

"An antic chase story in the tradition of
The Milagro Beanfield War and *The Monkey Wrench Gang*."
—LOS ANGELES TIMES BOOK REVIEW

SWEET MEDICINE

A NOVEL



DAVID SEALS

Sweet Medicine David Seals

THE LIBRARY OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN

Herman J. Viola, Editor

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DEDICATED
TO
MY FATHER, GREAT SPIRIT
WALTER J. SEALS,
1919–1991

Preface



THE RETURN OF THE QUEEN

YOU WON'T KNOW ABOUT THIS STORY UNLESS YOU'VE ALREADY read *The Powwow Highway*, or you've seen the movie, but that doesn't matter. You didn't miss much. It was a real disrespectful story, anyway, and I can explain it to you in about two easy sentences. It was all made up by Mr. David Seals, and everybody knows he never tells the truth or has any respect for anything. There are a number of people who are scouring the countryside looking for him right now, and if they catch him, they swear they'll murder him on the spot, just as the old Cheyenne Indians swore they'd kill Sweet Medicine if they could ever catch him.

For this tale is not unlike a continuation of the Quest to rescue the Sacred Woman, which we had to endure in that first idiotic and badly written book, and Philbert and Buddy are not unlike the warrior-knights of yore. If you were unlucky enough to have stumbled upon one of those original ratty copies, you would have discovered a tale that was supposed to have been full of all kinds of allegorical signifi-

cance and a lot of other literary tricks to make you think it was good writing, but I'll tell ya, I think he was winging it as he went along. Seals didn't know what the hell he was doing. He probably smokes marijuana too! There we were, bouncing along in a stupid 1964 Buick LeSabre that had been burned, rolled, and inhabited by skunks, and this total idiot fullblood Cheyenne named Philbert thinks it's a war pony, which he calls Protector. No wonder the college professors sneered. And Buddy Red Bird joins him in Montana to go rescue Buddy's sister Bonnie in New Mexico because she's been busted for selling every kind of drug imaginable, and cavorting through every kind of sexual aberration possible, and we're supposed to believe she's a sweet, innocent young thing. I'll tell ya, this girl is about as innocent as Madonna.

And there's a lot of hooley about exalted visions of Spirits in the Other World and all that drug-crazed Carlos Castaneda crap. I've never seen a Spirit, have you? Or a Flying Saucer? No, I didn't think so. That stuff's for New Age crackpots.

But oh boy, is it profitable. So I guess we'll have to wing it through another goddamn allegory full of significance, because the publishers are hoping to make a few bucks on this, and the movie's gone into video and pay-TV distribution, with worldwide rights, and the author is sick of sleeping on the sidewalk.

In case you may be wondering who I am, I'm the Storyteller, and I don't like it one bit. Seals is manipulating the hell out of me, too, just like you, and turning Bonnie into some kind of Queen from Avalon and Philbert into King Arthur and Buddy into Sir Lancelot. Next thing you know he'll be comparing me to Merlin. So I hope you'll stop reading this shit right now so we can put this clown out of business once and for all. You're just encouraging him if you keep reading.

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HOW THE KING AND QUEEN CAME TOGETHER INTO SACRED UNION.

PHILBERT AND BONNIE WERE MADLY IN LOVE. NO GREATER nuptial ceremony had ever been performed in the sacred halls of the Heavenly Palace than had been seen between these two. Nobody had ever been in love as much as they were. They loved each other so much that it made them sick to their stomachs, so powerful and intense were their destinies intertwined. It was as if acid was eating away at their bowels. Love ran through their guts like water flooding unto a mountain canyon after a spring rain, washing gravel and sagebrush off the slopes and down into the normally placid little creeks and gullies with all the rampaging force of a Flash Flood sent from the Great Goddess above, devastating all ordinary life in its path.

That is the kind of Power the Queen's most sacred gift—Love—has. It is supernatural.

Philbert was still pretty much the same big fat slob that he had been when he busted Bonnie out of the Santa Fe city jail yesterday, but he was more imbued with the essence

of the sacred fertility king than ever. He had slimmed down to about 290 pounds. He didn't quite have the same goofy, moronic expression on his fat brown face, but almost. Maybe he was a little smarter than he had been a week ago when he left the Lame Deer Reservation of the Northern Cheyennes in Montana, and maybe he was a little more confident, but not much. These miraculous transitions from comic idiocy to heroic parable take time. And Philbert was still in mourning for the death of his noble steed Protector. Never had a Sacred Pony executed his duty so valiantly as that rattletrap old Buick LeSabre, freeing his master of the Indian dependency on the American machine, and also tearing down the fucking walls of the tower where the Princess had been imprisoned. So what that the State Pigs had an APB out for them in ten states? Philbert and Bonnie and Buddy and Rabbit and Sky and Jane and Jennifer were hiding on the Picuris Pueblo up in the mountains, watching themselves on the local TV news.

