

MacLean Katherine

# Games



# Katherine MacLean

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*Games:*

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It is a tough assignment for a child to know where a daydream ends and impossibility begins!

Ronny was playing by himself, which meant he was two tribes of Indians having a war.

"Bang," he muttered, firing an imaginary rifle. He decided that it was a time in history before the white people had sold the Indians any guns, and changed the rifle into a bow. "*Wizzthunk*," he substituted, mimicking from an Indian film on TV the graphic sound of an arrow striking flesh.

"Oof." He folded down onto the grass, moaning, "Uhhhhooh ..." and relaxing into defeat and death.

"Want some chocolate milk, Ronny?" asked his mother's voice from the kitchen.

"No, thanks," he called back, climbing to his feet to be another man. "*Wizzthunk, wizzthunk*," he added to the flights of arrows as the best archer in the tribe. "Last arrow. *Wizzzz*," he said, missing one enemy for realism. He addressed another battling brave. "Who has more arrows? They are coming too close. No time – I'll have to use my knife." He drew the imaginary knife, ducking an arrow as it shot close.

Then he was the tribal chief standing somewhere else, and he saw that the warriors left alive were outnumbered.

"We must retreat. We cannot leave our tribe without warriors to protect the women."

Ronny decided that the chief was heroically wounded, his voice wavering from weakness. He had been propping himself against a tree to appear unharmed, but now he moved so that his braves could see he was pinned to the trunk by an arrow and could not walk. They cried out.

He said, "Leave me and escape. But remember..." No words came, just the feeling of being what he was, a dying old eagle, a chief of warriors, speaking to young warriors who would need advice of seasoned humor and moderation to carry them through their young battles. He had to finish the sentence, tell them something wise.

Ronny tried harder, pulling the feeling around him like a cloak of resignation and pride, leaning indifferently against the tree where the arrow had pinned him, hearing dimly in anticipation the sound of his aged voice conquering weakness to speak wisely of what they needed to be told. They had many battles ahead of them, and the battles would be against odds, with so many dead already.

They must watch and wait, be flexible and tenacious, determined and persistent – but not too rash, subtle and indirect – not cowardly, and above all be patient with the triumph of the enemy and not maddened into suicidal direct attack.

His stomach hurt with the arrow wound, and his braves waited to hear his words. He had to sum a part of his life's experience in

words. Ronny tried harder to build the scene realistically. Then suddenly it was real. He was the man.

*He was an old man, guide and adviser in an oblique battle against great odds. He was dying of something and his stomach hurt with a knotted ache, like hunger, and he was thirsty. He had refused to let the young men make the sacrifice of trying to rescue him. He was hostage in the jail and dying, because he would not surrender to the enemy nor cease to fight them. He smiled and said, "Remember to live like other men, but – remember to remember."*

And then he was saying things that could not be put into words, complex feelings that were ways of taking bad situations that made them easier to smile at, and then sentences that were not sentences, but single alphabet letters pushing each other with signs, with a feeling of being connected like two halves of a swing, one side moving up when the other moved down, or like swings or like cogs and pendulums inside a clock, only without the cogs, just with the push.

It wasn't adding or multiplication, and it used letters instead of numbers, but Ronny knew it was some kind of arithmetic.

And he wasn't Ronny.

He was an old man, teaching young men, and the old man did not know about Ronny. He thought sadly how little he would be able to convey to the young men, and he remembered more, trying to sum long memories and much living into a few direct thoughts. And Ronny was the old man and himself, both at once.

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