that there was a difference between being dragged somewhere and walking there with your head held high, even if you ended up in the same place."

Tamma, listening intently, thought about her own lack of control over her life and how she wished, like this Ninema, that there was a better place somewhere out there.

"She led a group of followers," continued Mr. Motega, "about one hundred and fifty in all, out west in the year 1815. They consisted not only of Iroquois, but also Cherokees, Shawnees, Hurons, and the Iroquois peoples' historical enemy, the Algonquian. Along the way they made a pact, a truce if you will, renouncing all previous hatred of one another, promising to live together in peace as a single Native American people.

"They settled themselves in modern-day Montana, far enough into the wilderness that it had not yet been penetrated by whites. In a valley overlooked by a tall mountain they established Tehya, meaning "Precious Place." The Tehyans struggled that first winter, but soon found out that their choice of land could not have been better. Within a few years, they had a bounty of food and an all-around satisfyingly happy lifestyle. Most importantly, they lived together without strife, divisions, or the white man's values.

"Somehow the word spread down the Great Plains. As the land was flooded with greedy settlers and crisscrossed by wagon trains, members of the tribes of the Great Plains came to Tehya to find a haven from war with whites, leaving their guns, Bibles, and alcohol outside. These new members were unquestioningly welcomed, and parts of their culture were absorbed into the

culture of the Tehyans. The language became a blending of the Iroquois of the east and the tribes of the plains.

"Life in Tehya was unbeatable. Some inhabitants called it a 'heaven on Earth,' and that wasn't far from the truth. But, inevitably, white settlers pushed north into Montana, and Tehya was overrun. Facing removal to reservations and losing their children to white-run schools, the Tehyans fled. They searched for ten years for a new place to call home, temporarily settling in Utah, Arizona, and California before their homes were found and they were forced to run again to keep themselves secret. As they ran, they gained new members eager to leave the white ways behind.

"Eventually, they found the perfect haven in Canada, in the forests of Saskatchewan right outside our doors. They found a fertile patch among the taiga largely ignored by white Canadians and stayed there. They prospered without any interaction with whites, and, according to the legend, remain hidden there today.

"Now, as the legend goes, Chief Joseph of the Nez Pearce, the one who was captured and said that he would 'fight no more forever,' was supposedly trying to reach the settlement of Tehya with his people. Having been acquainted with the white ways of Christianity, they called Tehya 'a Zion of the forest.'

"As far as your claim Mr. Parker, that the Tehayans capture and eat anyone who comes near their village, that I find hard to believe. But, if the legend is true, who could blame them for wanting to keep their home a secret?"

The class sat in silence for a moment until the ringing of the bell shook them out of their thoughts. Mr. Motega stood by the door as the students left, smiling at their congratulations that he had given the greatest first lesson in the history of their school careers. He closed the door and walked to his desk before he realized that one student remained in the room.

Tamma sat quietly staring at her desk, utterly lost in thought. Her heart pounded ferociously as she went over the details in her mind. *This place accepts people, welcomes them, and lives as a proud, untainted community*, she thought. *It has to exist!*

Mr. Motega observed closely the effect that his story was having on his clearly very special student. He watched as, after a few minutes, she silently gathered her things and left.

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From that day forward, Tamma had a reason to live, a reason to force herself out of bed every day. She counted the hours until her history class, and then stayed at least an hour after school to talk to Mr. Motega about Native Americans, current events, and everything in between. For Mr. Motega, their meetings were enjoyable twofold; he could talk about things that most people

didn't care to learn, and he realized that Tamma was slowly opening up to become a bright, gifted young student. For Tamma, she could stay at school to delay facing the horrors of home. Plus, in Mr. Motega, she found her one and only friend. She confided much in him, even her mother's painful demanding of perfection.

In many of these after-school talks, Tamma brought up Tehya, the legendary haven for Native Americans. One day in January she asked with uncontrollable interest, "Is Tehya a real place, Mr. Motega?" She hoped that he wouldn't casually steer the conversation in another direction, as he had countless times before, but he quickly did.