"Terrorists who destroyed municipal property, shot up La Posada Inn, injuring a number of law enforcement officials, stole an estimated one hundred thousand dollars from the City and County treasury—"

"It was only twenty-two thousand," Philbert interrupted.

"Yep," little nine-year-old Jane confirmed confidently. "I counted it."

"But in the movie they changed it to only four thousand," Sky remarked. He was only seven and was puzzled about these discrepancies of the media (not to mention Time and Space).

"Huh?" Philbert inquired dumbly. "What movie?"

"*Powwow Highway*," Sky replied.

The TV continued, paying them no attention at all. "—are still at large. The FBI and numerous SWAT teams of United States Marshals have been called into the state, and there are reports that the terrorists have links to Iran or Libya and—"

"Oh, bullshit!" Rabbit swore in her twangy Oklahoma accent.

Buddy angrily turned off the TV. "They just make up all these fucking lies, fucking Veho whitemen!"

While Buddy and Rabbit ranted and raved about the pigs

and turkeys and spiders and sheep that described for them the various mammalian and bestial qualities of the various kinds of American people, Philbert and Bonnie snuck off to bed.

Because, as I have said, they were very much in love, which means that they were also very much in need of their own kind of profane animal expressions and they were content to leave the politics and the plot to their friends. Philbert and Bonnie were content to let madness and irresponsibility sweep over their sacredness and profane the divine destiny waiting for them on the horizon: they tore off their clothes and crawled into the cold sheets and forgot about cops and manhunts and escapes for now. For now, they both had a lot of sex to catch up on, and sex, as most of us over the age of ten know, is a pretty good way to escape from the clutches of The Law. Oh, I know there are a lot of people under ten years of age who are hoping I don't go into too much detail about just exactly what these two naked animals were doing to each other under the covers, and what kind of filthy juicy things and other untamed and brutish acts they were performing upon each other, but you would also be surprised to learn that there are a great many people who are actually over the age of ten who would object to any graphic descriptions of the sucking and slurping that was going on. Ours is a very moral and religious age, in which pornographic filth is not appreciated. I personally would prefer to skip any talk of hot, pounding thighs and various types of erections, but, as I have said, the author of this earthy tale has no respect for propriety or people's feelings. He panders especially to the lowest common denominators of the reading public, and has been egged on by his editor and agent, a woman. Women, as is well known, are particularly fond of eroticism and other displays of naked wanton Power. Whereas a man asks only for gentleness and consideration, women in this new pagan age are demanding Orgasm Rights in the very halls of government. They seem to think that the very Deity argues for orgiastic ritual in the performance of Worship! Yes, I can see that culture and civilization are in the final throes of deterioration.

So there they are (in my bed, by the way, as everybody

is staying at my house, and I have to sleep on the couch), and it's a pretty strange sight, as you can well imagine. I have to imagine it, too, since I am not privy (as some peeping tom authors I might mention) to the scene. Although I wouldn't mind just a peek, as I am after all only human, since Bonnie is the real genuine classic Indian beauty and we can almost be sure that her butt looks real good naked. Boy, I almost envy that ol' Philbert, the son of a bitch. But he deserves it. Even though he's gotta look like a walrus in my creaky old double bed, Bonnie must surely be an antelope beside him . . . Well, all you ten-year-olds know what I mean. I don't want to go into any more lewdness. This is after all a love story, so I'll just say that anybody who has seen the way Bonnie looks at Philbert knows how she feels about him. There's no doubt about it. And there's really no doubt about why she loves him, if you could see his big, warm, brown elk eyes. He's a really warm human being, he really is. *Dumber'n* hell, but the nicest guy you ever will meet. I confess to a prejudice—I really do like him. If you're looking for an objective yarn in which Philbert's enemies (in the ivory bastions of Academia) are drawn with precise, polished prose, you can forget it. This is gonna be a love poem, dammit, and you can look for rational explanations in the sociology textbooks or somewhere. The know-it-all professors and preachers don't like me, and I don't like them.

