



THE RETURN OF THE BUFFALO

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Wilson Weasel Tail strode up to the podium and whipped out two sheets of paper. Weasel Tail had abandoned his polyester leisure suits for army camouflage fatigues; he wore his hair in long braids carefully wrapped in red satin ribbon. Weasel Tail's voice boomed throughout the main ballroom. Today he wanted to begin his lecture by reading two fragments of famous Native American documents. "First, I read to you from Pontiac's manuscript:

"You cry the white man has stolen everything, killed all your animals and food, but where were you when the people first discussed the Europeans? Tell the truth. You forgot everything you were ever told. You forgot the stories with warnings. You took what was easy to swallow, what you never had to chew. You were like a baby suddenly helpless in the white man's hands because the white man feeds your greed until it swells up your

belly and chest to your head. You steal from your neighbors. You can't be trusted!"

Weasel Tail had paused dramatically and gazed at the audience before he continued:

"Treachery has turned back upon itself. Brother has betrayed brother. Step back from envy, from sorcery and poisoning. Reclaim these continents which belong to us."

Weasel Tail paused, took a deep breath, and read the Paiute prophet Wovoka's letter to President Grant:

You are hated

You are not wanted here

Go away,

Go back where you came from.

You white people are cursed!

The audience in the main ballroom had become completely still, as if in shock from Weasel Tail's presentation. But Weasel Tail seemed not to notice and had immediately launched into his lecture.

"Today I wish to address the question as to whether the spirits of the ancestors in some way failed our people when the prophets called them to the Ghost Dance," Weasel Tail began.

"Moody and other anthropologists alleged the Ghost Dance disappeared because the people became disillusioned when the ghost shirts did not stop bullets and the Europeans did not vanish overnight. But it was the Europeans, not the Native Americans, who had expected results overnight; the anthropologists, who feverishly sought magic objects to postpone their own deaths, had misunderstood the power of the ghost shirts. Bullets of lead belong to the everyday world; ghost shirts belong to the realm of spirits and dreams. The ghost shirts gave the dancers spiritual protection while the white men dreamed of shirts that repelled bullets because they feared death."

Moody and the others had never understood the Ghost Dance was to reunite living people with spirits of beloved ancestors lost in the five-hundred-year war. The longer Wilson Weasel Tail talked, the more animated and energized he became; Lecha could see he was about to launch into a poem:

We dance to remember,

we dance to remember all our beloved ones,

to remember how each passed

to the spirit world.

We dance because the dead love us,

they continue to speak to us,

they tell our hearts what must be done to survive.

We dance and we do not forget all the others before us,

the little children and the old women who fought and who died

resisting the invaders and destroyers of Mother Earth!

Spirits! Ancestors!

we have been counting the days, watching the signs.

You are with us every minute,

you whisper to us in our dreams,

you whisper in our waking moments.

You are more powerful than memory!

Weasel Tail paused to take a sip of water. Lecha was impressed with the silence Weasel Tail had created in the main ballroom. "Naturpaths," holistic healers, herbalists, the guys with the orgone boxes and pyramids—all of them had locked up their cashboxes and closed their booths to listen to Weasel Tail talk. "The spirits are outraged! They demand justice! The spirits are furious! To all those humans too weak or too lazy to fight to protect Mother Earth, the spirits say, 'Too bad you did not die

fighting the destroyers of the earth because now we will kill you for being so weak, for wringing your hands and whimpering while the invaders committed outrages against the forests and the mountains.' The spirits will harangue you, they will taunt you until you are forced to silence the voices with whiskey day after day. The spirits allow you no rest. The spirits say die fighting the invaders or die drunk.'

