

WASICHU

THE KILLING SPIRIT

A NOVEL BY JACK RANDOM

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Wasichu: The Killing Spirit

A Novel by Jack Random

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WASICHU

THE KILLING SPIRIT

I have wished to make this book through no other desire than to help my people in understanding the greatness and truth of our own tradition, and also to help in bringing peace upon the earth – not only among men but within men and between the whole of creation.

Black Elk
The Sacred Pipe

PROLOGUE

CRIES FOR A VISION

He had to get out.

When every breath was her voice singing, when every song was her rhythm talking, when every step was her spirit walking, when every thought was a memory of Marie: driving, laughing, praying, crying, screaming, sighing, dying, when every mountain was the shape of her dance, the shape of her kiss, the shape of her breast, the arch of her back, the line of her hips, the taste of her love, her tongue in his ear, her tongue, her taste, her breath.

He had to get out before he became a dead woman's memory. He had to get out before her ghost swallowed him whole and his spirit left him for a corpse.

So he took to the road.

Crying for a Vision, Grandfather said. What the White Man called a Vision Quest. "When you have had your vision, you will come home."

He leaned his head outside and took in the smell of cows, the smell of hay, the smell of manure, the smell of horses, pigs and farms, the smell of crew cuts, cheerleaders, redwood barns and white picket fences. Kansas, he smiled.

The sign read: St. Louis 234 miles.

JACK RANDOM

Lala did a little shimmy and Jerico shot her some gas. She lurched and galloped down the open plains, chasing the White Buffalo, seeking the Red Road, following the ancestors to the mountaintop where he would cry for a vision. For three days he had ridden the blue highways and already he knew his pony better than in the twelve moons since she came to him.

The radio sputtered static so he gave the dial a spin with a rap on the dash. A mourning wail of fiddles emerged in high fidelity. Neil Young & Crazy Horse. The white man with a red man's spirit. He had overcome his many advantages and learned to speak in the language of his native brethren. So now Crazy Horse, the great Lakota war chief who led his warriors into battle on a white Appaloosa, delivered a message to his descendent and one of his blood.

Jerico Whitehorse pulled over to the side of the road and allowed the dust to settle. He turned off the engine and tuned his ear to the hum of cicada. He walked a slow circle from east to south to west to north, surveying the surroundings, scattered farms, patches of green grass, rows of corn, groves of maple and Kansas oak, looking for a sign. On the fourth circle, a crow sounded from the east and flew to the south.

Jerico knew what he must do.

He would cleanse himself in the waters of the great river to the east, then he would follow her south to the source, south to the beginning, south where the great winged one protects those on the sacred path, and south where all the generations emerge and where they return in the fullness of time.

There, at the womb of mother earth, he would cry for a vision.

Inipi: The Rite of Purification

We leave behind in the Inipi lodge all that is impure, that we may live as the Great Spirit wishes, and that we may know something of that real world of the Spirit, which is behind this one.

Black Elk

CHAPTER ONE

SIGNS AND OMENS

Where the great river meets the endless forest, it winds like a snake and the road following its path winds with it. Jerico walked Lala on this path. They would take time to breathe and gather signs. Though the river runs swiftly, it remains in the same place.

On the night before he left the reservation his grandfather came to visit. He offered guidance and told him about a prophecy handed down from generation to generation. He reminded his grandson of a man who came to the reservation many years ago, a spiritual warrior from the American Indian Movement, an elder of the seven tribes, who expressed concern that the young people were losing touch with their culture and traditions.

Grandfather brought Jerico to listen to this man speak of the old ways, the birth of the seven tribes, the coming of White Buffalo Calf Woman, the seven sacred rites and the great divide in the native land when the white man came with his guns, his smokestacks and his bible. At that time the tribes faced a turning point. Most came to believe they had no choice, that the Lakota way had come to an end, and that the whites were far too many and too powerful to resist.

Those who believed as they did followed the agency

WASICHU: THE KILLING SPIRIT

Indians like Red Cloud and Long Jacket. They adapted to the white man ways. They went to their church and delivered their children to the white man's Indian Schools, to be taught the white man's tongue, to believe in the white man's God, and to be trained in the white man ways.

Those who refused to believe as they did followed the wild Indians like Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse. They lived away from the blue coats as long as they could but with the buffalo gone, railroads and ranches dividing the land, women and children hungry and cold, they gave in and reported to the agencies. They gave in but they did not surrender. They remained proud of who they were. They did not give up their beliefs, their traditions and culture.

The killing of Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse by the hands of their own people marked the end of an era. It became more dangerous than ever to be free, to be Indian and to resist the white man ways. The wild Indians remained true and remembered but they hid the truth inside. To speak their own tongue, to dream as the old ones did, to dance the Ghost Dance or to cry for a vision invited the cruelty of their captors.

Jerico listened to his grandfather knowing that he had studied well the history and traditions of his people. None of this was new to him and he would not forget what he had taken to heart. They sat by an open fire gazing at the stars in a broad cloudless sky as Grandfather lit his pipe and passed it to his grandson.