"So Tamma," he began, "have I ever told you about the rituals performed by the Hopi in their underground kivas?"

Disappointed, Tamma nevertheless listened as her favorite teacher described the worshipping practices of the early Americans of the Southwest and their connections to modern-day Mexican-American customs. The Native Americans of the Southwest were some of her favorites, and she had a feeling Mr. Motega was using that against her.

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At the end of January, Tamma walked into Mr. Motega's classroom for their daily talk with a bright smile on her face. Her cheerful demeanor, however, faded as quickly as a thunderstorm rolling in to block the sunshine on the Great

Plains. Everything from the walls and bookshelves was packed into boxes, all of the maps, authentic corn-husk dolls, deerskin shirts, and handmade drums. Mr. Motega was sealing a large cardboard box when he noticed his panic-stricken star student gaping in the doorway.

"Come sit over here, Tamma," he gently implored her. She walked disbelievingly over to the chair beside his desk and sat down. He sat across from her, leaned his head against his hands, and sighed, as if the weight of the world pressed down on his shoulders. For the first time, Tamma noticed a thin silvery streak running through his long, jet-black hair.

"Tamma, something has happened to my family back home. I'm needed there. I'm so sorry that I can't be with you here. Unfortunately, I don't think I will be returning. Please forgive me."

"Take me with you," she demanded futilely. "There's nothing for me here."

"I can't do that. You live here, and someday you'll find your purpose, your calling. I promise. I . . . " He stopped when a frantic-looking man entered the room. He was, unmistakably, a younger relative of Mr. Motega. He looked awkward and uncomfortable in his jeans and red flannel button-up shirt. His expression was urgent, conveying the need to both Mr. Motega and Tamma that the two men had to leave *that very instant.*

"Tamma, anything of mine in here you can have. I will sincerely miss you. Goodbye." He gave her a brief hug, grabbed his coat from the chair, and was gone.

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It took her several minutes, but Tamma finally left the school. She walked toward home, barely feeling the icy wind pierce her skin. From outside her house, she could hear her mother and father screaming at each other. Clearly her father had been released from prison that day. The tension in the house only multiplied when he was home. He was scolding his wife for something that Tamma couldn't quite make out, but she could hear her mother's response: "Don't blame me! I'm doing the best that I possibly can! It's that Tamma. I've tried to make her *perfect*, and all she does is resist it! It's as if she *wants* to ruin our lives!" Their voices lowered considerably, but Tamma thought that she heard him say something about handling their daughter physically, knocking some sense into her.

Tears fell from Tamma's beautiful blue eyes. She wanted nothing in the world less than to go into that house. She wanted only to die, to leave everything behind and see if the next life would be really better than the first. She stood outside the house thinking about heaven, when the thought of Tehya crossed her mind. If it were real, which she was convinced it was, then there was a heaven on Earth.

She turned toward the forest and ran. In her head, the destination was certain, but the journey unknown. She ran for hours in the bitter cold as fresh snow covered her footprints. As the sky turned pitch-black, she fell down from sheer exhaustion.

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She was being lifted. Her head and limbs ached and she was shaking with fever, but someone was carrying her. She was being brought somewhere, into some sort of crude shelter. But there was a fire going inside, and it smelled wonderful. Two people whose images were blurred were leaning over her and saying something to each other that Tamma couldn't understand. Her eyes opened briefly to realize these things, only to close again when she was laid down by the fire.

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When Tamma next awoke hours later, she was being dragged on a sled that smelled of pine. She could not move her head to see who was dragging her, nor could she find the strength to ask the name of her rescuer. She was about to capitulate to her pain and allow herself to fall asleep again when the movement stopped and voices started. Soon she was surrounded by dozens of people, people who it took her a moment to realize were not dressed like westerners. Their deerskin leggings, embroidered shirts, and turquoise jewelry exposed them as Native Americans. Tamma knew, in an instant, that she had reached Tehya.

