



JOSEPH BOYDEN

BORN WITH A TOOTH

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Cormorant Books

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Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts
du Canada



The publisher gratefully acknowledges the support of the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council for its publishing program. We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Book Publishing Industry Development Program (BPIDP) for our publishing activities.

Printed and bound in Canada

The following stories have been previously published: “Born With A Tooth” in *Black Warrior Review* and *Potpourri*; “Shawanagan Bingo Queen” in *Cimarron Review* and *Blue Penny Quarterly*; “Painted Tongue” in *The Panhandler*.

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF CANADA CATALOGUING IN PUBLICATION

Boyden, Joseph, 1966–
Born with a tooth / Joseph Boyden. — 2nd ed.

ISBN 978-1-897151-34-1

1. Indians of North America — Ontario, Northern — Fiction.
I. Title.

PS8553.O9358B6 2008 C8I3'.6 C2008-902285-8

Cover design and image: Angel Guerra/Archetype
Text design: Tannice Goddard
Printer: Hignell Book Printing

CORMORANT BOOKS INC.
215 SPADINA AVENUE, STUDIO 230, TORONTO, ON CANADA M5T 2C7
www.cormorantbooks.com

For Amanda, my flying girl

PREVIEW NOT FOR RESALE

YOU DON'T WANT TO KNOW
WHAT JENNY TWO BEARS DID
~

*S*ummer barrelled up from the Great Lakes and rolled across Georgian Bay. Its heat killed the blackflies, and when the mosquito droves replaced them in the first warm nights, the weekenders arrived in swarms from Toronto and Oshawa and Hamilton and the northern States.

There was little Jenny could do about it. Weekenders meant business for the band along with the arrival of a handful of cute guys. Even a few old friends' faces among the white hordes that crawled like freshly dug grubs over the Turtle Stone Reservation. The arrival of the tourists meant a busy night at the big show on Canada Day, for the other bands, anyway. Weekenders meant a packed beach of excited and drooling teenagers, escaped from the confines of the parents' quaint summer cottages, grooving spastically. In the old days it had been Jenny's very own loud

and alive all-Indian-girl band playing on the stages of small clubs, screaming out the Native blues. Now it was slick white boys from the city up there on the Mosquito Beach stage, strumming insolently on guitars and acting like rock stars. It was time to realize that Sisters of the Black Bear were no longer in vogue.

Maybe calling the weekenders grubs was a little harsh. But just today she had seen a sickly pale and blubbered woman in a sun hat trying to power a motorboat out of the marina, had watched in horror as she lost control and punched her bow into the hull of Jenny's little Streamliner.

Jenny tried hard to hold in her anger when she walked down to the office to register a complaint against Blubber Woman. When Mike, the supervising tribal cop on duty filled out the report, he mentioned that he'd heard the council had chosen Sisters of the Black Bear to headline Mosquito Beach this year.

"Are you sure they picked us?" Jenny asked.

"Oh yeah," Mike answered. "Council said your new sound is great."

He congratulated her on her band's comeback. Her anger rubbed away now, Jenny skipped back to the marina, thinking how silly it was for her, a woman who'd be thirty-two this autumn, to be happy as a teenager. Her band had finally found a little of its old glory. Oh, they had lived through a real heyday in the mid-eighties, one year even being voted Best Female Band in the punk rock category by an underground Toronto newspaper, but that was then. Now the Sisters were set to headline the biggest bash of the year. Canada Day celebrations at the beach meant a crowd of hundreds, it meant vacationing club owners up from Toronto hungry for talent to be booked, and it meant revenge against all the bastards in the area who laughed at the notion of the band still slugging it out after all these years. Tina and Anne and Bertha were going to shit. This was the return

of the old days. Jenny tried to ignore the thundercloud of worry gathering around her head. Exactly how she'd managed to get the big gig was her own dirty little secret.

"The council wants us to play Mosquito Beach?" Tina asked, slouching on her drum stool at practice that night. Jenny had called an emergency meeting, and the girls were a little pissed at having to show up a second time in as many weeks at their rehearsal space, the old and abandoned marine mechanics' shop butting up against the green water of the bay.