"Your father was a good man. He held to the old ways. He walked the red road. He was good to your mother."

He filled his lungs with clean fresh air and looked inward as his eyes grew wet remembering. A warm and pleasant night, they could hear people walking and talking in the street nearby. Jerico felt the muscles of his gut tighten. With all that had happened he had not thought of his father in a very long time.

"It is a familiar story. He went off to the white man's

JACK RANDOM

war and came back with a dark spirit buried in his soul. He suffered. He drank. He left the reservation to save his family and friends from the pain he knew he would bring to them.”

Grandfather had not spoken of these things before so he wondered why he chose this moment. Did he fear that he would become his father? Did he fear that he would never return? Did he fear that he would abandon the red road as his father had?

“When a man breaks his heart, his spirit is wounded. He may forget who he is and why he walks the earth. On the day your father left, he came to me to ask that I look after you. I have done what I can do to prepare you for your journey.”

His father left the reservation when Jerico was only four. When he remembered him it felt distant and strange. His grandfather became his father in all ways and their bond grew strong like the river to the land. He loved his grandfather and would always be grateful.

“That old warrior called me aside after his talk. We spoke for hours about many things. He told me that Crazy Horse had a son by Black Buffalo Woman. It dishonored him for she was not his woman so the people kept it secret but the knowledge passed down to him and he passed it to me as I now pass it on to you.

“He told me that Crazy Horse was the greatest of all Lakota. It was prophesied that he would bring great change to the world. But Crazy Horse did not live long enough to fulfill his destiny. He did not complete the great cycle of the seven rites. His promise must be kept by others who carry the seed of his blood.”

He could see that his grandson’s mind wandered. He struggled to focus on the present. Even a much older man would have difficulty. Marie died in an accident, a tragic accident, but his grandson held himself to blame. Grandfather did all he could to comfort and assure him. Now he could only allow him the time and space he required. He

WASICHU: THE KILLING SPIRIT

took in the sounds, sights and scents of a summer night, the flutter of an owl, the fragrance of sweet grass, the spectacle of the stars and distant planets as he waited for Jerico's mind to return.

He knew that Jerico could not fully appreciate or even understand the words he spoke but he needed to hear them. He believed the purpose of his grandson's journey was greater than the healing of a broken heart. He believed that the Great Spirit intended Jerico to carry on the mission of Crazy Horse. He spoke when he felt his grandson was capable of hearing.

"The old warrior believed the mission of Crazy Horse passed through his bloodline. He said that all followers who believed as he did would dedicate their lives to the one who the Great Spirit chose. But the one who carried the seed would not know it until he completed the cycle."

Over the years he saw to it that Jerico learned the seven rites of the Lakota. Though too young to be a spirit guide he held the necessary knowledge to perform the rites as they were by the ancestors. When Marie died and Jerico dove into the dark world of sorrow and regret, Grandfather knew he had to let go. A mentor, a teacher, a parent or a grandparent can only do so much. The rest is up to the child.

Jerico would leave the tribe in despair and darkness. His people could not be sure he would return. They could only trust the stars, the healing spirit and the faith that guided the Lakota since the beginning of time.

Grandfather gave Jerico two books for his journey: *Black Elk Speaks* and *Strange Man of the Oglalas* by Mari Sandoz. The first was inscribed "Remember" and the second "Understand." Jerico did not inquire. His thoughts drifted far away like clouds on the wind. He had already read both books but if his grandfather wanted him to carry them he would do so without question. With an embrace they said goodbye and as a yellow moon lowered on the horizon, as the scent of the living earth washed over them, as the sorrow of

JACK RANDOM

many tragedies drew tears to their eyes, they would hold on to this moment for as long as memories endure. His mind scattered in seven directions, he drove along the river, taking in the discarded metal of the white man's industry, tractors, sheds, motorized vehicles, ploughs, stoves and dishwashers, rusting in the places of their disposal. He camped in near darkness down river from St. Louis. He climbed a fence with barbed wire to find his way to the riverbank. There he labored for hours, clearing a campground littered with plastic bags, aluminum cans, old radios, the shells of cigarette cartons, milk cartons, detergent boxes, plastic wrap and containers of every size and description. He reflected that the white man lives as if his is the last generation to walk the earth, as if his children and grandchildren did not exist, and maybe he was right. Maybe there is no future, there is only today. It was anathema to everything he believed. He reflected that the white man is the only creature on earth that spoils its own habitat.

He avoided shards of glass and jagged concrete and sat where he could wade his feet in the muddy waters of the great river, sitting motionless, breathing in and releasing the smell of oil and gasoline, releasing the sight of floating fish and the skeletons of poisoned wildlife, egrets and gulls, possums and raccoons that relied on these waters for survival. He sat for hours, legs folded, eyes shut to the world, hands open to Father Sky, breathing in and releasing his rage at the white man's ignorance and mendacity, discarding his toxic waste into the waters that gave him life, burying his poison where it will do most harm.

