

VENUS COTE

"I Forgive You"

The pain was excruciating and it wouldn't go away. Venus Cote didn't even want to drink, which was what she spent most of her days doing. Sharp pains were ripping through her stomach. She had to get to a hospital.

Venus pulled on her coat and boots, left her grandmother's house on the Cote Reserve and headed for the road. It was a cold morning in January 1985 when she hitch-hiked into nearby Kamsack and found the hospital.

The emergency doctor quickly examined her and told her she would have to be admitted. Alcohol was poisoning her

body. She was twenty-four years old.

Was this what she wanted? To die a slow, suicidal death from drinking too much?

Charlotte Cote, the daughter of Alice and Cecil Cote and the eldest of their nine children, gave birth to her first daughter, Venus, on July 23, 1960 at Kamsack Union Hospital. The Saulteaux family lived on a small reservation bearing their family name, five miles northwest of Kamsack, located in eastern Saskatchewan near the Manitoba border. By the time Venus was born, her biological father was no longer a part of her mother's life, and her stepfather named her after a little girl he had read about in a story book. The couple had two daughters together, Donna and Beverly.

Venus doesn't remember her mother. She only knows what she was told about her.

One morning Cecil Cote, who customarily checked up on the family every day, went to Charlotte's place to see how she was doing. What he found there was a horror and a father's worst nightmare: his eldest daughter, Charlotte, was dead. She had been killed by her common-law husband. The three terrified little girls were huddled under the kitchen table.

Venus was only three years old. Her little sisters were just babies. Venus never told her grandparents what she had seen. But she had seen something and it was enough to traumatize her into silence.

She was never the same after that. For a long time Venus would stand at her

grandmother's window, looking out onto the road, tears rolling down her cheeks, wondering when her mother would be coming, knowing that she was never again going to come walking up that road...