But you and I can imagine what lovers say to each other in the privacy of their pillows.

"I love you," he might say.

"I love you too," she groans politely in the grip of a sweaty, impassioned delirium. (That's all women want. When a man seeks a meaningful relationship, they run the other way.)

He smiles, looking up at her with adoring eyes, as she thrashes away, blinded by desire. "You're so beautiful."

She replies, playfully clawing at his legs. "Unnnh . . . ahhhh."

Is my romanticism too bold? Am I a naive dreamer, fantasizing about the ecstatic realms where dwell the hearts and souls of lovers? Maybe.

"My love," he sighs.

"Ohhhh, Philbert: OH, AH!"

"Yes?"

"Oh . . . uh . . . what? Did you say something? Did I say your name?"

He allowed a fleeting, wistful smile to cross his enraptured face, as hers was red and covered with her long black hair (wet with sweat). "I remember when we were kids but . . . that was a long time ago."

"Yeah," she gasped, and opened her eyes momentarily. "I don't remember you too well."

"I remember you," he continued conversationally, thrilled beyond belief, sure that he had died and gone to heaven. "I can't believe I'm here with you now, like this, Bonnie Red Bird."

"Yep, that's me."

"Bonnie Red Bird. I can't believe it."

"Yeah, it is CRAZY aHhhhHH!!"

If it was left up to me, I would have a delicate kiss right here, to see if it's real, if they can believe it. Have you ever kissed like that, Gentle Reader? Just to see if she's real, if you're awake? As Indians, maybe Philbert and Bonnie wondered which was their dream world and which the real world. Have you as Irishmen and African women wondered about this too? Kiss your sweetheart, and close your eyes, and you will see Philbert and Bonnie.

She was crying and carrying on in a way that scared him. He was sure that he must be hurting her, but she quickly and inarticulately assured him that he was not, and then he felt a most inexplicable and unprecedented urge surging up through him.

"Gosh," he gulped, unsure of himself.

Tears came in her eyes as she wildly stiffened and screamed. He lost sight of all reality in that moment, too, but it didn't worry him anymore. He wanted to ask her what was the matter, but it seemed impossible, or at least irrelevant. He didn't care. She didn't care.

Blinding light flashed all around them, and Thunder Beings exploded. They couldn't tell each other anything; she pulled herself close to him and comforted him, into her cheek, his eyes wet with her hair, and he cried. She marveled as she trembled on top of him, protecting him, hold-

ing him together as if he would fall apart without her arms and legs around him. She listened to him snuffle. He tried to stop but he couldn't. Her ears felt his breath blowing lightly into her, into her like his hot sperm, but the more he tried to control himself the more his giant chest trembled. And the more she said, "It's okay, it's okay, My Darling," the more he clung to her. He couldn't breathe anymore; it was all inside her now.

She remembered what a lonely and abandoned boy he had been back home, always the butt of the jokes of the other children because he was fat and stupid, an orphan whose father no one knew, and whom nobody wanted. She had always felt a little sorry for him, like most other people had, but they had their own gut-wrenching problems on the desperately poor reservation and they couldn't dwell on poor Philbert's problems for long. They had to find their own livelihood in a place where there was eighty percent unemployment, where they didn't have even minimally adequate health care or education, where they had to see their religion and cultures systematically destroyed by the prevailing society. Everyone had drunks in the family and dead children in the graveyards, everyone felt helpless as they watched strip-miners and lawyers destroy their beloved Mother Earth and Her honor, everyone was almost as bad off as Philbert. And Indians are human beings, too, just about like everybody else, so they couldn't help but laugh at him a little because he was at least a little bit lower than everyone else, he was a little more foolish, a little more of a loser. And Philbert himself even compounded the ridicule of his tribe because he would smile at their insults like they were jokes, he acted like he almost knew some Comic Tickle was at work. He took the cruel mockeries with magnanimity; his innocence counterbalanced the guilt everyone else felt. If no one ever saw him sob (until now, beneath Bonnie), alone at night where he slept in abandoned and wrecked cars, then that wasn't their fault. If no one knew that he often didn't eat for days at a time or even weeks, except for garbage from the hospital trash cans or handouts at the Senior Center, then how could they appreciate the fact that he was a Contrary who had grown fat from half-

stale beans and potatoes? Philbert was obese but he was undernourished.

When Bonnie asked him softly, "What's the matter, Darling?" he gave her a sharp, startled look and turned away. "Have I done something wrong?"