When at length he found a quiet space within, he leaned into the muddy waters and let the great river cleanse his body, mind and spirit. He let the current take him, watching the heavens float by in a sky of darkness. His mind traveled to the sweat lodge back home. He remembered the waves of white heat, the smell of sweet grass, the passing of the pipe. He remembered ancient faces emerging from the darkness of

WASICHU: THE KILLING SPIRIT

the lodge, the glowing white stones, the explosions of steam as sacred waters were poured on them, and the waves of sweat flowing from his body. He remembered the deep, solemn satisfaction that entered his soul upon completing the four cycles.

"If you are going to do Inipi," Grandfather said, "do it right."

Together they walked into the hills, far from the village of shantytown cabins and shacks where most of his people lived. For two days, they fasted. "When you are older," Grandfather said, "you will fast four days." Jerico protested that he would fast four days now but Grandfather only smiled. They gathered willows, logs, sticks and smooth, round stones. They built the lodge, the fire pit, and lined the sacred path, working in the old ways, side by side, in the ways that were handed down by the ancestors.

"If you are going to do Inipi, do it right."

As he climbed up the bank and hiked back to camp, the river came alive with creatures shuffling in the brush, bright eyes in a black forest, the haunting hoot of an owl, the yip of coyotes far from their native land, fish jumping and wild dogs scavenging, howling and yapping, cicada and tree frogs in their nocturnal serenade. Even the bright lights of a floating riverboat casino, a paddleboat steamer with its Dixieland jazz and costumed revelers seemed natural and right. Everything was in its place.

His thoughts turned to his ancestors and the one all Lakota remember first. Crazy Horse cast aside tradition and the ritual of Inipi when he first went to the mountain to cry for a vision. His father, who was Crazy Horse before him, was displeased. Together they would relive the spiritual journey in the sacred and prescribed manner but the vision would remain the same. He would not be killed in battle. The white man's bullet would never pierce his body. No enemy would harm him as long as his people remained true. He would be humble, he would take nothing from his

JACK RANDOM

victories, he would wear no trophies, and he would always help his people first, yet he would live with the knowledge that one day a trusted brother would hold his arms and mark his passing to the other world.

Crazy Horse held true to his vision and the Lakota ways. Jerico vowed that he too would remember the old ways. He too would wear plain clothes. He too would seek no glory or gain for his victories. Like the great Lakota warrior, he would always hold the people in his heart.

Only once did Crazy Horse betray his vision. Only once did he allow pride to bend his judgment, accepting the honor of becoming a shirt bearer and desiring a woman forbidden to him. He paid for that transgression with a bullet to his face. That he survived cannot be explained except thus: he should have died but it was not written.

The greater truth of Crazy Horse was that the liquid world of dreams was as rich and alive and palpable as the world we call life, a world ironically dominated by fear of death. To Crazy Horse this life was a shadow and the dream was the greater reality.

He built a fire and his eyes joined the dance of flames before he settled into a deep sleep where he dreamed of the old ways, a dream of hunting and counting coup, a dream of raiding enemy camps and migrating with the seasons, a dream of the buffalo and the Greasy Grass, a dream of freedom before the white man came.

He had this dream many times before but this time something dark lurked in the shadows, a sense of foreboding just beyond his grasp, something he could feel and smell though it was not there. It smelled like corpses rotting in the sun. He awoke to the caw of the crow but did not stir until certain he was alone.

In the light of day, he could see he had been guided to this place for a reason. His camp could not be seen from the road and the view from the river was obscured by overgrowth and a weeping willow. It was a good place for Inipi. He cut

WASICHU: THE KILLING SPIRIT

reeds of willow, gathered logs and sticks, hunted down Inipi stones, dug the pit, laid the sacred path, and built a sweat lodge in the way of the ancestors, the way Grandfather taught him.

He moved in a sacred manner, slow and deliberate, but he was only one man and could not perform all the roles of Inipi: Fire Keeper, Drummer, Water Man and Spirit Guide. In a world less than perfect, it was the best he could do and for three cycles of the sweat, he prayed that the Great Spirit would take pity on him and hear his cry for understanding. On the fourth cycle, he heard the chant of ancient voices. He saw their faces, marked with worry and wisdom, and looked into their eyes. He perceived something beyond the ancient sorrow and sensed the dark presence of his dream in the folds of steam, in the sacred lodge, in the glowing stones, and in the eyes of the ancient ones. He burned sage and prayed until the darkness receded.

He was relieved to get back on the road. Coasting along the banks of the Mississippi, it felt good to be back at Lala's reins. He allowed the waters of the great river to once again wash over him, to cleanse his spirit and give him new birth. He let go his ghosts, his nightmares, his dark thoughts and heavy shadows. He let the past fade in the rear view mirror as he watched the vines, kudzu and brush of an eternal forest creep over the ruins of the white man's waste. He watched the awesome power of Mother Earth in constant motion, reclaiming the land from the discards of industry. He felt the air, itself, grow heavy and alive as sweat layered his skin and tall trees of magnolia, oak and dogwood, threw shadows on the blue pavement.