"I really don't think we're ready to play something as big as Mosquito Beach," Anne chimed in. "I haven't picked up my bass seriously in weeks. And I know for a fact Bertha hasn't touched her guitar in longer than that." Bertha nodded meekly, holding her guitar in her chubby fingers as if it were a wilted flower. "Let's call it off."

"That's not a possibility," Jenny said. The Sisters sat for a few minutes, looking at one another.

"Why the hell would the council choose us to play something as big as that anyways?" Anne asked after a little while. "It doesn't make sense. Fluff music is what's in. We're too hardcore for them. How'd they decide to pick us?"

Jenny wanted to tell the Sisters how she'd finagled it, but her burning face wouldn't let her.

Thirteen years was a long time for any band to keep going, with all its original members still hammering away at their respective instruments. Sure, there'd been a few sabbaticals when it was time for Tina or Anne or Bertha to scream out another kid. More than a few; they'd had thirteen "baby breaks," as the Sisters had taken to calling them, over the last 156 months. In good years, those three managed to have their babies within close

proximity, so that the Sisters could take one extended break rather than a whole bunch of them. These sabbaticals gave Jenny a chance to concentrate on her clothes-making, to fill back orders for mukluks and parkas and stitched blankets for the trading post. And in turn, her sewing gave her an excuse for not becoming a baby oven. “You think I’ve got time for procreation when I’ve got orders coming out my butt for more beaded moccasins?” Jenny would say to Tina or Anne or Bertha when they teased her about her indifference to the little babbling droolers.

Sometimes there was heartfelt questioning on the part of Jenny’s mother, who’d taken on the slight burden of managing the band over the years. “It might be good for you to have a baby,” Ma would say over a cup of coffee at the Schmeeler Restaurant or in her own kitchen. “A child opens your eyes to the world’s possibilities.” Ma liked to talk in feel-good statements that fell apart quickly when you began to pick at their meaning.

Sometimes the desire to have a baby whined in Jenny’s ears like a far-off outboard motor needing a good tune-up. But that was about it. Tina and Anne and Bertha, on the other hand, wore their babies on their sleeves like fat, brown little medals. Knocking out another one was for them as easy and by rote as Gretzky scoring a goal against the Toronto Maple Leafs. They treated it like some ridiculous hockey game: Tina 5 — Jenny 0; Anne 4 — Jenny 0; Bertha 4 — Jenny 0.

But one good thing came from their birthing rituals; when they returned to practice after sweating another one out, a whole flood of inspiration followed. The Sisters played like demons for the next couple of months. Jenny imagined that the four of them were psychically plugging into whoever the new mother happened to be, surfing her wave of pent-up and finally released estrogen. Some of the Sisters’ best songs had been born,

so to speak, during jam sessions interrupted by constant breast-feeding and diaper changing. It was a shame that so few people actually got to hear the music now, a shame that punk rock had become a dinosaur. The Turtle Stone Hall only had the guts to book Sisters of the Black Bear once a year — on New Year's Day, of all days, when bingo was the last thing on people's minds. Obviously, live music was too. The band had decided unanimously to pull a no-show this year if the hall came knocking lamely in late December. The band was Jenny's baby, and she wasn't going to have her child laughed at and scorned by a bunch of hung-over bingo players any more.

Other than the annual New Year's gigs, the Sisters hadn't played live much in the last number of years. Last winter, after a particularly brutal blizzard that had shut down the rez and kept almost everyone indoors for three days, Tina had shown up at practice with a sheet of paper. "I worked something out," she announced, waving the paper. "In the last ten years we've played approximately forty-six hours in front of a live audience, including encores. That's about four and a half hours a year, maybe two gigs annually, on average." Jenny and Anne and Bertha stared back at Tina, speechless. "I was shut in the house with Joe and the kids," Tina said defensively. "I went a little stir-crazy."

"So what you're saying," Anne said, "is that, other than the annual bingo gig, we manage to play only once a year."

"Not exactly," Tina answered. "Back in '86 we played four shows in one year. But for the last five years or so, New Year's Day has been about it."

"So what are you saying?" Jenny asked. "You don't think we should bother any more?" Nobody answered. "Is your silence telling me you all want to quit?" she asked, raking the others with her eyes.

