

## Vision of the Crow

*by Mitch Lawrence*

### Chapter 1

#### Texas Summer 1829

Lars looked in astonishment at what appeared to be an arrow lodged in his sternum. Eyes agog and mouth adrape with foamy blood, he had enough life remaining to recognize a warrior bearing toward him at full speed. Bow fully drawn, the painted specter released his final act of terror, penetrating the German's throat. Taking one last breath, the blonde-haired emigree was now fully aware of what was happening and could only whisper a faint warning to his beautiful Frau, "Commanche...". Helga Weber was watching with utter disbelief from behind the canvas which covered the precious cargo of the German immigrants. As if in slow motion, she inexplicably wandered to her forested homeland and invoked her own ancestors. 'Did they make similar attacks with blood, lust and hate in their hearts?' Snapping back to reality in the same breath, she raised the flintlock rifle and took aim at the warrior, still mounted atop the wildly painted buckskin. Pulling the hammer back with her right thumb, she touched off the trigger and was overwhelmed with the sonic boom accompanied by an instant billow of black smoke which completely blocked her view. The warrior rocked from the impact of the lead slamming into his left bicep. Recoiling, he released the lock of hair which he had been in the process of taking from the invader's skull. War Lance could hardly believe his bad luck. This woman shouting obscenities in a strange language had nearly killed him! 'Perhaps my medicine was not properly prepared', he rued.

Lars Weber was dead. Helga now focused solely on the life of her thirteen-year-old daughter, hiding beneath the tick-bed on the floor of the wagon. The mother instinctively knew what these marauders would do to an angel like her Johanna. She shuddered and swore loudly in German as she fumbled with the sheath holding the honed steel knife of her prostrated husband. Working the six-inch skinning knife free, Helga jumped off the moving wagon fully intent on killing the mounted warrior holding his arm to keep from bleeding to death. 'The Mules. The Mules!' Why had she not taken the lines and simply driven off at full speed? 'Why hadn't Lars done the same?' No time for these thoughts. 'Kill the killers!' was all that entered Helga's mind. A second warrior worked feverishly to unhitch the mules which the injured man known as War Lance had managed to slow before being assaulted by the woman with fire in her eyes. The Comanche called Little Horse had tried desperately to unhitch the mules without dismounting but the leather tugs keeping the harness attached to the wagon were so thick, and wedged so tightly to the single tree that he could not free them. Hastily leaping to the ground, he cut the tugs, disconnected the neck yokes and drove the mules off. Though still hitched together, the animals were now clear of the wagon and running from the fracas. Little Horse could see his friend was hurt, asking curtly, "are you ok?" War Lance answered with a grin, pretending there was no pain as he turned toward the enraged woman running directly at him. Sliding off the buckskin-colored stallion, he met the fiend with his full body force as she flung her stout frame at him, flailing the blade in her hand. To the warrior's shock, the woman knocked him off his feet, connecting with the knife in a slashing arc. The wild motion opened the painted face from the left eye downward across the nose and mouth, leaving a screaming wound of white flesh and pulsating blood. Although War Lance did not immediately feel pain, he was absolutely overwhelmed by the strength of the savage woman with hair the color of a sunset. This could not be happening! The attacker was now on *his* back while the woman, 'oh how

heavy she is!', was on top, plunging the knife toward his throat, screaming gutturally in a strange language. The warrior was losing blood, and his strength was ebbing fast. With both hands he kept the knife from penetrating his throat, but the crazed woman also held the hilt with two hands and would surely win the contest. Should he begin singing his death chant? How much shame this death would bring to him. Killed at the hands of a trespassing white woman! 'But she was so strong...'

Helga thought of nothing but revenge and protecting her child as she overpowered the man who had killed her Lars. And then she saw a flash of brilliant light, followed by the same feeling she had experienced when falling on the frozen pond back home. A loud *crack*, bright flashes of light, dead silence. Minutes later she awoke to a new reality. A reality she had feared the most when agreeing to come to Texas. Her mother back in Oldenberg was right. America was a wild land full of blood-thirsty men; white, brown, black *and red*.

