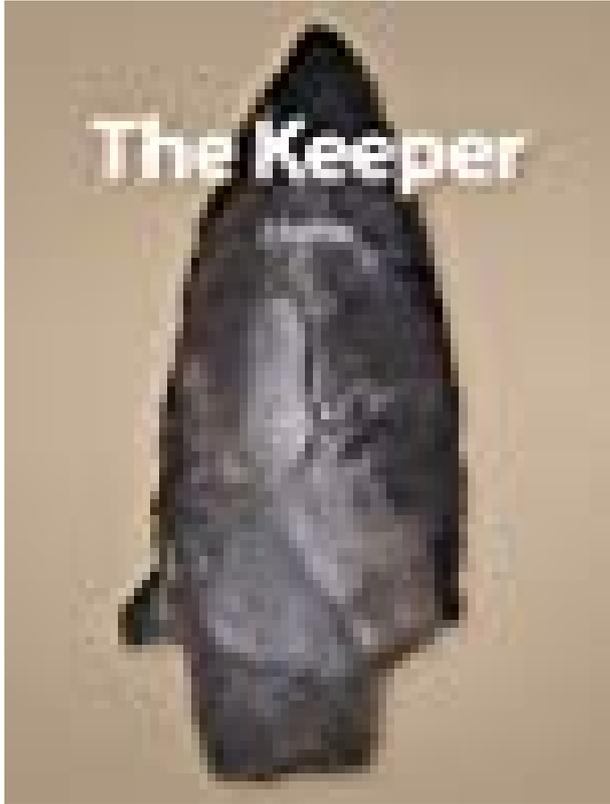


The Keeper



ASIN	B004YKZIIG
Goodreads Rating:	3.40
Pages:	112
Author:	J.T. Kalnay
Genre:	Fiction
Language	English

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The portal to the center of time and space secretly exists in a circle of trees in the Madawaska Highlands. The Keeper has promised to protect the secret of the portal at all costs. He has been given a diamond arrowhead with special powers to help him protect the secret. Travel through time and space with The Keeper as a series of loves threaten his promise, and challenge him at every turn. Please enjoy this sample of The Keeper Madawaska Highlands Summer, 1978 High atop a gray limestone cliff a copper-skinned boy watches the sun rise. Though the long June days have darkened his tawny skin to a burnished copper, they have not and will never warm the deep water. The sun reaches the boy. But the lake is still dark, shaded by the rock. The cliff is nearly bare, adorned only by two ancient trees and a number of red pictographs. One is larger than the others. It is a hand, palm out, that sends its warning down the length of the lake. The cliff is older even than the lake. It shoots hundreds of feet straight out of the cold dark water. The boy often finds arrowheads and spear points near the cliff. Most from his people, but some from the others who have passed this way. Some in friendship, some in anger. He looks out over the water and feels the telltale ripples. A pair of canoes move towards him, towards the cliff. Tourists. Cottagers. Their sounds carry across the dark still water. Though the words are indistinct, their tone carries feelings. The feeling of morning tiredness mixed with hope and anxiety for the coming day, for the adventure on the cliff at the end of the lake. The boy repeats a silent prayer, words he has said to himself and to his Manitou a thousand times in this place, on this rock.

Words passed on to him from his copper-skinned grandmother, whose people were keepers of this place before the cottagers, before the loggers, before the prospectors, even before the missionaries. Simply before.

He touches his necklace, a leather strap that carries a silver medallion that houses a large purple arrowhead. He tucks it under his shirt then slowly, precisely, gracefully, as though this vertical world was his natural habitat, he climbs down the cliff to await the canoes. # The girl dips her paddle again and again, with a delicate yet practiced and powerful rhythm. The last of the early morning mist hangs in clumps and patches just above the black water. She looks ahead at her father's narrow back. An open toothy smile spreads across her face and she tips her head back slightly in a quiet prayer. She thanks her God for all this, for the day, for her father. As she opens her eyes they track again to the cliff looming at the end of the lake. A flash of silver glints from the ridge line. "Did you see that?" she asks. "See what?" her father answers. "Nothing," she says. She dips her paddle slightly deeper, pulls slightly harder, glues her eyes to the ridge. The girl, her father, and the boy sit in the sun with their backs to the rock. Their feet dangle hundreds of feet above the water. "This is beautiful," the girl says. "Yes," the boy answers. "And high," her father adds. "Yes," the boy repeats. "What's that over there?" the girl asks. "The darker part of the forest? It's almost round." "A group of spruce trees. It's a special place.

Important to my people. All my people." He emphasizes the word 'all'. He fixes the father with a look. The father looks away. "Can you take me there?" she asks.

"No," the boy answers. "And you must not go there." "Important how?" she asks. "Important in a way that people from away do not understand," he answers. The girl and her father share a perplexed look and an awkward moment gathers momentum, threatens to spin out of control. Before it can, the boy asks, "ready for the last two pitches?" He stands up, hands the rope to her father, and heads up the cliff. Joshua Tree National Park October 1999 The coffee skinned man has walked through this desert before. Felt its warmth, felt its desolation, and felt its beauty seep into him. It rejuvenates him.

He has come here each fall for years.

At first, just to walk.

To be in the immenseness and the silence.

To be away for a few days. Away from her crippling illness, her need, her pain. It's selfish. But she understands, and encourages him to go. She knows he needs this time. That it sustains him through the inevitable and interminable northern Ohio winter. When the pain will be the worst. When she may not leave the chair.

When her workers will meet her at the door and wheel her to her lab at the start of the day. When he will meet her at the end of the day, and carry her inside.