He looked back at her, even more startled and scared than before. "Oh, no, no. Not you, no. Don't ever think that."

"Then what? I didn't hurt you, did I?"

He was embarrassed, but he told her anyway. Slowly at first, but then as he saw sympathy in her eyes the story of his life poured out of him as involuntarily as the seed and the sorrow of his lonely race had poured into the ground where the great buffalo herds had once roamed. The more he told her of the death of his mother, the more she loved him, and washed him. The more he saw the love upon her, the more he wanted her, and the harder he got. They talked, and then made love, ferocious sexmaking, and they didn't come out of the bedroom for three days.

"Hey, you two," Buddy shouted through the locked door the first morning-after. "Jesus, you goin' for a record?"

"We're okay," Bonnie shouted. "Go away."

"Damn," they heard him mutter. "I thought I was the champion tipi-creeper. 'Til now."

Then the kids burst through the door and the lovers hastily covered themselves up. Sky and Jane didn't seem to notice the proximity of the two adults. "Merry Christmas!" Sky shouted.

"Christmas?" Bonnie muttered. "I forgot all about it."

You may recall that the first episode of this epic involved a four-day journey that culminated on the Winter Solstice, which is the night before the night before Christmas. As I said, this story is just full of all kinds of mythological significance like that. In the movie the screenwriters got that all screwed up, and therefore the story lost a lot of its power and flopped at the box office. But don't get me started on movie assholes.

"Santa Claus was here," Sky bubbled. "And left me a Nintendo with Mario Brothers and Kung fu and Wrestlemania, and I'm already up to the fourth level of—"

"Whoa, whoa, Partner," Philbert interrupted, laughing. "Santa Claus was here? I didn't know anything about it."

The kids piled on the bed, and Buddy and Rabbit came in the room, too, grinning.

Rabbit said, "Yep. I thought from the commotion we heard in here you saw the magic old gent, too, last night."

"Uh . . ."

"And I got the lavender jogging suit and fifty bucks," Jane explained proudly.

"Okay Troops," Buddy ordered, "let's march. These two have got their own presents to unwrap."

"What presents did you get, Uncle Philbert?" Sky asked.

Philbert looked at all of them, and especially Bonnie, curled up in his big arm. "I got all of you, my friends. This is the greatest gift any man could ask for."

"C'mon, Kids." Rabbit smiled.

They ran out and Rabbit whispered as she left, "We snuck into town and got the presents yesterday."

"Great. Thanks, Rabbit," Bonnie said. "I love you."

"Yeah, well . . ." She smiled, and closed the door quietly behind her.

Bonnie and Philbert smiled at each other, kissed lightly . . . and then went right back into it. This time Philbert even ventured to assert himself and Bonnie expressed her pleasure that he was coming along very well in his sexual instruction.

They snuck in the bathroom and took a shower together. It only had one or two pathetic little trickles dripping from the cockeyed old nozzle, but eventually it did the job, and the two people managed to get each other clean, in between some more shenanigans. It was getting a little embarrassing how often they went at each other, as if they had nothing better to do.

Back in the bedroom it started all over again, and Bonnie experimented with one or two new variations on an old theme that, for most people, has served very satisfactorily for countless eons.

The aroma of cooking meat wafted through the cracks in the walls—and there were numerous such ventilations in the quaint old adobe shack—so that Philbert started to suds over (in a more normal expression of human desires: I'm sorry, I couldn't resist making the vulgar comment), and said, "Christmas dinner."

He started to get up, but Bonnie stopped him. "No. No dinner."

"Huh?"

She explained. "You have to go on a diet, Philbert. I'm sorry."

"Well, yeah, I know that. I'm embarrassed. But this is, uh, don't you smell that? It's like a goose or deer they're cooking. It—"

She grabbed his you-know-what and added persuasively, not really understanding it either, "Something tells me we should make with a fast, as of the Old Days when dreamers and visionaries pursued sacrifices. For the people."

Well, that spoke to Philbert. You may recall he was particularly fond of the poetic expressions of the Old Ones, his traditional ancestors, who saw the world differently than you and me. They didn't know who the hell christ was, for instance, or his christ-mass. Why should he celebrate a savage feast? His great grandfathers wouldn't. They saw this time of year as the Extra Day of the Year, when the sun stood still, when the days and nights turned around and started to get long again (sort of like Philbert, under Bonnie's ministrations: I'm sorry, I did it again). Did Bonnie see this as an omen of Philbert's status as the fertility chief? Did she think, as her great grandmothers did, that it was planting time?