Fully awake, Helga's fears deepened when she was unable to move her hands. Somehow, they were over her head and tied tightly to the front wheel of the Weber's wagon. Groaning, the emigree opened her eyes wide as she breathed in an acrid odor of wildness and sweat. Hovering over her face, the gruesome-looking attacker was in a rage, wholly intent on penetrating her womanhood. The heavy cotton dress pulled up and around her waist, her nakedness lay fully exposed. Seeing the whiteness of her own widely spread thighs, the German mother's fighting instinct was reignited. With all her strength she kicked upward with a powerful knee, making contact with the warrior's balls. The assailant rolled off in pain and she heard his friend laughing, saying something incomprehensible in his strange language. Helga closed her legs tightly, wriggled her dress to cover her nakedness while screaming her outrage. War Lance was irate. The knee to his manhood left him ashen with a new kind of pain; he would *kill* this crazy white woman! Knife in hand, he was immediately on top of the wild woman, blade at her windpipe. Helga began to whimper, thinking of her hidden daughter who would surely witness her shame. Little Horse watched with amusement as his friend was bested by a woman tied to a wheel but spoke out when he saw the rage in the wounded man's face; "Goshawk will not be happy if this captive is killed, War Lance!" Goshawk had led this raid as he had many others. While the tribe was always interested in keeping captives as slaves, they were also valuable as trade, especially young women. This one was still young enough to bring a big price. Raping was to be expected, especially when the captives were of age. But killing was foolish and Goshawk would not tolerate it. So, the ghoulish looking warrior sighed relief when he felt the savage woman go limp and he knew she would succumb.

Watching from inside the wagon, the thirteen-year-old girl had bitten her lip, leaving smeared blood where she buried her head into the ticking as she fought tears. The singularity of the tragedy was more than she could bear. While losing sight of her mother when the warriors tied her to the wagon, the girl could still hear her fighting and knew she was alive. Not surprised by her mama's *strength*, she was *stunned* at how savagely the Christian frau had *fought*. Noting that the warrior's wounded arm was useless, his face mangled with blood and gaping flesh; the fraulein named Johanna felt a twinge of pride. She had felt the entire wagon jolt when her momma kicked the man hard enough to send him sprawling into her view. She choked back a celebratory yell when the rapist reflexively grabbed his manhood and writhed in pain. But Johanna saw a new menace in those flashing eyes when he arose. She could only watch in terror as the warrior pounced at the hidden woman, knife in the striking position.

A moment later, her mother went silent and Johanna knew that the wounded assailant had killed her. The traumatized girl could not contain her grief, "Nein, Nein, Nein!" Jumping from her cache, she lunged out of the wagon in a single bound. The sound of Johanna's frantic voice shocked Helga's mammal instincts, causing her body to bolt upwardly into the attacker's razor-edged blade. The resulting incision immediately released a pulsing rush of dark blood from the freshly opened artery. Catching one final glimpse of her angel, Helga drifted into other-worldly sleep.

Goshawk rode silently from the wreckage of the other two wagons, calculating the value of both equine and human captives. While Goshawk cared little about the trinkets these invaders carried in their mule-drawn boxes, he knew that his people liked the iron pots, utensils, looking-glasses and other paraphernalia the newcomers traveled with. Some of the warriors liked the emigrants' colorful dresses and bonnets, often wearing them to tatters after a raid like this. But Goshawk wanted *weapons*. Rifles, powder *and* lead. The white man's weapons were the only way his people could remain in power and continue their lifestyle of hunting and raiding. Seeing the woman tied to the wagon wheel, he noted the blood oozing from her neck and the war leader was instantly angry; knowing he had one less hostage for trade. Looking at War Lance, Goshawk put the puzzle pieces together and yelled sternly, "What happened here? Why is this woman dead?" Little Horse occupied himself by tending to the wailing girl, hoping to avoid Goshawk's anger. War Lance, distorted face bleeding and gun-shot arm bound, ruefully began to explain. Nudging his sorrel pony next to the stammering warrior, the leader began quirting him violently about the head and shoulders, swearing loudly and lamenting the man's foolish nature. Whirling the pony away, he yelled at the two failed captors to tie the girl who was *still alive* to one of the mules. "We have a long way to travel. Let's go!"

