

## The Moondancer

The Prophet danced in the combined light of the campfire and Grandmother Moon. His reedy voice and withered arms raised in prayer to the Spirit World, that the coming of Great Evil that his Brother, The Spirit of the North Wind had told him of, would not happen.

Physically weakened by the days of fasting, his movements were slow, but sure. The smoke from the White Sage he put in the fire; carried his prayers into a cloudless sky.

Ray Corngrower was on patrol and halfway through his shift. Getting hungry, he radioed in for Code Seven; giving the address of Wilke's Drive-in as his lunch break.

As he turned onto Main Street, a bright red Mustang roared from the parking lot spraying a fantail of gravel behind. When Ray turned on the overheads and the Mustang pulled over.

"Car Five to Base. I'd like a check on Oklahoma 4971."

"Ten-four, Car Five."

Ray turned up the volume on the radio and got out. Approaching the vehicle so he could see the driver in the side mirror, he recognized Junior Sikes.

"Hi Deputy Corngrower," Junior said as Ray looked in the window, "Can I help you?"

"Hello, Junior. You were going a bit fast when you pulled out. Have you been drinking again?"

"After what the Judge said? Are you kidding? No sir, I've learned my lesson and take pride in being a responsible driver."

The smirk on Junior's face gave lie to his words.

"I'm sure that the people whose cars you sprayed with gravel wouldn't agree that you are a responsible driver. I going to have to cite you for Reckless Endangerment."

Junior's face turned red with anger, "You can't do that! My father is a City Councilman. He knows the Mayor personally!"

Ray looked pleasantly surprised and began to write, "Me too. It's a small world, isn't it?"

The Prophet rested by the campfire. His aged bones welcomed the warmth and again the Spirit of the North Wind whispered in his ear.

No one saw his bowed head raise nor heard the chanted prayers turn into his Death Song. His wrinkled face seemed somehow to change and the years fell away like discarded buckskin. He picked up his Staff of Shaman and turned to meet a Warrior's Death in the squealing rage that was upon him.

Ray's shift ended with no further incidents. He changed out of his uniform in the locker room and stopped by Pearl's for a bite to eat.

"We're almost closed," Pearl said as he walked through the door.

"I know," replied Ray, taking a seat at the counter. "I was hoping to eat before I went home."

"Well the grill has been cleaned," said Pearl, giving him a look. "But I have sandwich fixins' and a bit of tator salad. There's still a tad of coffee left or a soda, if you want."

"Anything will be fine."

He helped himself to the coffee and sat back down at the counter, while Pearl fixed his plate.

"Don't want to go home, huh?" she asked, without turning around.

“The place does get empty,” he admitted.

“Sounds to me like you’re pinin’ over some female. Need to talk about it?”

“I guess not. I’m still trying to work it out in my mind, but thanks,” said Ray, as he finished the meal and paid.

Thanking Pearl, Ray went out to his truck. He was about to put it in gear, when Amos Badwater approached his window. “The People need your help, my brother. Can we go somewhere to talk?”

The Evil lay in the cool mud of a drainage ditch to ease its pain. It had no intelligence as humans have, but rather a natural cunning making it one of the most ferocious beasts in the woodland.

Fear was not a part of its makeup; especially fear of the two leggeds, which it associated with the burning pain in its side. After resting until the pain subsided, it rose to continue venting its rage on whatever crossed its path.

Ray’s truck rattled into his yard; its lights playing over the lone figure sitting on the steps.

“What’s Grayson doing here?” Ray asked Amos, without looking at him.

“He wants to talk to you also.”

“I have a bad feeling about this.” Ray muttered, as he stopped the truck.

“Greetings Nephew,” Grayson said, as Ray stepped onto the porch.

“Welcome to my humble lodge, Uncle,” answered Ray, as tradition required. “I am honored to have such distinguished guests. Enter and be welcome. Will you eat?”

The formalities were completed and two hours later.

“No, I won’t do it!” Ray said starting to get angry, “You’re asking me to take part in something I gave up believing in years ago. Go ask John Littlefeather. It’s more in his line, anyway.”

Amos looked at the floor, but Grayson gave Ray a hard look, “The Prophet spoke of you,” he said. “Not anyone else, for the last time. Will you do it?”

Amos cleared his throat. “John is in Pawhuska on a construction job. There’s no one else, my brother.”

Ray went in to get the coffeepot and refilled their cups before answering, “I cannot. How can I succeed in doing something that I don’t believe in, in the first place?”