A woman with wild red hair in a blue convertible passed him on the narrow road in a blaze of glory. A chill crawled up his spine as three doves flew over the tree line to the west – west where the flame is extinguished, west where the spirit is swallowed, and west where the souls of all beings are laid to rest. A raven's cry and silence.

JACK RANDOM

He saw Marie in the mirror of his mind. He watched her smile turn to lifeless form. He saw her body dancing turn to unformed clay. He saw blood on the pavement of a lost highway. He saw her tears run dry as he tasted his own. He saw Marie behind and Marie ahead as he rounded a curve where an old pickup lay overturned in the brush alongside the road. A man knelt in the scattered debris, coughing blood and bleeding from his forehead. He pulled off his shirt and held it to the man's head, guiding him away from the smell of spilt gas in the dry brush, coaxing him to lie down at the roadside.

"Screw me!" the man choked through the blurred vision of his blood-soaked eyes. "Help her!" He pointed to where the wild woman in a blue convertible went over the edge into the river. There was a trail of burnt rubber, a splintered guardrail, and a path of fresh destruction. He followed the trail, skidding down a steep embankment, where he dove into the waters just as the overturned car went under.

There was life in her eyes when he pulled her from the car and carried her to the riverbank. There was life in her body when he pushed muddy water from her lungs and pressed his mouth to hers to refill them with air. Her lips were cold, her body numb, and he knew as he gazed once more into her eyes that her struggle had passed. He saw Marie.

The wild woman was dead. Nothing he did could save her or bring her back. He heard a distant and wicked laughter in the river running, laughter in the wind through the trees, laughter beneath the wail of sirens and the whirl of lights and emergency personnel barking orders and asking questions.

"What happened? What did you see?"

A woman died. He watched her spirit leave her body behind her. He saw Marie. He sat down in the shade of magnolia, oak and dogwood, and wiped the water from his face.

WASICHU: THE KILLING SPIRIT

“Just an accident,” someone said. “Nothing you could do.”

Jerico did not believe in accidents. It was an omen, a clear and powerful warning meant to move him away from his chosen path. In a few hours, he would move on but a part of him would always remain here, at the side of a winding road, desperate, alone and afraid.

He drove on in a mindless haze, winding along the great river, until he feared he would follow the ghost of his past to his own muddy grave. He pulled off the road, found a cheap motel, ate, showered and slept, praying that a new day would breathe life into his weary bones.

CHAPTER TWO

DREAM READER

He dreamed of Marie every night.

Every night he called her name and she came to him. She came to him on a floating red stallion, hair glowing in sunlight, eyes shining in moonlight, her smile radiating a vast horizon, her warmth melding to his own.

Every night he tried to speak of his unending sorrow, the guilt and shame he thrust into his own heart, his yearning to live those few days, hours and minutes over again, to undo what had been done, and every night she placed her finger across his lips, silencing his mourning cry and easing his pain.

Every night they let their bodies find words they could not find in life, seeking oneness with the wind and sun, seeking harmony with all creatures of the earth, allowing their spirits to be swept away in waves of liquid warmth.

Every night he bathed in her beauty. He received the gift of her lips, her breasts, the nape of her neck, her abdomen and thighs. He gave himself away and yielded to the relentless pull of her womb. Every night he lost his name, his sense of standing, his identity and shame. Every night he forgave himself in the soft comfort of her eyes.

Every night he held her as if he could stop the day from

WASICHU: THE KILLING SPIRIT

coming, as if the sun, the moon and the stars were tied to the beating of his heart. Every night he felt the rhythm of Marie's heart become his own and his become hers and every night he believed she would never leave. He felt her breath, the calm of her embrace, the sweet salty taste of her love. Every night he listened to her peaceful sigh and believed it would last forever.

Every morning he awoke. Alone.

This night, as he lay by her side, holding back the cruel awakening, he sensed the presence of another. How can one describe a thing that has no substance yet it invades one's consciousness, shadowing all thoughts, obscuring all desires, until it alone dominates, until nothing else can exist? It chased Marie away, leaving him tossing in confusion and sorrow.

His anger began as a seed of discomfort and grew like weeds in an untended garden. How can you fight something that will not show itself? How can you answer that which does not speak? This thing, this darkness (for that is the only word that invites description) found its way to his most sacred and private place, a place reserved for his love.

His greatest fear was that he would never again be alone with Marie.

In the long restless night that followed, he had a dream of the Mound Builders, the seven tribes that prospered on the trail that became known as the Natchez Trace. They were remembered for the earthen pyramids they left behind. In the dream a great chief defeats the Spanish conquistadors, holding the head of their leader aloft in victory, only to watch his people slaughtered and his city destroyed by endless waves of soldiers fulfilling a promise of vengeance. Jerico was unsettled by it but he was profoundly disturbed by how his dream of Marie ceased to be, a dream he had dreamed for a fortnight. It gave him comfort. It gave him a reason to rise and greet the challenge of a new day.