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Llano Estacado, Texas Summer 1829

Johanna was so thirsty and tired that she began to hallucinate. The mule was wearing out, showing pink flesh where the harness rubbed incessantly as well as white lather along its neck, flanks and hind legs. 'Or had the mule died from exhaustion?' 'Was this the Schmitt's mule?' 'How did I get on this mule?' 'Where am I?' 'Where are mama and papa?' 'Was I just dreaming that the Comanche's killed them?' Scar Face rode his pony close, bumping hard into Johanna's exposed, sunburnt thigh and shaking a quirt at the filthy child's face. Johanna stirred enough to register a look of hate and vengeance when she realized this was no dream. *This* was the wicked man who had killed her *mama and papa*. Narrowing her eyes as she looked directly into the monster's eyes, she spoke low and distinctively in German, "you killed my mama and papa. I will kill *you* one day." War Lance could not understand a syllable of what the captive said and only grinned in return, shaking the quirt in her face. As he turned his horse away, he said in Comanche, "I will teach you how to be a good woman. Soon you will bleed and *then you will learn!*" With lust in his voice, he grabbed his manhood as he cocked his head back and made the howling noise of the wolf.

Goshawk drove his party as hard as he dared, taking the hostages to the brink of death while careful not to exceed it. They would bring the valued guns and ammunition he needed, *if he was wise*. Pushing livestock to the edge was fairly simple, if one watched for tell-tale signs of exhaustion. And so, the veteran raider was angry at himself when the black mule faltered, laid down and died. The animal would have brought a fair price from the Comancheros. That was *two unnecessary losses* in what should have been an easy and profitable raid. The large woman with hair like sun had fought fiercely, and even

though War Lance had killed her accidentally, the unwarranted loss angered him. War Lance was a skilled warrior but too focused on his man pleasure. His appetite for women was insatiable and it had caused many problems, this just being *the latest*. 'Aiyee!' Now War Lance owned a wounded arm and a mangled face as a result of his lust. 'Perhaps he will learn to control his urges' thought the senior warrior as he pushed the caravan to the designated meeting place known by the Mexicans as Llano Estacado. Goshawk desperately wanted additional weapons and he was disappointed by his dwindling trade advantage.

The obscene gesture from Scar Face jolted Johanna's mind into action. She began to think of escape. The idea of being someone's slave, wife, or worse overwhelmed her thoughts, and she made up her mind that *she would escape*. She would *definitely* go back to Oldenberg. The thought of her beloved Grandparents, Oma and Opa filled her breast with hope, and she began to shape a plan. Surveying the other captives, she noted they were all mounted, most of them riding double on the mules. There were two women, a sixteen-year-old girl, three young girls and two small boys. The two fraus had been repeatedly abused each night they stopped for rest, making the women virtually crazy, and likely not much help. Reflecting on her sixteen-year-old friend Lena, Johanna had a flicker of hope that she could be a reliable accomplice. For some reason she was not being abused, even though she was a well-developed young lady and the warriors were clearly interested in taking pleasures with her. But each time one of the warriors made an advance at the brown-eyed fraulein, the warrior who wore white feathers intervened. He seemed to be the leader; not necessarily in control of the others, but when it came to trade 'wares' he seemed to have authority. Johanna had not yet reached maturity, but her bosom was beginning to develop, and she knew she would begin her menses soon. Her mother had prepared her for such a matter, and she prayed nightly that God would delay this event forever. Scar Face's friend had felt her private parts and showed disappointment at what he discovered. While she could not understand the Commanche words, she was grateful when the men kept their distance. It pained her to see the humiliation of the fraus by so many warriors. They simply lined up and took their pleasures as the women either stared blankly into the heavens or prayed for death.

The Weber party had been made up of three families, all heading to German settlements near a place called Austin. Johanna was a little uncertain whether Austin was part of America or Texas. It did not matter now. These Commanche warriors were clearly in charge of this endless stretch of earth that no civilization had managed to claim. Like the others in her party, Johanna was a devout Lutheran. The thought made her sob, knowing how proud her papa was to be going to a new land where Germans could worship as Martin Luther had proclaimed. She wondered if the Commanche worshipped *anything*. All she had seen was cruelty and debauchery from them and she *hated* them; even though that was not the Lutheran way. The group of travelers had all been experienced livestock farmers from the Oldenberg Region of Germany; all willing to take the risks inherent to traveling to this Edenic trace for the promise of a better life. All three of the men were *second* or *third* sons and would not inherit family land reserved for the eldest sons in the European tradition. They had all heard of the dangers of Texas in gory detail. To say they were ignoring those dangers was not entirely true but like most human beings, they were certain that tragedy would strike *someone else*. The remaining Weber party now rode bareback, hands and feet tied, single file to their new destiny. Suddenly Johanna felt the bile of anger rising in a way she had never experienced. 'Why had papa taken this risk? How could he leave his angel all alone with these heathens?' Bursting out "Papa! Mama! Where are you?!"