The enraged spirits haunted the dreams of society matrons in the suburbs of Houston and Chicago. The spirits had directed mothers from country club neighborhoods to pack the children in the car and drive off hundred-foot cliffs or into flooding rivers, leaving no note for the husbands. A message to the psychiatrist says only, "It is no use any longer." They see no reason for their children or them to continue. The spirits whisper in the brains of loners, the crazed young white men with automatic rifles who slaughter crowds in shopping malls or school yards as casually as hunters shoot buffalo. All day the miner labors in tunnels underground, hacking out ore with a sharp steel hand-pick; he returns home to his wife and family each night. Then suddenly the miner slaughters his wife and children. The "authorities" call it "mental strain" because he has used his miner's hand-pick to chop deep into the mother lode to reach their hearts and their brains.

Weasel Tail cleared his throat, then went on, "How many dead souls are we talking about? Computer projections place the populations of the Americas at more than seventy million when the Europeans arrived; one hundred years later, only ten million people had survived. Sixty million dead souls howl for justice in the Americas! They howl to retake the land as the black Africans have retaken their land!

"You think there is no hope for indigenous tribal people here to prevail against the violence and greed of the destroyers? But you forget the inestimable power of the earth and all the forces of the universe. You forget the colliding meteors. You forget the earth's outrage and the trembling that will not stop. Overnight the wealth of nations will be reclaimed by the Earth. The trem-

bling does not stop and the rain clouds no longer gather; the sun burns the earth until the plants and animals disappear and die.

"The truth is the Ghost Dance did not end with the murder of Big Foot and one hundred and forty-four Ghost Dance worshippers at Wounded Knee. The Ghost Dance has never ended, it has continued, and the people have never stopped dancing; they may call it by other names, but when they dance, their hearts are reunited with the spirits of beloved ancestors and the loved ones recently lost in the struggle. Throughout the Americas, from Chile to Canada, the people have never stopped dancing; as the living dance, they are joined again with all our ancestors before them, who cry out, who demand justice, and who call the people to take back the Americas!"

Weasel Tail threw back his shoulders and puffed out his chest; he was going to read poetry:

The spirit army is approaching,

The spirit army is approaching,

The whole world is moving onward,

The whole world is moving onward.

See! Everybody is standing watching.

See! Everybody is standing watching.

The whole world is coming,

A nation is coming, a nation is coming,

The Eagle has brought the message to the tribe.

The father says so, the father says so.

Over the whole earth they are coming.

The buffalo are coming, the buffalo are coming,

The Crow has brought the message to the tribe,
The father says so, the father says so.

I'yche'! ana'nisa'na'—Uhi'yeye'heye'!
I'yche'! ana'nisa'na'—Uhi'yeye'heye'!
I'yche'! ha'dawu'hana'—Eye'ae'yuhé'yu!
I'yche'! ha'dawu'hana'—Eye'ae'yuhé'yu!
Ni'athu'-a-u'a'haka'nith'ii—Ahe'yuhé'yu!

(Translation)

I'yche'! my children—Uhi'yeye'heye'!
I'yche'! my children—Uhi'yeye'heye'!
I'yche'! we have rendered them
desolate—Eye'ae'yuhé'yu!
I'yche'!—we have rendered them
desolate—Eye'ae'yuhé'yu!
The whites are crazy—Ahe'yuhé'yu!

Again when Weasel Tail had finished, the ballroom was hushed; then the audience had given Weasel Tail a standing ovation.

"Have the spirits let us down? Listen to the prophecies! Next to thirty thousand years, five hundred years look like nothing. The buffalo are returning. They roam off federal land in Montana and Wyoming. Fences can't hold them. Irrigation water for the Great Plains is disappearing, and so are the farmers, and their plows. Farmers' children retreat to the cities. Year by year the range of the buffalo grows a mile or two larger."

Weasel Tail had them eating out of his hand; he let his voice trail off dramatically to a stage whisper that had resonated throughout the ballroom speaker system. The audience leapt to its feet with a great ovation. Lecha had to hand it to Wilson

Weasel Tail; he'd learned a thing or two. Still, Weasel Tail was a lawyer at heart; Lecha noted that he had made the invaders an offer that couldn't be refused. Weasel Tail had said to the U.S. government, "Give us back what you have stolen or else as a people you will continue your self-destruction."