Some dreams come from deep within the psyche. They

JACK RANDOM

speak to fundamental needs within the soul. They arise out of basic desires. They are deeply personal and address wounds, chasms of the soul, which can only be healed in the expanse of time.

Other dreams, like the dream of the Mound Builders, spring from a deeper well. They are manifestations of ancient memories, the collective consciousness of an entire people, the instinctive knowledge given voice in the stories handed down from generation to generation.

He often dreamed of his ancestors, so often that he felt a direct link, a blood bond that connected him to Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull, Big Foot and others, but never had these dreams crossed over to other tribes and other native peoples. His were the people of the plains, of the buffalo and open skies. The seven tribes of the Lakota-Nakota-Dakota came from the north and migrated westward in a futile attempt to escape the white man's advance.

Only Tecumseh of the Shawnee had ventured from the north to the tribal kingdom of the mounds. Born under the sky of a great comet, Tecumseh tried to unite the tribes for a final assault on the European invaders. The enemies of the Lakota were not the Spanish conquistadors but the armies of the English, the French and the bluecoats who called themselves Americans. The tribes of the south did not answer Tecumseh's call for they still believed they could make peace with the Great White Father. It would be many moons before the truth of Tecumseh's vision was known and all tribes would unite against the common enemy of the invaders. It was a vision that came from a very deep place, from the soil of the earth and the blood of her people.

Now it seemed the dream of the Lakota joined the dream of all native peoples and the darkness they feared invaded both the dream of the people and the dream of the self.

When he was a small child he would hide in the tall grass, behind trees and rusty cars, where he watched Grandfather burning sweet grass, drawing lines in the dirt, as

WASICHU: THE KILLING SPIRIT

he read the dreams of others. He watched their faces as they struggled with Grandfather's reading. When he was older, he would pound the drum or the keep the fire burning. He would do the same for his father before the white man's sickness poisoned his spirit and stole his gift.

Dreams were important to the Lakota. They were gateways to the over world, windows to the soul, doors to a hidden universe of spirits, and bridges to ancestral gardens. Crazy Horse, who lived in two worlds, was one of the greatest dreamers and visionaries of all the Lakota but he was also a reader of dreams. His father taught him the wisdom and importance of interpreting a dream in the tradition of the old ways.

As he followed the winding road at a saunter, the forest grew denser, smells more pungent, the air ever thicker. He contemplated his dreams and he knew where he must go. He heard stories from travelers about the voodoo priests of New Orleans. While the black robes condemned them as practitioners of the dark arts, blood sacrifice and devil worship, he considered them native spirits. He remembered how the priests and ministers tried to convert him to their church with the promise of heavenly paradise. Their voices were soft and gentle and he listened until he realized that their God would condemn his grandfather to eternal damnation. He understood then that the white man's heaven is for white men alone. In the white man's heaven, the red man was a slave.

Grandfather said: Keep your eyes wide open. Look to Father Sky but keep your feet planted on Mother Earth. The red road is revealed only to those who walk in a sacred manner.

He saw to his pony's needs, fuel, water and rest, and then he let her find her stride on the open highway. They rode with the ghosts and shadows of a moonlit night, hitting the long bridge where the waters of the Mississippi scatter into the marshlands of Lake Pontchartrain at sunrise. He had

JACK RANDOM

never been so far south. He had never experienced a land where the six and eight legs flourished and rabid plant life covered every inch of space. He had never breathed air so thick it covered the body with the sweat of the land. He had never felt the heartbeat of the earth slow to near stillness.

It began to rain and it rained so hard the wipers could not clear the path. Slapping back and forth at a furious pace, as if Lala sensed danger, he let go and allowed her to carry him to safety. She rode into the heart of the great city, the source, womb and birthplace of a continent, pulled to the side of the road and waited, waited, waited for the rains to ease.

New Orleans: Even the name suggested promise. New Orleans, city of jazz and vampire lore, a city of mystery inviting legend and mythology, a dream of endless nights where women bared their breasts on the streets, where swarms of masked and bearded people celebrated and danced, making love in store fronts, drinking until they passed out where they stood, a city of sex, hustle and grime but it was a long time to Mardi Gras and the city that greeted them now was fresh and washed clean by torrents of rain.

He parked on the embarcadero, not far from the cathedral where a man in white with long brown hair, drenched from head to foot, summoned a crowd with his magic flute. He listened and contributed a dollar and a smooth black stone before he walked on through the courtyard down to Bourbon Street, gazing in windows crowded with trinkets like those the white man used to buy Manhattan, ignoring barkers pimping strippers, watching Bourbon Street regulars perched on bar stools with chicory scented coffee, catching their breath and gearing up for the next wave of tourists.