Nightfall came and even the warriors were beginning to show fatigue from the endless days of travel. Johanna did not know what their destination was, but she instinctively knew their situation would not get any better and likely, worse. She was beginning to pick up some of the sign language the warriors preferred to use and understood that they would be meeting some other men after two more nights. She must escape *this night*. It *had* to be *tonight*. As the warriors and hostages began making camp for the night, the horses and mules were hobbled and set free to graze. While not the lush green pastures of Oldenberg, the animals made do with what was in front of them after taking long drinks from a muddy wallow. Johanna's feet were untied by one of the warriors. He showed genuine concern for the hostages at times, especially when the bully 'Scar Face' was not around. With wobbling and painful steps, Johanna stretched her cramping muscles and walked to a scrub pine tree to relieve herself. Her dress was in tatters, barely covering her aching, sunburned legs but it was the only cover she had. The days were unbearably hot but she *dreaded* the cold she must endure each night. Lena was also allowed to wander to some privacy and was smoothing her equally tattered dress when Johanna whispered in German, "Lena, *we must escape*. We must leave *tonight*." Looking around with fear in her eyes, Lena whispered in a shaky voice, "Johanna, I cannot leave my *little brothers*. And besides, we will be *captured and beaten* if we try to leave!" With resolve in her voice, Johanna implored, "Please Lena, you are my *friend*! *Together* we can run away and return with *help*." "Johanna, you are not thinking right. Returning with help would take weeks and my family will be *long gone* by then", Lena said a little too loudly. Abruptly the brown-eyed girl turned away, as if to prove to her captors that *she was a good hostage* and worthy of the extra fine treatment accorded her. Johanna knew that Lena was not going to take *any risk*; instead, putting her faith in displaying good behavior. The intuitive thirteen-year-old sensed that this was a big mistake on Lena's part and felt a twinge of despair for the life she could see ahead.

Goshawk had not slept more than an hour or two since the raid. He was exhausted and had to get some rest this night. He must be sharp for trading with the Comancheros. Walking quietly to the young brave named Black Wing the leader said quietly, "you will take the first watch tonight. I will come and relieve you halfway through the night. Be watchful and especially keep an eye on War Lance. He will try to make an advance on the pretty one and we must keep her untarnished for our trading with the Comancheros." He turned and walked a few paces to lie down near the small fire, wrapping his red wool blanket around his body for warmth against the night air. Goshawk was asleep instantly. Black Wing had not had to stand watch over the hostages since the first night, but he was already fighting his need for sleep. Determined to stay awake until Goshawk awoke, Black Wing took a perch on a fallen log and began his watch. Johanna was equally tired but determined to keep her eyes open while appearing closed. She prayed to the Lord Jesus that all her captors would fall asleep and that she would be able to run away without being detected.

Tucked into her boot was a penknife she had grabbed when she had been lying under the tick mattress in the wagon, watching the nightmare of her parents death. The small knife had been lost the previous week and after searching high and low, the family determined it would never be recovered. Johanna was more than surprised when she felt it with her knee as she dug deep under the bedding, hiding as instructed by her now-deceased mama. Instinctively, she had grabbed it and slid it into her ankle-length boot. Five days later, the knife had rubbed the skin raw and Johanna felt relief as she pulled the three-inch miracle free. Examining the camp through slitted eyes, the calculating girl was satisfied that all were asleep. Scar Face had awakened earlier but went back to his slumber when he saw that the young