The Evil stood silently in the shadow of trees that bordered the pasture where a horse was. Its sharp sense of smell doing what its weak eyes could not, pinpointing exactly where the animal lay.

The horse, having fed and rested, would soon arise to feed again. The Evil waited.

Inside the house, nine-year-old Susan Oates was sleeping the sleep of innocence. On her dresser was a framed picture of her in Western clothes sitting on her parade saddle, astride the horse in the field.

She awoke to the animal screams of rage and pain that seemed to come from the pasture.

Not bothering to dress she rushed down the stairs and into the kitchen, where she saw her father loading his shotgun, “Stay inside!” he ordered and went out the door, closing it firmly behind him.

In the breaking dawn the screams had died leaving a silence even more frightening. Suddenly a blast from a gun and the screams started anew, only this time it was her father who screamed.

Susan huddled on the floor in the corner of the kitchen; too terrified to move and wishing with all her might that her mother was here, instead of visiting relatives in Kansas City.

Two hours later the Oates' yard was filled with emergency vehicles.

Ted arrived on the scene as the attendants were putting the body bag into the ambulance.

Parking, he walked over to Sam and asked, "What do you make of it?"

Sam looked tired and running a hand over his face, turned to Ted, "It's bad, real bad.

We're having a hard time telling where the horse ends and the man begins. In the thirty years of my career, I've not seen anything like this."

Ted put his hand on the old man's shoulder, "Are you okay?"

Sam shrugged, "Yeah, I guess so. I'm concerned more about the girl. She's inside with a neighbor lady."

Ted sighed, "Yeah, I have kids myself and would hate to have them go through something like this. Any idea about the cause of death?"

Sam looked toward the pasture, "It was an animal. I'm not sure what kind, but there's nothing on two legs that could be that savage."

Ray had been asleep for three hours when the insistent ringing of the phone pulled him from a deep sleep, "Hello? Yeah, Captain. No, that's okay. The Oates' place? I'll be right there."

He stumbled into the kitchen and poured cold coffee into a mug and drained it in two gulps. Then dressing and running a comb through his hair, he hurried to his truck.

The pasture looked as though someone had dumped a truckload of red paint in the middle of it. The slimy blue and green entrails were blind snakes that glistened in the morning sun and the torn grass was the work of an insane groundskeeper.

Ted watched as Ray squatted down to examine the ground.

"Inspector?" Ray called, "I found something.

Ted walked over to where Ray was looking grimly at the surrounding area.

"It's a hog," Ray said without looking at his friend, "A big one from the size of the tracks."

"A pig did this?" Ted asked, the disbelief apparent in his voice.

"Not a 'pig', an Arkansas Razorback." Ray said, with no surprise or doubt. It was simply a statement!

"I didn't know that anything other than maybe a bear could be so vicious." Ted said skeptically.

"They aren't usually. This one may have rabies or it may have been wounded by a hunter," replied Ray.

"Captain Abraham will want to know about this." Ted replied, "He'll probably want you to lead a search party."

Ray said with a shrug, "I can't. I'm going to be busy. Is it okay if I use your radio?"

Captain Abraham answered the call on the portable radio on his desk, "What did you find, Deputy?"

"It's a razorback, sir." came the immediate answer.

"Can you track it?" was the question immediately broached by the Captain.

"Yes sir." came instantly over the radios static, sounding like an agreement.

"Then I want you and Watts to organize a group of men that you can trust to not shoot someone's cow and kill the damn thing before it hurts anyone else." ordered Abrahams.

"Sorry sir, I can't." came Rays quiet reply.

“What do you mean, you can’t? I just gave you an order and expect you to obey it!” snapped Captain Abraham .

Ray held the mike by his thigh until the Captain paused for a breath, “I quit,” he said and tossed the mike on the seat of the car.

A stunned silence echoed the airwaves then Abraham spoke again, “Did I hear you correctly? Deputy? Deputy! Ray?”

There was no answer.

Ray drove to Graysons’ house and parked in the yard. Knocking on the door, he received no answer. Thinking that Grayson might be in the backyard, he went around the house and saw the old man coming toward him from the woods.

“It is good that you have come,” Grayson said before Ray could speak, “The Prophet is dead and there’s little time. We have much to do.”

“I’m sorry that the Prophet died. He was a good man and of ‘The People’.” came Rays somber reply.