There was a knock on the door. Buddy said, "Come and get it, Boys and Girls. Roast buffalo, yams, squash, corn, homemade biscuits with sausage gravy, pure honey, choke-cherry jam, preserves—"

Philbert looked imploringly at Bonnie. She was firm. He looked at the closed door, closed to him now forever from all the ordinary happy pursuits and appetites of mortal men. "Uh, no thanks, Buddy. We're fasting."

"What?"

"Uh . . ."

"Oh, c'mon, you guys. Jesus, we have pumpkin pie and fresh peach ice cream with homemade chocolate fudge syrup and—"

Bonnie said, "Thanks anyway, Buddy." She didn't understand it at all. It was as if something supernatural was working through her. She smiled wanly at her compeer. "I'm

sorry, Honey. I just feel like something is working through me, and we have to do this. Didn't you say something about me sewing a medicine bag for you out of my prison dress?"

"Oh, yeah," he remembered, and jumped up. He reached in the pockets of his smelly old jeans laying crumpled on the plain wooden floor where Bonnie had torn them off and thrown them, fishing around to find something.

She sat up in bed and lit a Winston. "I . . . it's crazy. I don't know why I feel so strongly about this all of a sudden, but—"

"No. It's good to trust the Powers," he said. "I have to learn about making sacrifices, you're right."

"Is that it? I feel so good and strong right now."

"Here they are," he said. He showed her two small stones and the old cigarette lighter from his dead pony. "These two stones . . . I didn't notice before, but they're white."

"Like white crystal, maybe."

"Yeah, or . . . I don't know much about rocks. This one is from Nowah'wus, the Sacred Mountain Bear Butte in South Dakota. I got it on our trip down here to rescue you. And this one is from Fort Robinson, in Nebraska, where Crazy Horse of the Sioux was killed, and Dull Knife's Cheyennes were massacred in 1879. This came to me from the Powers there. And this is the token of my Sacred Pony, who gave his life that we may live."

She touched them and looked at them. "I feel dizzy. There is a strong . . . spiritual . . ."

She blew tobacco smoke on the objects, and then leaned back on the pillows.

"What's the matter?"

"I don't know. I just had to lean back. Something went through me."

He felt something powerful surge through the room at that moment, like a fluctuation in electricity, and a whisper, like static in his ears. He thought he heard voices calling from far, far away. He put the two stones and the lighter on Bonnie's belly, just above the triangle of her womb, and they grew warm. She groaned, her eyes closed.

She began talking in a quiet voice that was almost not hers. "When I was a girl I had a vision. I dreamed I saw a woman with Yellow Hair, the color of corn, and she was

walking toward me. I didn't know her. I was sick for a long time and my parents thought I was going to die. But I recovered. I heard that woman's voice often over the next few years, but when I asked people around me they looked at me like I was crazy. They didn't hear the voices. My stepmother wanted to put me in a mental hospital when I was sixteen. No, I was seventeen. So I ran away. I took a bus to New York City and hid out, and fell in love with a whiteman, but he was killed in a wreck. I got married and . . . well, it was pretty bad, except for my kids. I love them very much, Philbert. But it all got screwed up and I ended up in jail, and men were just bastards. Until you. And until now, I forgot about the Sacred Woman and the voices. I haven't thought about her for years. I thought I was crazy too."

"But now you know it was a vision?"

She opened her eyes and looked at him. "Well, what else could it be? What do they mean when they say you're mentally ill or something? That's bullshit."

"Yes."

"The Woman . . . I wish I could remember what she was saying. She was saying something to me. She's always been trying to tell me something, but I've been too stupid to listen or know. Oh." Tears ran down her cheeks, and she turned over and sobbed into the pillows. Philbert watched the three objects of his medicine slip beside her, and her naked womb covered them under her.

He laid beside her and hugged her. She sobbed uncontrollably for an hour in his arms, and all he could do was wonder why, and how, this great woman had come into his arms. Why me? Philbert thought. Why her? He always thought of Bonnie, when he was a boy, as the most beautiful girl in the tribe, and the most special. There was almost an air of tragedy around her, as if, for all her seemingly normal and girlish activities and laughter and games, she carried a burden around with her, a sadness. He saw her one time walking alone in the pine hills above Lame Deer, and he could have sworn there was a glowing light around her; faint and dim, as if she was only walking in front of the setting sun silhouetting her on the horizon, on the crest of that hill. He thought he was looking at Is'siwun, the