“Maybe not quit,” Bertha finally spoke quietly, looking tiny and round and meek. “But maybe we should try some new material or something. Punk’s been gone for a long time. I mean, there aren’t too many people around any more who are into the two- and three-chord thing.”

“She’s right,” Anne said. Tina nodded.

“Bertha means the three-*power*-chord thing,” Jenny said angrily. “Isn’t that what brought us together in the first place? The angry force of rebellion? A kind of music that allowed anyone to play it? We didn’t just learn three chords, we mastered them! Don’t forget the glory days.”

“That doesn’t mean we can’t go in a new direction,” Anne said.

“Yeah. Look at Nirvana or Hole or Green Day,” Tina followed. “They’ve done something good without selling out.”

“They’re a bunch of glam rockers, a bunch of poseurs,” Jenny mumbled.

“Maybe,” Bertha whispered, “we’re just too old for this.” Jenny stared at Bertha holding her beat-up Stratocaster copy on her lap, fiddling with its volume knob. “I mean, we got families and jobs and stuff.”

“I’ll tell you what,” Jenny said. “We stick with it through summer, and if nothing comes of it, if we don’t get at least one really good bite by then, we can pack it up for good.”

“We get to experiment with new material,” Anne added.

“Definitely,” Jenny said. “But no Anne Murray covers.”

And so all that winter and into spring the girls practised more regularly. They tried new material, Jenny actually enjoying the challenge of testing her vocal range. Where before she’d had to rely on throaty chants pierced by howls and screams, now she was actually singing, making words come out of her throat that an audience might be able to interpret. Bertha’s guitar

miraculously became rhythmical, to some degree, and she started experimenting with solos outside her holy trinity of chords. Tina sat back and stroked her drum kit with finesse, and Jenny could tell from her smile that playing the drums was a lot easier on her child-strained lower back than frantically beating them. And Anne — well, Anne was the real musician of the group. She played her bass with head down, her long black hair covering her face as she concentrated on crisp runs of deep notes, forging a steady and intricate rhythm that the band relied on. For months it was almost like the old days again, the Sisters eager to show for practice, creating new songs and fine-tuning, even slowing down considerably, their old ones.

But late spring brought a lag in energy. Everyone was busy preparing for the onslaught of the weekends, and the old lackadaisical spirit returned. It might be Tina calling to say, “Julia’s sick again and threw up on me, I can’t make practice,” or Bertha announcing that she couldn’t come because her husband was complaining that he wasn’t seeing enough of her.

With Canada Day and the big Mosquito Beach gig only two weeks away, the Sisters had been slacking off. Not only that, Jenny thought. Soon, very soon, she was going to have to tell the others her little secret. She remembered putting together a tape of the band’s new stuff early last winter and titling it *Return of the Sisters of the Black Bear*. She’d given it to Ma to send out to different clubs in Northern Ontario, and even a couple of the old ones in Toronto that were still around. But the bingo season was raging and Ma was on a very long winning streak. She was too busy to send the tapes out, or had just plain forgotten, every time Jenny enquired.

When word spread about the council accepting musical applications for Canada Day at Mosquito Beach, Jenny felt the baby of an idea being born in her head. The Sisters were slacking again,

they needed someone to give them a boost. But when she listened to their new tape, she realized that they were far from ready. The band sounded slow and scared of the new stuff. The only highlight was Anne's talented bass bopping along through each uninspired song. So Jenny had dug through her tape collection and finally pulled out an all-girl band from the late seventies, a band with the atrocious name Girls' Night Out. They were happy and fluffy and sang in harmony. They'd made a minor splash and were long forgotten. They were horrible but in a sweet, girly way. Without thinking, Jenny dubbed the tape onto a blank one, dropped it in an envelope and scrawled *Sisters of the Black Bear Get Happy* across it, and sent it off to the council.

There was no way they would choose it, Jenny had thought. But she was pretty sure the old men and women on council would snap their fingers, maybe even try and whistle along to the music, decide not to give the Sisters the gig but write a letter saying how nice their new music was and maybe next year, blah, blah, blah. The Sisters would be inspired anew to keep playing.

