

Sample Pages



LYNDA PARTRIDGE

A LILLIAN INDIGENOUS MYSTERY



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SPIRIT RIDER

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Lynda Partridge

Artwork: Dave Nicholson



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Sample Pages

FOR AUTUMN

Little Warrior

Little warrior, I never met you
But I met your spirit through those who love you.
I saw your smile and heard your laughter
through the stories shared with me.
I felt your strength and determination flowing
through the words of someone who loves you.
You fought so hard. You were so brave.
You tried to stay with those you knew would miss you.
You weren't sure what to do
But that fierce spirit let you know it was time.
You felt those wings trying to break free
And you listened.
I see you smiling on your family and your friends
With no pain
And filled with the love you carry from this world.
Little star, little angel
Always loved here and now, always loved there.
Little warrior.

In Memory of Andrew and Hailey

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Sample Pages



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Part I



Sample Pages





Chapter 1

A BICYCLE MYSTERY

“KOKOM! AUNTIE! Come quick! He’s doing it again! Hurry!” Lillian’s frantic voice echoed through the house. “Hurry, hurry!”

Kokom came rushing—or fast-walking, really—toward the big picture window where Lillian stood. Her slippers barely made a sound as she moved with urgency. Auntie, on the other hand, dashed down the hallway at full speed, nearly tripping over the edge of the carpet.

“What’s going on?” Auntie asked, breathless, as they both arrived at the window. The three of them stood there, staring out onto the street, their eyes scanning every corner for a glimpse of movement.

“I’m sorry, Lillian,” Auntie sighed after a moment. “We must have missed him again.”

Kokom nodded. “Sorry, my girl. We’ll keep trying until we see him. And don’t worry—we know you well enough to know you’re not making this up.”

Lillian let out a deep, dramatic sigh and turned to face them, her shoulders slumping. “I really thought you’d see him this time,” she said, disappointment heavy in her voice. “Oh boy. Here we go again.”

And with that, Lillian’s new adventure began.

It had only been a short while since she and her friends Chloe and Grace had unraveled the mystery in the barn. That spirit, a girl their age, had been tethered to the earth because of unfinished business with her brother, who happened to be Chloe's dad. At first, they'd hoped she was an alien spirit—how cool would that have been? But no, she had been a human spirit. Despite that slight disappointment, the experience had been transformative for Lillian. She'd discovered her gift for seeing and communicating with spirits, a gift that seemed equal parts fascinating and exhausting.

Since then, things had quieted down. Well, until a few days ago, when a strange boy began appearing outside her window on a bike. He rode past, taunting her, sticking out his tongue, and—most annoyingly—flipping her the finger. Lillian wasn't entirely sure if he was a spirit, but something about him felt different. Either way, his behaviour was undeniably rude, and it was starting to get on her nerves.

She turned away from the window, glancing over her shoulder one last time in case the boy reappeared. He didn't. With a loud sigh, Lillian wandered into the kitchen in search of something to eat.

Kokom and Auntie were seated at the table, deep in conversation. Lillian only caught snippets—something about Grace and Chloe visiting soon—but her grumbling stomach drowned out most of it.

“Don't eat too much,” Auntie warned as Lillian rummaged through the pantry. “Supper will be ready soon. And don't forget, you're going to Grace's house tomorrow night.”

“Okay, cheese and crackers it is,” Lillian replied, grabbing a handful of crackers and some pre-sliced cheese. She loaded her snack onto a plate and wandered back into the living room, balancing the plate carefully as she perched on the arm of the couch.

She glared out the window, daring the boy to return. No sign of him. There didn’t seem to be any pattern to his appearances, but Lillian was determined to figure it out. She nibbled on her crackers, her mind already racing with ideas for the upcoming week. Grace and Chloe were going to be here, which meant plenty of time for adventures. Chloe’s school had been closed temporarily—something about a health hazard—and she was coming to stay with her cousin Grace until things were sorted out. Lillian didn’t know all the details, and honestly, she didn’t care. All that mattered was that both Grace and Chloe would be nearby.

It had been a while since the three of them were all together. Lillian had met Chloe last summer when she stayed on Chloe’s farm, and Grace, Chloe’s cousin, lived near Lillian in the city. The three of them had hit it off immediately, and their shared adventure with the barn spirit had cemented their bond. Now, with Chloe coming for a week, Lillian was already imagining the fun they’d have.

Her daydreaming was interrupted by Auntie’s voice. “Lillian! Lillian... *Lillian!*”

“Huh?” Lillian snapped out of her thoughts and looked toward the kitchen.

“Don’t forget, your social worker Mrs. Beasley is coming by in the next hour,” Auntie reminded her.

Lillian groaned inwardly. She still got nervous every time Mrs. Beasley visited. Even though her Auntie constantly reassured her that this was her home now, Lillian couldn't shake the fear that she'd be taken away again. It had happened too many times before.

"And I can hear you worrying about this visit," Auntie said, raising an eyebrow at her. "Don't. It's just a routine check to make sure you're still happy here and that we're doing everything we're supposed to—feeding you, clothing you, all that good stuff." She chuckled lightly, hoping to ease Lillian's nerves.

"I know, I know," Lillian replied, her voice tinged with exasperation. "I just... I still get nervous that my mom will show up someday and want me to go back."

In the kitchen, Auntie sighed quietly, her gaze softening as she glanced at Kokom. It was a fear she shared with Lillian—though for different reasons. She wished, deep down, that Lillian's mom would recover from the illness that had consumed her. But she also knew how much stability and love Lillian had found here. It was a delicate balance, and Auntie could only hope that Lillian would come to truly believe she belonged, no matter what the future held.