“Though he was my friend and brother, there will be time for grieving later. Now I ask that you clear your heart of all things White and follow me. Enter the Silence and become again what you once were.” Grayson said, as he turned and led the way back into the trees.

Ted stood at attention in Captain Abrahams’ office, listening to him rave and afraid to sit down with the mood ‘The Old Man ’ was in, “He actually quit!” Abraham roared, “Just when we needed him the most! You’re his friend, so tell me why.”

“I don’t know, sir. He’s been acting a little strange since he got of the hospital in Bristow. But he didn’t say anything to me about quitting. “

The Captain took a deep breath and said, “Well, what’s done is done. Get in touch with the Lighthouse Reservation Police, I want a combined effort in bringing this to an end. You’ll be in charge.”

“Yes sir,” replied Ted, snapping a salute, before turning to leave.

Ray was exhausted from the lack of sleep and trying to keep up with Grayson. He was amazed at the older man’s stamina, as they hurried through the woods without pausing to rest. After what seemed an eternity they came to a clearing. A sweat lodge set under a tree and a fire crackled in front of it.

“Get out of those clothes,” Grayson ordered, “The stones are about ready.”

Naked, Ray entered the sweat lodge and sat down on a wool mat. Grayson placed the heated stones in the depression dug in the lodge floor and put more stones in the fire.

Ray poured water on the stones with a gourd dipper taken from a woven water basket. The steam filled the darkness of the lodge. Outside, a drum began to beat a monotonous rhythm and Ray began to sweat the poison from his soul.

Inside the lodge there was no marking of ‘time’. The only light was when Grayson replaced the heated stones. Outside, day turned to night and night into day. Throughout it all, the drums sounded.

Slowly, the veneer of civilization slipped from Ray. His sense of self as he knew it was replaced. By what, he didn’t know. Visions of lodge houses made of limbs and mud brick danced before his eyes. Warriors dressed in ribbon shirts, leggings and feathered turbans flashed by. Were these forgotten memories or hallucinations, he didn’t know, but by that time, he didn’t care.

“Come take of the waters,” Grayson told him. Leading Ray to a small clear flowing stream, he waited while Ray bathed. “Dress yourself”, Grayson ordered, indicating the feathered

turban, ribbon shirt and buckskins that lay on a log. When Ray had dressed, Grayson had him sit and while he applied the war paint.

Starting with Ray's left cheek and working clockwise, he chanted, "Yellow is for the East, that your heart may see clearly. White is for the South, that you may have trust in yourself. Black is for the West, that you may be strong in your truth. Red is for the North, that you might have wisdom and show gratitude." finished, he walked behind the stark figure of a warrior that had been Ray.

"Ray!"

When the warrior didn't acknowledge that he had heard, Grayson knew his task was nearly completed.

Guiding the warrior back to the clearing, he gave him the traditional weapons. The stone knife and the war club carried in the belt and the stone tipped spear to be carried by hand.

"Go now and slay the Great Evil," Grayson ordered and watched the warrior disappear into the trees.

Amos waited until the warrior was gone before approaching his brother, "I still don't understand why we couldn't have just shot the damn thing."

Grayson gave him a stern look, "The Prophet said that while we could kill the beast, the Evil would live on and would return to our People. It's better to end it once and for all."

"What if he fails?" Amos asked, gazing to Ray had disappeared.

"Then we'll have to find another. Do not worry my brother. All is as it should be."

"I guess so." admitted Amos. "I'd better get the sacred drum back to the Medicine Lodge."

The razorback waited on a hillock on the outskirts of the Little Deep Fork swamp. The wound in its side oozed rancid and swollen and the swarm of flies it attracted added to the madness.

It was silent as it listened to the baying of hounds and the shouts of men in the distance. Neither the dogs nor the men worried it. It had dealt with both before.

Leaving the hillock, it searched for an ambush point to make its fight. Once it was found, the razorback urinated in a half dozen places marking its territory before selecting its cover.

"Better call your dogs, before they get too far ahead," Ted told the dog handler.

"They'll be okay. Each is a seasoned hunter and no Arkansas hog is gonna' get the best of them."

"I think we should stop and rest. These rubber boots are killing my feet," Ted said.

"You can rest, if you want. The rest of us will keep going and you can catch up later," one of the men replied.

"Okay. I won't be long." Ted sat down on a stump and leaned his rifle against a tree. The afternoon sun felt warm and the air smelled of fall. "I wonder what Ray is doing?" he asked himself for the thousandth time.