But the council loved it. Things had progressed too far for Jenny to reverse them. The girls were just going to have to face it and play their own music. They were going to have to find some of the guts they had had in the old days, when the Sisters were a band to be taken seriously.

All of them called the first years of the eighties the "old days." Punk rock had swept into Canada from overseas with the Sex Pistols, The Clash, the Stranglers, the Subhumans. Seven Seconds and the Circle Jerks and the Dead Kennedys and dozens of others had poured into Canada from the south. Jenny still remembered the thrill of the four of them jumping into the car and making the drive down to Toronto to catch the blistering music and feel the intensity of angry youth expressing early-adult angst in little basement clubs.

The Canadian bands had begun making a stir in 1980. DOA and the Young Lions, the Day-Glo's and SNFU all made regular tour stops in Toronto, and even sometimes up in North Bay. "Oh, that Joey Shithead in DOA is so cute," Jenny remembered saying often.

One late night, during the long drive home to the rez after an especially intense show, Jenny said, joking, that the girls should start a hardcore band. They all laughed.

"What would we call ourselves?" Bertha asked.

"How about the Deerslayers?" Anne said. "Or maybe Red Power."

"Nah, I like the Scalp Sisters," Tina said."

"No," Bertha answered. "The Four Skins would be better."

They had decided that night what instrument each would play, and suddenly the jokes had become serious. Within a month each girl had bought her own used, crappy instrument and they were practising in Ma's basement under the name Sisters of the Black Bear. Ma liked the idea a lot, but thought the music wasn't very pretty.

"We're not about pretty, Ma. We're about making a statement on the condition of Canada's indigenous people and especially its indigenous women, and that's ugly. Therefore the music is too."

"But you're not ugly, Jenny," Ma said. She didn't get it, but she'd been helpful in getting the girls their first gig at the hall. Shortly after that, the Sisters made Ma their official manager. She had lots of cousins all over Northern Ontario, and they helped her find gigs for the band. Ma was very polite-speaking to Toronto club owners she didn't know, and Jenny was sure this helped the band get booked there too.

Sisters of the Black Bear had lots to say, and the songs poured out in their first couple of years. By tapping into native anger

they found a deep source of creativity, Jenny thought. After all, Leonard Peltier was rotting in jail for crimes he hadn't committed. Indians all over North America were living in abject poverty. Teen suicides were way higher in Native populations than in any others in North America.

It wasn't until the band released its first tape in early 1981 that the Toronto gig offers started pouring in. After much debate, the band titled the tape *Sisters of the Black Bear — Welcome to the Maul*. Jenny considered every song a minor classic: "Blowing Up the Bingo Hall," "Custer Wore Arrow Shirts," "The Government Gave Dad a Bottle of Whisky for Christmas and All I Got Was This Lousy Smallpox Blanket" and "Who Has the Red Face Now?" All got lots of air play on college radio stations. For a while the Sisters were playing Toronto so regularly that they considered moving there. It wasn't only Jenny who felt swallowed up after a couple of days in the big city, though, and in the end everyone was glad they hadn't moved. As quick as punk came in, it began sinking, replaced by cheesy "progressive rock" and synthesizer music. But by that time the band was a part of the Sisters' lives, and they continued practising together in the hopes that one day punk rock would be recognized again.

And here we are, Jenny thought, come full circle.

The band had their chance to make a statement again, in front of a really big crowd of kids and adults who needed a lesson. She felt stronger telling the Sisters what she'd done.

"You did what?" Anne asked, the night after the emergency meeting, back again at the rehearsal space.

"I gave the council a tape of somebody else's music."

Bertha gasped. Anne's and Tina's mouths dropped.

"Well, we'll just have to tell them to find another band," Anne said finally.

“I say we play and we play hard, just like we used to do,” Bertha said suddenly. Everyone looked over to her, standing up now, strapping her guitar on and turning up the volume knob.

“Yeah!” Tina shouted. “We’ve got new stuff. We’ll play that along with our best old songs. We’ll kick ass.”

Jenny hadn’t seen those two so excited since the night of the show eleven years ago where the whole club had become a giant mosh pit. Tables and chairs were smashed that night; the audience bruised and battered themselves. The police eventually arrived and shut the show down. The band had never been happier.