A raven called from atop a wrought iron balcony and Jerico knew he had arrived. He stepped into Marie Laveau's House of Voodoo and there, amidst a cornucopia of charms, potions, fetishes, crystal balls and misshapen dolls, he asked to see the dream reader. The man at the counter sized him up and asked for twenty dollars, a discount for their native

WASICHU: THE KILLING SPIRIT

brothers. He was escorted through a wall of beads, a delicate jingle of bells announcing his entrance. A dark skinned woman dressed in layers of orange, yellow and black, matching bandana wrapping her head, sat behind a round table, draped in blue velvet, and gestured to the chair opposite her. She introduced herself as Madam Toussaint, psychic, master of spirits, palmistry, tarot, voodoo and reader of dreams.

She spoke in a Caribbean accent and moved in the slow, deliberate manner of ritual or dance. The scent of jasmine permeated and the sound of distant waves caressed the senses. Jerico observed her in silence as she examined the space surrounding him, gazing into the air as if seeing what could not be seen with ordinary sight.

“Tell me your dream.”

He told her the dream of Marie as she played a deck of Tarot, hardly raising her head, hardly appearing to listen.

“This is not difficult,” she said. “You have lost a loved one, your soul mate, very likely. She is gone to the other side but she is here with you. She is with you now.”

“And the darkness?” said Jerico.

“It is your guilt,” she replied. “If Marie could speak to you now, she would tell you, you are not to blame. The earth spins, the spirit lives on, and the living must go on living.”

He knew that she was not what she appeared and the reading she had given was no different than what any dime store gypsy would have offered, yet he remained where he was for he sensed that she possessed a gift.

Madam Toussaint looked up, a little surprised that he was neither impressed by the generic reading nor departed. Time is money.

“Is there something else?”

Cautiously, he began telling the dream of the Mound Builders. He carved the image and placed it in the crystal ball of her memories. He pulled tears from her eyes and drew at the gift she carried within her.

JACK RANDOM

Madam Toussaint knew this dream. She had dreamed it this very night. She had placed herself in the role of the chief's daughter and her tears were real. She dropped her accent and folded her hand to his, speaking now as sister to brother.

"I know you," she whispered. "I was there."

He looked into her dark eyes and saw her truth.

"I was your child and you were my chief. The darkness that follows you is strong, more powerful than any I have known. You cannot win this battle. There are centuries of history behind it. It is evil and it cannot be defeated. Like the chief and people of the mounds, you can only run. You can only hide."

She bowed her head and told him the story of her people, the Indio of the Caribbean, the people of God. The Europeans took them from their islands and made them slaves on the mainland. They took the people of the mainland, the tribes of the Natchez, to make them slaves on the islands but the mainland Indians revolted. They died rather than become slaves.

"This is what ties us together and splits us apart: the slave trade."

He asked if she knew the place of the seven mounds. She did but she did not wish to reveal it. "As sure as my tears are warm, it is a trap," she said. "This evil spirit has chosen you for a reason. It wishes to own you as a man may own a woman or a woman may own a man. It knocks on your door at night. It crawls into your bed. It enters your dreams. It will find your weakness and exploit it. Run away. Or better yet, find an exorcist."

She looked into his eyes and knew that he would do neither.

"Follow the Natchez Trace," she said. "It is about a hundred miles north."

She pulled a charm from her neck and held it firmly in his hand. "You'll need it," she said.

WASICHU: THE KILLING SPIRIT

She gave him back his twenty dollars and refused to hear his protest. He understood. She wanted no part of the battle that was his and his alone.

Ishnati Alowanpi:

Making a Girl into a Woman

It is at this time that a young girl becomes a woman and she must understand the meaning of this change and must be instructed in the duties, which she is now to fulfill. She should realize that the change which has taken place in her is a sacred thing, for now she will be as Mother Earth and will be able to bear children, which should also be brought up in a sacred manner.

Black Elk

CHAPTER THREE

FIRST BLOOD

The swath of land bordering the Natchez Trace, a scenic highway from Nashville to New Orleans, is largely untouched, preserved as much by poverty as by social conscience. Like the White Sands of Utah or the Black Hills before gold was discovered, it was not worth destroying, so it was allowed to remain much as it had been for centuries.

Driving north on the trace, guided by an unseen hand of forces beyond the senses, Jerico pulled off the highway and walked the trail that for a thousand years before the Europeans arrived was the trading route of the Mound Builders, ancestors of the Choctaw, Chickasaw, Cherokee, Creek and Natchez. He gathered his powers, walking in harmony with ancient spirits, and tapped the well that united all native peoples. He heard them in the wind, saw them in the old growth trees, smelled them in the moss and felt them in the soil beneath the soles of his moccasins.