An old woman with a wrinkled face pushed her way through the throng of onlookers and, with surprising strength, lifted Tamma from the sled and carried her into a nearby building constructed from a combination of deer hide, bark, and clay. A massive bear pelt was thrown over Tamma as she was put on the floor near the fire. The frigid air returned for a second as a man entered the house. Bare-chested in spite of the cold, with a large feather sticking straight up from his long braid, and deerskin leggings, Tamma barely recognized Mr. Motega. He smiled at her when she showed signs of recognition, but he could not hide the look of concern on his face.

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It took Tamma the better part of two months, or two full moons, to recover from the horrible cold she had caught. Luckily, in that time no search parties from Saskatchewan had found her or the hidden village. Mr. Motega visited her every day and, at her request, taught her some of the language formed from a plethora of Indian tribes. It overjoyed her to learn that *perfect* was not a word in their language. She was soon able to communicate simple phrases to his mother, the elderly woman caring for her, and the various other curious well-wishers she received.

After a discussion with his mother and the other elders of the tribe, Mr. Motega decided to tell Tamma everything. The first part was easy; he only had

to confirm her suspicions that the legend of Tehya that he had told on the first day of school was true. He then told her his part of the story of Tehya.

"My full name, Tamma, is Yuma Motega. Yuma means 'Son of the Chief,' and Motega means 'new arrow.' As the firstborn son of Tehya's chief, I had an important role defined for me even before my birth. Hunters and outdoorsmen were encroaching closer and closer to our homes, and my people knew enough about white men to know that we would have no chance against them should they find us.

"I was to be the settlement's 'new arrow,' the new hope and direction for our continued existence. We had tried so hard and for so long to avoid contact with modern society, but finally realized that we at least needed to know what we were up against in order to survive. So I was sent into a town near Quebec when I was four years old to learn the white man's language, in case someone should stumble into our settlement, and technology, so that maybe we could harbor some of it ourselves and not be disadvantaged. I made it through school and college, eventually becoming a teacher to make money to buy supplies for us for the worst case scenario."

"Why did you tell my class about Tehya if secrecy and seclusion are essential?" asked Tamma.

"I knew that an altered version of Tehya had somehow made it into modern society, and I wanted to set it straight. I thought that knowing the story

would encourage acceptance and understanding of Indians on the part of Canadians. I assumed no one would believe it enough to come running out to find it," he laughed, "but clearly I was wrong.

"The day I packed up all my things, Tamma, I had received urgent news from my brother. My father, the chief, was ill, and I was needed at home to lead my people if something should happen to him. He succumbed to a fever shortly after I arrived. I am to be made chief the next full moon."

"So as the chief," Tamma sweetly asked, "do you get to decide whether or not I'm allowed to stay here once I'm well enough to leave?"

"Actually, that decision had been made long before you arrived." Tamma cocked her head and wrinkled her nose in confusion. "You see," he explained, "my brother, who is a skilled shaman, had a vision many moons ago, so I'm told. He saw a young woman with hair like corn tassels, talishi, and eyes like the new moon in the blue sky, tayen. Her coming, my brother saw, would bring countless seasons of security to Tehya. The person he saw and described couldn't be anyone else; it's you. If you wish to stay, you are to be welcomed as one of us the evening that I am named chief."

Tamma's answer needn't be said.

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On the morning before Tamma was to be made a Tehyan and given the name Onida TarevaChine, which means "the expected one with beautiful eyes," Yuma

Motega took her hand and led her out of the hut where she had been recovering. It was mid-March and winter had given way to an early spring. Tamma looked down from atop the hill on which the hut was built and gazed down upon the valley below. A stream with water as crystal clear as the blue of her eyes ran through the farmland, and the sun was rising between two of the mountains encircling the valley. A few children were playing tag nearby, and their laughter traveled pleasantly to Tamma's ears. Others down the hill waved excitedly to her. As she stood there taking in the indescribable natural sweetness of her new home, she knew that she had found it. She had attained her own perfection. And, rather than the ultimate end, perfection turned out to be the greatest beginning.