“What do you say, Anne?” Jenny asked. “If this isn’t punk guerrilla tactics, I don’t know what is! This is the statement we’ve been wanting to make again all these years.”

Tina, Anne and Jenny stood together, looking down at her. Anne eventually nodded, then smiled, picking up her bass.

“All right,” she said. They were back in business.

“Old Jeremy on the council told me you girls turned over a new leaf,” Ma said to Jenny over their daily coffee a week before the gig. “He says you’re actually making real music now. You didn’t say nothing to me about this, Miss Two Bears.” Few could pronounce a name like Jenny Tobobondung, never mind remember it, so back in the old days the girls had replaced their Ojibway names with shorter, more memorable monikers: Tina One Bear, Jenny Two Bears, Anne Three Bears, and Bertha Four Bears. It had been a sign of solidarity.

“Well, Ma, the music is a little different now.”

“You’re not going to go smashing Bertha’s guitar on stage for her again, are you?” she asked, looking worried over her cup, her grey frazzled hair sticking up out of her head. “I still remember that show in Toronto a long time ago, when Bertha

tried to smash her guitar. But she was too small so you had to do it for her. You girls missed three shows trying to scrape up money to buy a new one.”

“No, I won’t smash anything, Ma,” Jenny answered, sipping her coffee. “So what exactly did Jeremy say about our music?”

“He says it’s real pretty, and you all harmonize real nice together now, and it reminds him of music again.”

“It’ll be a good show, Ma. A nice show. Don’t worry.” The Sisters’ new material was plain bad — atonal and uninspired. Jenny didn’t know what they were going to do.

“Wear something pretty for me,” Ma said.

The days before the gig flew by too quickly for Jenny. The four of them spent every hour they could find in the practice space, but still they sounded bad. “Too much distraction!” Jenny found herself shouting one afternoon to the rest of the girls after Bertha’s four-year-old rode his tricycle across Jenny’s mike cord, catching his pedal in it and ripping the mike from her hands. Tina tried to turn the problem of having kids in the rehearsal space into a creative coup by getting them to sing along on certain songs. The idea sounded brilliant, but persuading any of the kids to contribute more than monkey sounds or farting noises proved impossible. Jenny was sick with worry, wondering how she’d ever managed to nail herself into this particular punk rock coffin.

Ma kept the Sisters filled in with early phone reports of crowd size out at the beach as they huddled at her house, trying to psych up for the show. The first band, a pop rock trio from Barrie who called themselves the Brews Brothers, were set to go on in a half hour, followed by a Gordon Lightfoot-inspired balladeer named Serious Henry, backed by his middle-aged band.

Ma's calls from the pay phone at the beach were beginning to grate on Jenny's nerves. "Jenny? It's your mother. My guess is that there's two hundred people here now. Did you fix your hair nice?" A half-hour later the phone rang again. "Jenny? It's your mother again. I had little Frank run around and try to count heads. He says over three hundred weekenders are here, not including locals. What did you decide to wear?" When the phone rang once again, Jenny couldn't hear her mother very well over the din of the Brews Brothers and the screeching crowd. "Over five hundred," she heard her mother say. "Get down here quick."

Jenny walked into the living room where the others sat. Anne nervously smoked a cigarette and checked over the set list.

"Okay, we open with 'Thirty-Something Wasteland', right?" Tina asked as she drummed her thighs with her sticks. "What comes after that?"

"Don't worry," Anne mumbled from a cloud of smoke. "You'll have a set list taped by your kit."

Jenny looked over to Bertha. She sat on a big chair, her feet not quite touching the floor, quiet and still as a small stone. "You okay, Bertha?" Bertha's nod back wasn't too convincing. "Well, Sisters, time to head to the beach," Jenny said, trying to sound chipper, the words coming out shaky.

Jenny suddenly realized that, without anyone actually saying it out loud, all of the Sisters had chosen their original stage dress. As they stood up and headed towards the door, the band's classic look — black combat boots, black torn jeans and black T-shirts — somehow calmed her. They were ready to do battle. Sure, the black didn't exactly have the slimming effect that it had had ten years ago. But there was no getting around the fact that they looked intimidating, a stocky army of women on the warpath, despite all the procreation the other three had been

involved in. A little blocky, maybe pudgy, but still intimidating. As Jenny walked down the steps towards the waiting van, she felt the tight tug of her jeans. She'd never had babies, so what was her excuse?