He came to a clearing in the forest, where three of the giant mounds, now covered with tall grass, had survived the destruction of treasure seekers. He climbed the tallest mound and looked out over the vast field where an army of ancient warriors once danced in celebration and he remembered their faces. He removed a pouch from his vest and gave an

JACK RANDOM

offering of tobacco in the seven directions. He cleared a small circle and sat facing south. Unwrapping a red clay pipe, given to him by his grandfather, he packed it, smoked and waited. He watched the creatures of the forest, a cluster of deer, raccoons, a rabbit and a fox, as they wandered in and out of the clearing. He watched the sun rise in clear blue skies. He closed his eyes and took in the sounds and smells of forest life, animal remains and sweet grass, a snake over dry twigs and leaves, songbirds and a distant hawk. He watched a trio of vultures circle overhead, then drift to the west. He chanted in the old tongue the songs Grandfather taught him, and he waited.

A crow landed on the mound before him. It cocked its head and studied the strange creature that walked in soft moccasins and chose this sacred place for silent meditation and prayer. A sense of recognition passed between them before the crow hopped in a jagged circle around him and took flight up the trace.

He rose to his feet and returned to his pony to follow the flight of the crow. He understood the futility of awaiting a destiny where his destiny did not await him.

Somewhere past Tupelo, Mississippi, in the sweltering heat of late afternoon, he pulled off the highway and drove down a country road in search of gas and a cold drink. He found both at a combination restaurant, bar and convenience store with a blue neon invitation: Ice Cold Beer. He accepted, settling on a corner barstool and ordering a cold one over the twang of country music. The bar man checked his braided hair, red bandana, dark skin and cleaned two ash trays before tapping his brew. This place did not welcome his kind. Taking the hint, he planted his eyes dead ahead and sipped his not quite ice-cold beer.

The lighting went even dimmer and a strange whistling sound filled the room. He scanned the half dozen patrons through the mirror behind the bar. There was no reaction. The room began to sway like a boat on calm waters and still,

WASICHU: THE KILLING SPIRIT

no one reacted. He heard the soft whispering of a couple across the room. He heard cockroaches scrambling beneath the sink, flies in the kitchen, the flow of water in pipes, and the hum of electrical appliances. Beneath it all he heard voices chanting, singing in words he could not understand, and with it a thrumming, a beat, a pounding. It came in waves, pounding and subsiding. He looked in the mirror and saw faces like portraits of the damned, contorted faces, young and innocent, faces marked with age and disease, wise and naïve faces, faces that had known only sorrow and faces that knew only the warmth of family and friends.

What tied them together was that they were all native faces.

He saw their tears and heard their screams. He crawled inside their skin and felt their helplessness as the thrumming pounded and the room swayed until it pulled him from his barstool and pushed him outside where he fell to the earth gasping, choking, drenched in cold sweat.

The bar man and patrons followed him out as the pounding wave of sound receded into the woods. "I'm alright," he said. "Something I ate."

He righted himself, holding his head between his knees. The gawking crowd waited to be sure he was not dying before they went back inside with a round of uncomfortable laughter and derisive comments: "Crazy fucking Indian."

He steadied his hold upon the earth. He felt abused and beaten. Fear swelled in his pounding head. He wanted to take hold of Lala's reins and ride into tomorrow but this was an enemy he had to face. He remembered the vow he took at the ceremony that marked his passing from childhood to the community of warriors. The warrior must choose his battles wisely. He must not lead his people into certain death, but when the battle is chosen then the warrior's duty is his honor. "You will not turn from your enemy," Grandfather said, "but face him, even if he is a thousand strong and you are but one. The warrior plants his staff where he will not be moved by

JACK RANDOM

anyone but death.”

Crazy Horse did not run from Custer at the Greasy Grass. He rode his pony straight into the heart of battle. He laughed at them, taunted them and planted his staff.

Jerico would not run now. He grabbed his hunting knife and followed the sound into a thicket of magnolia, poplar and southern pine. He found a trail and held to it, slicing through overgrowth, kudzu, bristles and creeping vine as the thrumming, whistling and pounding intensified. He covered his ears but the sound was both within and without him. He hiked until the sun fell from the sky, until the green of the forest turned dusk gray and slivers of light shot through the trees like lasers.

The thrumming softened and he slowed his pace. He was in a gorge, a holler, with limestone bluffs pressing in, a place ripe for ambush. He backtracked, climbed the northern bluff, and crept forward until he came to a place where the waters of an underground spring trickled through cracks in the earth to form a pond surrounded by wild flowers.

He gazed down upon a beautiful girl, a young woman, a woman child, dressed in white with beaded white buckskin moccasins and matching vest, her long dark hair in a single braid, sitting cross legged on the rocks, teasing the water with a stick. He recognized the beadwork as Cherokee and understood that she was dressed for ceremony. In Lakota, it is known as Ishnati Alowanpi: Making a Girl into a Woman.

