

**Book III**  
**The Ghost Dancer**

## Lesson Plan

The school in St. Louis was called the Harmony Indian Re-Education Center. Liz had been sent there when her white father had left her and her mother alone. The sparse grounds of the mission were conversely, for her, what her native Nevada had otherwise been for white people prior to the discovery of silver there, a place almost entirely bereft of any interest, a noxious, monotonous, uninflected void consisting of a collection of unnamed things of absolutely no discernible value. Each night the attendant delivered her a cup of hot water and along with it a stern warning not to be stubborn and ‘act Injun’.

Even amidst the trappings of the bustling town of St. Louis, she still wore the memory of the desert like most women wore jewelry, a visible golden secret woven throughout her being. The white man would not compass her pride any more than he could grasp the sands of the dessert in his hand. It was then she had decided to stop talking. At first they beat her for being stubborn. Eventually they accepted her silence as a mark of stupidity.

Infractions of the school rules were invariably met with quick punishment meted out personally by the director of the school, a local merchant named Rufus Enbright. These usually took place not in the school but in the back of his dry goods store on Vine Street, ‘Enbright’s Emporium’, consisting in a quick flick on the rear thighs from his birch cane followed by an assignment to wipe down the entire canned inventory of the store. The cane had two words scorched into the haft, ‘The Civilizer’.

The other girls attending the school were mostly from the Osage tribe. Liz had only contempt for them. They easily traded their heritage for the sweet treats the Presbyterian Society brought on Saturdays. When her soul had been sufficiently saved which, for a half-caste girl apparently meant that she no longer wore buckskin or ate with her fingers and knew how to brew proper coffee, she was sent to work full time in the millinery department of Enbright’s, to help with carding soft goods. The teachers at the school were relieved to get rid of her. She had been a corrupting influence on the more

pliable students.

The room where she slept in back of the store was really more of a closet but at least here there was no odor of damp straw. It had two items to decorate the spare plaster walls, a clock which was stuck at 1:20 and a picture of a red-haired Jesus. When they brought her here the matron had told her that 1:20 was the precise time Jesus had ascended from the grave.

There had been no point her caretakers thought in educating her further. Carding was a task she was deemed capable of, even with inferior intelligence. When the raw cloth came in from Chicago in crates, it was her task was to roll it up on the broomsticks that were suspended from hooks, then later measuring off the lengths rolled onto the cards that people brought in for their sewing projects. Enbright would work late some nights and these nights if no one at the mission school had misbehaved he asked her to dust off the entire inventory of canned goods. These were the evenings she dreaded most.

A chair had been pulled into the middle of the floor and there was a whale oil lamp lit in the corner. Liz could barely make out Enbright standing there.

“Take that rope there and tie me to the chair.” He ordered gruffly, emerging from the shadows.

She had complied as he seated himself. The first time he had asked this she thought perhaps he had gone mad.

“Now take my switch.” He was referring to the same birch walking stick he used to torment the students at the mission school, ‘The Civilizer’. She took the item which was leaned against the counter and held it awkwardly out in front of her as if it was an offering to the spirits. She noticed he seemed to be sweating a lot and had removed his shoes and socks. He extended the bare bottoms of his feet toward her.

“Strike the bottoms of my feet.”

Again she complied.

“Not like that bitch. Softly. Yahh-that’s it.” he moaned exposing his yellow incisors.

She could see that he was getting aroused.

“Keep on it. Now get on my ass.” He growled and moaned again his eyes rolling back in his head.

“No!”

“So you can talk. I thought you was a mute. I knew it!”

At first she blinked, then she realized she had never spoken a word to the man before.

“Now take it out. Hurry up!”

She began unbuttoning his pants, removing his erect member. Her fingers were coarse and calloused from carding.

When she fumbled, he cursed her.

“Injun Cunt! Hurry up!”

She looked around nervously hoping and dreading that someone might discover them but Enbright had locked all the doors and drawn the shades.

“—scold it.”

“What?”

“Scold it. Say ‘you’ve been a bad boy’. Now that I know you can talk.”

“Bad fellow. Stupid half breed.” The words were suddenly coming out easily as his breath began to come in short gasps.

“Now puh-p-puh-punish him. C’mon, give it a slap.” ”

She gave the engorged member a flick with the birch cane.”

“Careful. Give me a splinter and I’ll kill you, you mute Chola bitch.” he spat.

“You have misbehaved, stupidly, once again! Can’t you learn or are you too stupid?” Curiously she heard these coming out of her own mouth, rather than his. The words the matrons at the school came back to her and she scolded the erect penis using these same phrases as had been directed at her, flicking it each time more skillfully with the tip of the birch cane.

Afterwards Enbright sat listlessly in the chair for a long while eyes closed.