Kokom reached over and gave Auntie's hand a reassuring squeeze. "She's a strong one," Kokom said softly. "She'll find her peace."

Lillian, oblivious to the exchange, returned to the couch with her empty plate and plopped down. She stared out the window one last time before muttering to herself, "Next time, I'll catch him."



Chapter 2

A SUCCESSFUL VISIT

AUNTIE KNEW there would always be a place for Lillian in her home, and her heart. She glanced at her own mother, who was busy helping in the kitchen, and felt a quiet reassurance. Her mother would always be Kokom to Lillian. She smiled, though she wasn't sure where these sentimental thoughts were coming from.

Such joy in the world, but sometimes such sadness, she mused. Walking to the doorway that led to the living room, she paused to watch Lillian. The girl was staring out the window, a look of deep thought on her face. Auntie marveled at Lillian's young wisdom and the special gift the Creator had given her. She sighed, knowing another adventure involving the whole family was just around the corner. Lillian sighed too, almost as if on cue. Shaking her head, Auntie returned to the kitchen.

"K, Lillian. Down the hall you go and wash up for your visitor. Let me just say," and she raised her voice for emphasis. "You don't want her thinking we treat you like an unkempt beastie!"

The teasing snapped Lillian out of her trance this time. She wolfed down the last crumbs from her snack and bolted down the hall.

A short time later, a firm knock came at the door. Lillian practically flew back up the hallway, nearly tripping over her own feet in her rush to answer it.

“Careful, Lillian,” Auntie murmured to herself with a smile. *Always in a hurry.*

THE DOOR SWUNG OPEN so hard that Lillian almost stumbled backward. “Hello, Mrs. Beasley!” she exclaimed, words tumbling out of her in a single breath. “I’m fine, I don’t want to move, and thanks for visiting! Was it a good drive? Do you need to see my schoolwork? I can show you my room. What else do you need?”

“Lillian,” Auntie said gently, placing a hand on Lillian’s shoulder. “Let her through the door first.”

“Oh, right. Sorry.” Lillian stepped aside, her cheeks flushing as she realized how flustered she’d been.

Mrs. Beasley smiled, clearly used to Lillian’s enthusiasm. “Thank you, Lillian.” She stepped inside, nodding respectfully at Auntie and Kokom. “It’s wonderful to see you both.”

“And you as well,” Kokom replied, handing her a steaming mug of tea.

“Now, Miss Lillian,” Mrs. Beasley said, turning to her. “Shall we have a little visit? Then I’ll meet with your Auntie and Kokom afterward.”

Lillian nodded eagerly, leading the way to the living room. For the next 45 minutes, Lillian chattered non-stop, showing off everything she could think of: her schoolwork, her regalia, a dreamcatcher she had made, and even the beadwork she’d started.

“See? I’m learning so much about my culture!” she said proudly. “I’m even learning my language and some different dialects. *Kwe, Aniin, Sago*—that’s hello in Algonquin, Ojibwe, and Mohawk.”

Mrs. Beasley nodded, clearly impressed.

“And every morning, I say this prayer. Well... maybe not every morning. More like every other morning. But I do always say *Miigwech* to thank the Creator. *Kichimigwech kichi-manido minwa nigoding.*”

Mrs. Beasley held up her hand, chuckling softly. “It’s okay, Lillian. I can see you’re learning a lot.”

Lillian grinned and batted her eyelashes dramatically. “See? I’m being taught so much living here. So, you don’t need to move me.”

When she finally ran out of steam, Mrs. Beasley gave her a reassuring smile. “Lillian, I’m not moving you. Remember when you first came into foster care, we said it would be until your mother got well enough to care for you on her own? That hasn’t happened yet. We don’t even know where she is right now. But if that day comes, and she’s healthy and able, do you think you’d want to go back and live with her?”

Lillian looked down at the carpet, thinking. Finally, she answered honestly. “I don’t know.”

“That’s okay,” Mrs. Beasley said gently. “You don’t need to worry about that right now. If you’re happy here, this is where you’ll stay for now.”

The words felt comforting, but Lillian couldn’t help catching on the phrase “for now.” It lingered.

Mrs. Beasley wrapped up her visit by meeting with Auntie and Kokom. “You’re doing an excellent job

with her,” she said to Auntie. “It’s clear how much she’s thriving here. I wish all foster parents were as nurturing and understanding as you.”

Auntie nodded, gratitude mingling with relief. She saw Mrs. Beasley to the door and waved as her car pulled away.

Meanwhile, Lillian had rushed up to her bedroom to text Chloe and Grace. *Just had my visit with Mrs. Beasley. All good. She says I’m staying here! Wahoo!*

The replies were almost immediate.

Grace: *That’s awesome! Can’t wait for tomorrow.*

Chloe: *Yesss! Adventure time!!!*

Lillian grinned. She put down her phone and walked over to the window to watch Mrs. Beasley’s car disappear down the street. But something else caught her eye. There he was: the boy on the bike.

For the first time, he wasn’t sneering. Instead, his face was solemn, and his eyes glistened with tears.

“Why is he so sad?” Lillian whispered, pressing her forehead to the glass.

For a moment, she thought about calling Auntie or Kokom. But before she could make a sound, the boy’s image wavered, like a mirage.

Then he was gone.

“Dang,” she muttered, shaking her head. “What now?”