The dogs were close and coming fast, as they followed the scent left by the razorback. It wanted to race to meet them, to greet them with sharp hooves and slashing tusks. Instead, it waited. It knew from experience the strengths and weakness of the pack.

The lead dogs came into the small clearing. They were sniffing the urine when the slower dogs arrived. Unaware of the trap, they all sniffed and the males urinated where the boar had. Then in the way of dogs, most sat down while one or two circled the clearing trying to pick up the scent.

A squeal of rage and it was upon them. It slashed exposed stomachs and ripped soft throats. It broke spines with rock hardened hooves and what was left of the pack fled.

Satisfied that nothing else lived in the clearing, it started back the way it had come. It circled around the hated two-leggeds and would attack from behind.

The hunted was now the hunter.

Tom Long aka "Long Tom" had been raising and training hunting dogs all of his life. His dog specialties included raccoon, rabbit, big cat and hogs. He was answering a call of nature behind a bush, when he heard the sounds of a dog and hog fight in the distance.

"They got it, boys!" he yelled to the four men waiting for him. "Let's go nail his hide to the barn door!"

The men ran toward the sound of the fight.

"Listen to those hounds scream!" puffed one of the men. "I think your dogs are getting the worst end of it!"

"Bullshit!" yelled Long Tom, still running. "There isn't a critter alive that can take a pack of dogs that I've trained."

The five men came to the clearing and stopped short. Before them lay the ripped bodies of most of the hunting pack.

"Good Lord," Long Tom whispered, as he looked on the scene. "What the hell is this thing?"

Ted dozed in the warmth of the sun. His dreams were of his children and the man they called Uncle George. He didn't know that he was being watched by two sets of eyes.

One set hated him because he was human, the other because he was White.

The warrior lay concealed in the tall grass at the base of a dead tree. He saw the razorback slipping quietly through the brush toward the foolish White, who slept on the stump. He permitted himself a small smile at the thought of the Evil killing one more Whiteman, before he killed it.

The razorback walked silently toward Ted, a few more steps and it would be in range of its lightning fast charge.

Then the wind shifted and the scent of a closer enemy caused it to turn.

The warrior watched as the Evil turned to face him and cursed the errant breeze that had betrayed his position. He jumped to his feet as the razorback charged, its scream of rage sending a thrill of fear through all that heard.

The warrior snatched up the spear and held the point low, with the butt braced firm against the base of the tree. His teeth bared in a cross between a battle grin and a snarl.

The razorback's lightning charge through the grass at an angle turned the point slightly, but was enough to break the shaft sending a long bloody gash down its side. Sweeping past, it made a tight turn and charged again. The warrior pulled the war club and knife from his belt. Crouching low, the way a modern day man would fight an attack dog, he waited. A Creek war cry not heard for a hundred years mingled with the squeal of pain and rage as the two came together.

Ted was shocked awake at the first charge of the razorback. He watched in disbelief, as a painted savage seemed to materialize from the ground to battle the animal. His rifle was forgotten, as he sat a captive audience to the fight.

The razorback's tusk hooked one of the warrior's legs, causing him to topple then circled to come in for the kill.

The warrior tried to stand to meet the charge, but his torn leg was weak and would not allow him to stand straight, as a man of The People faces his enemy. The Evil upon him, he fell. In a last ditch effort he warrior brought the war club down with all of his strength, breaking through the skull and brains of the attacking beast. It fell a few feet past him.

It took Ted a few moments to realize it was over. Jumping from his seat, he rushed to where the injured man lay unconscious.

“Ray?” He called and applying pressure his friend’s torn bloody leg, he began to cry.

One of the men was returning to see why Ted was so long in catching up to the group, found them and using the forgotten radio on Ted’s belt called for Medivac.

Ted accompanied Ray to the hospital. “He’s lucky,” the doctor told Ted, “another inch to the right and the femoral artery would have been ripped. He’d have bled to death before the helicopter arrived. “

“So he’ll be okay?” was the question Ted had to ask.

“He won’t be running any races for a while, but unless infection sets in, he should be fine in a month or two.” was the reply.

“Thank you, doctor,” Ted replied and sighed in relief.

“You’re welcome. By the way, do you know a Lou Abraham? He’s called here a dozen times demanding the best of attention for Corngrower. He says that the County is to be billed, as Corngrower is a deputy injured in the line of duty.”

“Yes. I know him.” Ted replied.

“Then tell him to either not call or to lower his voice. He’s scaring the hell out of the receptionist!”