The Sisters stood in the shadows on the stairs leading up to the stage's side, Serious Henry crooning sadly above their heads. The crowd appeared monstrous from this angle, hundreds and hundreds of people stretching back along the beach, right to the water's edge two hundred metres away. The beer tent along the side was wall-to-wall weekenders and locals. Half the audience listened intently; the drone of talking and laughing and hooting rose from the other half, mingling with Henry's melancholy voice. When he stopped singing, though, the crowd erupted in claps and cheering. Henry tipped his cowboy hat to the audience and, through the roaring, mumbled, "Thank you. Thank you very much. Please stick around for Sisters of the Black Bear."

The Sisters nodded to Serious Henry as he exited the stage and walked down past them, tipping his hat again. Jenny watched the roadies running around the stage, pulling apart Henry's shiny equipment and lugging out the Sisters' battered and sad-looking gear.

Anne handed Jenny a mickey of rye, and Jenny tipped it up and took a big gulp. The horrible taste made her gag. It was fully dark now, and the event coordinator came up to brief them quickly. "You've got a full hour and a half to do your thing, ladies," he said. Jenny thought that if he had whiskers he'd look like a little white rat. "You got a real happy crowd out there. I was told it's the biggest Mosquito Beach turnout ever. You can go on any time now." He walked down the steps and hurried off. "Give us the set lists," Tina said.

Anne's mouth. "Oh my god. I left them at your mother's house."

Jenny felt her stomach sink to somewhere below the tight waist of her jeans. "It's okay," she said, before a panic attack could wash over her. "We basically know exactly what we're going to play. Just keep the communication lines open onstage. We'll be fine." The Sisters walked onstage, into the bright lights and small roar of the crowd.

Jenny felt as if she might be floating towards the microphone, the blood rushing in her ears, until she stumbled on a wire snaking across her path. She straightened up and muttered, "Good evening, folks," into the mike, but no sound echoed across the audience. The damn thing wasn't turned on. She fumbled along its shaft and hit the switch. The microphone squealed to life and Jenny tensed at the feedback. "We're Sisters of the Black Bear," she said, her voice booming shakily across the crowd, "from right here on Turtle Stone Rez. Welcome to the Maul."

There was a short silence. Jenny had been hoping that this would be enough cue for the Sisters to kick into their first song. She looked back and saw that Bertha wasn't ready yet, was still strapping on her guitar. The crowd grew silent. Jenny looked out through the lights and smiled meekly. "We thank you for coming," she muttered, feeling her face begin to burn. None of the Sisters had ever been in front of so giant a crowd. She could feel a thousand eyes staring at her. She looked back again. Bertha gave her the nod and started strumming into the first song. The rest of the band joined in, so slow it seemed they were playing under water. Jenny leaned towards the mike, closed her eyes to the glare and opened her mouth to sing. Nothing came. She'd completely blanked on the lyrics. She felt the band tense up behind her.

They kept playing the song heroically. She stepped back from the microphone as casually as she could, turned around and looked at them helplessly. Anne had her head down, hiding behind her veil of hair, her fingers picking out the notes. Bertha stared at her with a doe's eyes, unsure whether to keep playing or not. Tina glared from behind her drum kit, not caring, from the sound of it, if she was even keeping time. Jenny shrugged and made an apologetic face to them. The song whined down and petered out.

Jenny stepped back to the mike and half whispered, "We call that one 'Thirty-Something Wasteland' ... uh ... we try to make our music match our feelings on the issue." A few people laughed. A fat man close to the front of the crowd shouted loudly and drunkenly, "That sucked!" That got more laughs from the crowd.

Jenny reddened. She made his face out through the bright stage lights. He was a true grub. "This next one's called 'Scalp The Fat Drunk.'" The crowd hooted, which made her feel a little better. Anne nudged her. She still had her hair covering her face.