warrior with a Raven's Feather in his hair was also awake and watching the camp. Johanna slid the penknife into her fingers and began moving the blade slowly back and forth against the rawhide strips binding her wrists. The rawhide was incredibly tough, and it took several minutes to cut a small groove into the hardened material. But the girl persisted with the sawing motion, careful not to move her body any more than necessary until her hands felt the tension release. Victory! Johanna slowly moved the knife into her newly freed right hand, resisting the urge to rub the deep welts and abrasions left by the overtightened rawhide. The one called 'Black Feather' by the captives was unsuccessfully fighting his need to sleep, nodding his head and then snapping back to attention from the motion. As Johanna worked the penknife into the rawhide binding her feet, she was impressed by how much faster the task was, feeling total freedom for the first time since the raid. Praying to Lord Jesus as mightily as she could, she felt instantly answered when she raised her eyes to see Black Feather sleeping, still sitting upright on the fallen timber. Rising to her feet in silence, the girl slowly began backing away, careful not to disturb the other hostages lying in a disarrayed fashion on the ground. She could not help but notice Lena had a well-worn blanket wrapped about her, sleeping like a mouse beside a cat. Once Johanna had backed far enough away to avoid casting a shadow in the fire light, she turned and ran. Running was Johanna's gift. She was born to run. She was the fastest girl her age in Oldenberg. It was rumored that her father had been a gifted runner, traveling all the way to *Munich* to compete with the best runners in Germany when he was a young man. Besides inheriting his stark blonde hair, Johanna had been blessed with Lars' long legs. Sprinting into the darkness, she ran like one possessed with a demon. Instinctively regaining her footing when she stumbled into rocks, holes and brush, she did not know *which* way she ran. It felt like the opposite direction from where they had come. She could not tell. She just ran. She ran until she saw stars, and then *kept* running. *Running was life*. At one point she thought she heard a noise coming from the direction of the camp. The fire was long out of sight though and she prayed to her Lord Jesus that she could continue running all night. *Running was safety*. After the first long sprint, she had to slow to a walk. Her young body demanded it. While walking, she realized she had been gripping the pen knife so tightly that it had cut the palm of her hand, making it bleed when she opened it all the way. Stopping momentarily, she cut the bottom of her dress away to use as bandaging for her bleeding hand. The resulting alteration improperly exposed her legs below the knee. But she did not care. Who from the community would see her anyway? As she began running again, she felt freer than before and realized that the long skirt had been a detriment. The cut hand was yet another miracle to be thankful for. Able to run even faster, Johanna gained her second wind and fell into a steady pace. She felt like one of those horses that seemed to be able to lope forever, covering close to 10 miles by the time the sky began to show its first light of day. Digging in for one more big sprint, Johanna was brought to an abrupt stop by what appeared before her. A massive cliff's edge fell without warning at a 90-degree angle. The runaway pulled herself to a stop before being hurled into the abyss below.

Without further hesitation, Johanna looked for a way down the cliff. But it was impassable, dropping precipitously over 500 hundred feet. Using the new light, she strained her eyes for a way around the massive rimrock impediment, but the cliff extended several miles in both directions. Trapped! Certain that the warriors were up and on the hunt for her, Johanna did the only thing she could think of. She began climbing down the face of the cliff. From toe hold to fingertip hold, she managed to descend about 150 feet before she became stuck. Nowhere to go. Not even back the way she had come. The last step she had taken was almost a jump downward, making it impossible to backtrack. 'Think. Think. Where next?' Looking down and to her left, Johanna saw her only hope. A small crevice, not more than

a crack in the face of the rock, looked like it had enough space to fit into. Perhaps she could finally catch her breath and get a little rest.

The sound of people caused her hopes to rise, only to be dashed to the valley below when she recognized the distinct voices of Scar Face and the white-feathered leader. With nothing in her soul but fear, Johanna jumped downward and grabbed a small scrub brush clinging to life in the crevice the girl was aiming for. Scrambling into the crevice, the young German was completely camouflaged; only a small fluttering of her skirt dancing in the breeze which was quickly refurled into its rightful place.