She did not notice his presence above and he did not wish to disturb her, but when the thrumming returned, the skies darkened and a blanket of dark clouds moved overhead, blocking what remained of sunlight, he called out to her. He called out but she did not hear. She did not see the darkness or hear the thrumming, though it was now so loud it bent him to his knees. He pressed his forehead to the earth and held his ears but the thrumming only grew stronger, shaking his bones, rattling his brain, boiling his blood with rage. He struggled to raise his head, to curse the darkness, to challenge

WASICHU: THE KILLING SPIRIT

this spirit that hid in shadows and would not face his enemy but the darkness vanished as quickly as it had appeared. The pounding ceased, the clouds lifted and the forest breathed again.

He looked to the girl, the beautiful Cherokee woman child, and froze in the place where he stood. A man with hunched shoulders, flash of metal, arms flailing, fists pounding, scratching, clawing, kicking, flashing, blood streaming, screaming, moaning, a knife in her chest, her body writhing in a pool of red, her eyes open, his face in her eyes, and Jerico could not move. The girl screamed and he could not move. He could only listen to the fading beat of her heart and the twisted laughter of the Wasichu killer.

He knew the spirit had guided him to this place. It wanted him to witness this horror. The killer expected him but did it know that he had backtracked? It expected him on the trail below, not on the bluff above where now he crouched, breathless, crippled by the darkness, frozen with fear like Big Foot at Wounded Knee.

He prayed to the Great Spirit. He called on the ancient ones, the spirit of the Cherokee and Choctaw, the fallen of Ash Hollow, Sand Creek and Medicine Bow, the dead of Wounded Knee, the spirit of the crow, the buffalo and the great thunderbird. He summoned the spirits of Sitting Bull and Black Kettle and all who had felt the white man's wrath. He called on Crazy Horse and his body awakened with a crash of thunder. He sprang from his perch and soared like the night owl silently to his prey. He lowered his talons into the predator's shoulders, gripping him with vice-like fear, breaking his spirit like a severed spine. The killer crumpled to the earth, a limp body of useless flesh.

He spun the killer around to face the moment of his last breath, the eyes of the ancestors, Red Cloud and Little Big Man, Crow Dog and Two Feathers, Young Man Afraid and Spotted Tail, Black Elk and No Water, glaring over his shoulder and crying out for revenge.

JACK RANDOM

But the shining silver blade of his knife clung to the sky, freezing time to a crystalline moment. The eyes of the killer held shame and fear and his face reflected a thousand others: Yellow Hair and General Miles, the unknown coward who plunged his bayonet into Crazy Horse as Little Big Man held his arms, the Colorado volunteers who cut from Lakota women their private parts and fixed them to their saddle horns, the railroad men and their buffalo killers, the Appaloosa killers, thunderbird killers, crow killers, river and earth killers.

The Wasichu wore so many faces, an endless sea, wave after wave, more than the stars, and each one carried the same darkness beneath his pale skin, each afraid and filled with hate. Two thousand years of hatred and slaughter, two thousand years of death and poverty, two thousand years of genocide and white man rule yet still they feared and hated.

The killer pleaded for mercy. "Kill me." Like the soldiers of the Seventh Calvary who killed themselves rather than face the savage avengers, "Kill me," he pleaded.

Jerico understood that this man was not his enemy. He was only a man, a white man, a brutal and savage killer, but he was not the enemy. The enemy was the darkness that filled his soul. The enemy was the fear, the hatred, the need to avenge some unknown wrong. Killing it seemed was all the white man knew.

He remembered the first time he was told of the white man's religion. They have killed their own God, he thought. Now they kill everything and pray that their God will return to have his revenge. They wanted to be tortured, beaten and whipped as they had tortured, beaten and crucified their God. They lacked the courage to take their own lives so they pray that their God will take them. But their God will not return. Their God is dead. They killed him. So the killing goes on and on.

He released the killer and watched him disappear into the woods. He heard a cough and turned to the bloodied body

WASICHU: THE KILLING SPIRIT

beside him. She was alive. As he had spared the killer, so the Killing Spirit had spared the girl.

She would live. Badly wounded, bleeding and mercifully unconscious, yet she would live. She had earned her womanhood. She fought back with every ounce of strength she possessed. She became a woman warrior just as Jerico had become a man. Together, they planted the staff and faced the enemy.

He thanked the Great Spirit, Mother Earth and Father Sky that the girl who became a woman would live.

He bound her wounds, cradled her in his arms, and carried her out of the woods.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jack Random is a writer of novels, essays, short stories, plays and jazz poetry. His roots firmly planted in the fertile central valley of California, he has marched the streets in protest, haunted jazz town bars, read poetry in cafes and town squares, strutted his hour upon the stage, crisscrossed the country by air, rail, highway and thumb, mourned at Wounded Knee, gazed into the eyes of the crow at Grand Canyon, and paid tribute at the grave of Geronimo. He has labored in the fields of plenty, toiled on the assembly line, pursued higher education and attempted to enlighten children in the public schools. He has been a pilgrim and a seeker of truth. He is married to the love of his life. All the while he has chronicled his thoughts and revelations in words: plays, poetry, novels, stories and essays. His first novel *Ghost Dance Insurrection* was originally published by Dry Bones Press (2000).