"Don't sweat it, Jenny," she whispered. "Let's do 'Smoke Signals.' You're real good at that one."

The crowd was restless, talking and laughing quietly. The tone reminded Jenny of a wake. "This is where we start for real," she said into the mike. "This one's called 'Smoke Signals', and it's dedicated to all the politicians blowing smoke up our collective asses."

The same heckler shouted, pointing up to the stage, "You could blow a lot of smoke up those girls' big collective asses, eh?" Jenny stared down at him. He'd taken his shirt off and wrapped it around his head. His hairy belly jiggled as he laughed with his sunburnt friends. The band kicked into the song. It was supposed to have a tribal rhythm, a beating of the war drum, but Tina was so nervous that she was sounding like an epileptic having a seizure.

Jenny leaned to the mike again and began singing scratchily. It was hard to find the beat with the ringing in her ears. *There's smoke signals in the sky*, she quacked, her voice shooting back at her from her monitor, *There's little reason asking why*. This new song was pathetic. All of them were. *It's big industry polluting the sky / Leaving another child left to cry*

Jenny was grateful when the song finally ended. A smattering of applause. The audience refused to make eye contact with the band.

“Now Glenn Miller had a big band,” the fat grub up front shouted to his buddies, making sure to shout loudly enough for Jenny and everyone else to hear too, “but I guess you’d call these chicks a *really* big band.” Nervous twitters from people around him. “Hey, what’s your band’s name? The Bear Sisters?” Jenny noticed that his few remaining friends were polite enough to turn away from her to laugh.

Jenny walked over to Anne. The crowd didn’t seem to know what to do with itself. “Do the instrumental,” Jenny said to her. “Powwow Highway’. It might get the crowd dancing.” Anne nodded her hair-covered face, then walked to Tina, then Bertha. They kicked into the song as Jenny walked back to the front of the stage, dangling her microphone so that it nearly touched the ground. She tapped her foot to the music and stared down at the fat man. He stared back at her, smiling, centre stage and six or seven metres dead ahead. The crowd had cleared a small space around him, and he danced theatrically, sticking his tongue out at Jenny and rubbing his belly.

Jenny smiled back and began to swing her mike in a slow circle, like a stripper with a feather boa. A couple of guys hooted. The band picked up the pace. They actually sounded tight, hitting the right chords hard, surfing along the fast tempo. Jenny swung the microphone faster. The fat man gestured to himself

with both hands, mouthing, “Oh, baby,” to her. Jenny was whirling the mike on the end of its cord, picking up speed, as the song reached its crescendo. When the man reached down and squeezed his crotch in mock seduction, Jenny let the mike fly; it sailed like a silver arrow aimed true towards the man. He was still grinning when it hit him square in the forehead with an amplified and hollow BONG.

Jenny pulled the microphone back in, hand over hand, the screeching of feedback a nice touch, she thought, to the end of the song. She placed the mike back in its grip and stared down at the man. He was sitting on his ass like a fat child, rubbing his forehead. Jenny was halfway to the stage stairs when the clapping started. Just the smack of maybe ten hands together at first. It quickly multiplied so that, by the time she reached the stairs there were hundreds and hundreds of hands clapping, voices rising in shouts and whistles, a beach packed with admirers demanding more. Jenny looked back to the Sisters. They were still standing in place, dumbly staring out at the sea of noise.

There was nothing else to do; Jenny ran back to the mike and shouted, “This one’s called ‘Burning Down the Bingo Hall’. Hit it, Sisters.” Jenny growled into the mike as they kicked in fast and hard behind her. *The Bingo Hall’s burning / The Bingo Hall is burning / The Bingo Hall is popping balls and it’s burning hot tonight.*

Within a minute a mosh pit had formed, swallowing up the fat man, forty or fifty crazed and happy cottage kids jumping in a circle around him like movie Indians, pumping their fists in the air and howling along. More and more people joined in. Jenny grabbed the mike off the stand and paced the stage, spitting out her words, the words a tribal roar now, flying above the guitar and bass and drums. She spotted Ma on the right, back a ways

from the melee and leaning against a birch tree. Wiry grey hair bobbing, Ma tapped her foot fast as she could to the music, grinning big.