War Lance was now the angry one. "Why did you put *Black Wing* in charge of watching the camp? Black Wing is weak, *and* he is young. Why did you not put *me* in charge? I would have stayed awake all night. I am *Comanche!*" Spitting blood and phlegm from the wound that cut through his upper lip, the indignant warrior continued, "That girl is trouble and carries the ghost of her mother who foolishly died by lunging into my knife!" Goshawk mostly ignored the incensed warrior. The girl's tracks had been easy to follow, leading straight to the rimrock canyon 's edge. The chieftain could even see where she turned in the loose sand and fell to her knees in order to descend the steep canyon wall. He knew for certainty the running girl with yellow hair was nearby, but the party would need to tie up the ponies and descend the steep canyon wall to retrieve her. That could take hours, and time was running out. Furthermore, the search party had crossed a set of tracks made by 15-20 ponies. They were unshod and would have been hard to distinguish from Comanche ponies except Goshawk noticed one horse was wearing Rawhide wraps on the front hooves. Two of the ponies were heavily laden, making the war leader suspect a group of far-ranging warriors, probably Apache hunters. The horse was probably sore-footed, and Apache always carried a set of leather booties in their kit. Goshawk doubted the enemy tribesmen were on the warpath this far from home. The Apache preferred to raid Mexican villages and there were *none* this close to the Llano Estacado. Mescalero and Chiricahua Apache often traveled this far east to hunt the buffalo of the Southern herd, but not this time of year. 'What is my old enemy up to?' wondered the insightful man. Goshawk was not afraid of fighting but could only imagine *delay* as the *best* outcome of such a conflict. The Comanche raiding leader had agreed to meet the Comanchero named Tomas Cordoza by high sun tomorrow. This meant they would have to push the animals and hostages to their limits to make the rendezvous on time. If the girl was not found within the hour, they would have to leave. They would find her on the way back home. After all, where could a white child *possibly* hide in this country where a Comanche war party could not find her?

Johanna tried desperately to disappear into the crevice. She knew she was very close to discovery and began praying fervently to her Lord Jesus for delivery from this evil. She could not see anything except the sheer drop to the valley floor below, and her hearing became exceptionally tuned to any noise encroaching on her nest. All she could do now was wait, pray and get as small as possible in the crevice.

Black Wing had traveled with the searchers and while he had proven to be a disappointing night-guard, he was slender and wiry, making him an ideal candidate to descend the canyon wall. Besides, his failure of last night would be forgotten and he would be exalted in praise if he found the runaway. As he descended over the rimrock, Goshawk admonished him to keep the girl from harm as she was highly valuable in trade. Black Wing nodded his understanding and vanished out of sight. Looking over the immediate terrain, there was enough disturbance in the soil and plants to see which way the girl had gone. The lithe warrior quickly covered 75 feet of the trace when the tracks seemed to disappear. The rock face was devoid of any dirt or plant that had obviously been disturbed, forcing the young

Comanche to rely on his intuition to make the correct choice of where the girl was heading. Black Wing quickly concluded that the obvious direction would have taken the hostage along a gradual but barely distinguishable fracture in the wall that led to a larger shelf. Through a leap-frogging fashion the girl could have continued a descent all the way to the valley floor. Scaling along the fracture with the skill of a ram, Black Wing was positive he would find the girl hiding behind a cluster of brush ahead. As the warrior approached the obvious hiding spot, he was reproofed to find it void of a yellow-haired escapee. 'Strange' he thought, 'Where else could she be?' 'Perhaps she made it further down the cliff than I thought.' Just as Black Wing resumed his descent, he heard the sound of a dove cooing above. Knowing this was Goshawk, the Comanche called back in similar fashion. He would climb back up the canyon wall and see what the senior warrior was concerned about. In less than 5 minutes Black Wing appeared at the rimrock edge where the search party anxiously awaited. Goshawk asked in the hand language if the warrior had seen any sign of the girl. Using silent hand motions, Black Wing told him that while he lost the track, he was certain of the only direction she could have gone. To the young warrior's surprise Goshawk signaled to mount his pony. There were enemies close by and the Comanches needed to move fast in order to meet up with the Comanchero, Tomas Cordoza. Downcast, Black Wing nodded and swung onto the black pony, following the others back to the encampment of his personal failure. 'Aiyee, why did I fall asleep?'

Johanna thanked her Lord Jesus as the events unfurled. The warrior who had fallen asleep and made it possible for her to escape was so close she could hear him breathing. At the cliff wall where Johanna had jumped downward in desperation, the warrior had found a way to simply sidle down what seemed like the face of the cliff, barely slowing his stride. Why had *she* not seen this? But, Thanks to Jesus she *did not* see the hidden trail or Black Feather would have been hauling her back to the others like a prize pony. From above she heard the horses stirring and then galloping away. It was amazing what she was able to pick up simply by listening. She now understood how *danger* heightened one's senses, *as well as* one's bodily *reserve*. Breathing normally for the first time since her wild run across the night landscape, she wondered, '*what should I do now?*'