She could see the rhythm of his chest rising and falling abating, he was once again breathing normally.

“I go sleep now?”

“First untie me bitch.” The roles had resprung.

When she had entirely removed the ropes from him he stood up with his back toward her, the whole

shirt was drenched in sweat now. Suddenly he whirled and slapped her.

“That’s just so you remember about the splinters next time.” He said wiping the front of his trousers with the end of the carded felt and then, flipping it to clean his mouth where the track of spittle had emerged from the corner.

When she went to her room that night, even though she had told herself not to, she began to cry. After an hour, when the tears dried by themselves, she began quietly humming to herself. It was the Pai-Ute medicine song and it soothed her.

*Now all my singing Dreams are gone,  
But none knows where they have fled  
Nor by what trails they have left me.  
Return, O Dreams of my heart,  
And sing in the Summer twilight,  
By the creek and the almond thicket  
And the field that is bordered with lupins!*

## **Lavender Oil**

After dropping the rear of his borrowed wheelbarrow in front of Enbright’s store Machin had muscled the box marked ‘Howe Scale’ onto the plank sidewalk and then half lugged and half kicked it into the cool interior where Liz sat immobile on a low stool in front of the textile shelves . Once inside he had abruptly and heavily sat down on a stack of spermaceti candles, panting.

“T.N. Machin Esquire to see Mr. Rufus Enbright.” He proffered a small card leaning forward, smiling. The light seemed to bother his eyes and his fair skin confirmed that he was from back east. She did not move or speak in response, or even blink.

Machin leaned backward against the crates and sat there for a while fanning himself with the folded ad flyer from the Howe Scale Company, still puffing slightly from the recent exertion. On the paper was a lithographic picture of the scale with lettering underneath that read, 'If you've got Howe, you've got Balls, and Howe!'. He had folded it in such a manner that the only lettering visible was the word 'B-A-L-L-S'. This was intentional and had taken hours of practice. Liz now sounded it out mentally according to what she had learned from her teachers at the HIREC. He continued to eye her with amusement as her frustration grew.

"Bah- alls!" she had at last uttered happily and involuntarily quickly covering her embarrassment by adding,

"You from back East?"

"S'pose so." Machin replied, letting the homemade fan drop soundlessly to the floor with a wink. The Howe Scale represented a real technological improvement. By replacing the metal pivot or vertex with a cast ball bearing, it insured the scale would continue to be accurate over a far longer period of time. The older models tended to lose accuracy as the bearing points of the fulcrum wore and when used to assay gold instead of peas they wore even quicker. Machin's plan was to sell the scales and have them shipped from Vermont with payment forwarded to him in California by the Howe Company via Wells Fargo on receipt. In the mean time he could sell off the advertising posters to local justices along the way to raise petty cash; the 'scales of justice' the sly humor providing a reminder of the way justice was done on the frontier,—with balls. As a practicing lawyer he knew from experience judges always had some petty cash available for novelties and more importantly most had a perverse self-directed sense of humor.

Machin's clothes, soaked with sweat, seemed to adhere to him like wet leaves clinging to a drainspout. They were not only ill fitting, there was a faint odor which the dampness evoked, that mingled with that of the spermaceti. Liz could not identify it immediately but it had been wafted intriguingly in her direction by the motion of the fan. Machin had arrived in St. Louis just three days earlier. He had come to St. Louis because it was the usual starting point for those heading to the gold fields but also, his sister and brother-in-law Dr. Gilbert Tillapaugh resided here. Tillapaugh's first project on arriving

in St. Louis had been to set up a much needed clinic here. He had written to Machin to come join them but Machin had other plans. Somewhat to his sister's chagrin, her husband often treated the poorer cases in exchange for chickens or goats, even at times for free. Even Cherokee Liz had visited the clinic on several occasions, mostly following Enbright's 'can cleaning' sessions. Tillapaugh was the first and only white man who had treated her kindly since she had come east. The second evening after his arrival Tillapaugh had filled Machin in on his suspicions about Enbright and about what was going on in the back of the dry goods store.

Having lost most of his personal belongings fording the Cuyahoga River, Machin had been forced to borrow some of this brother-in-law's clothes. Tillapaugh was taller, heavier and something of a dandy as well. The result was Machin's present resemblance to a half-made sausage. By mistake he had also taken the frilly handkerchief belonging to his sister which was now stuffed in his jacket pocket compounding the rather bizarre presentation. The combined smell was making him gag as he fought now to catch his breath.

When Liz stepped forward into the light he quickly stashed the handkerchief out of sight, but not before she could identify the odor as one she was familiar with, lavender oil.

"Excuse me there missus,—but I am not used to this St. Louis humidity." He paused for breath. "Mind if I have a smoke?" He took out a cigar and lit it before she had a chance to answer.

"Boss don't care for smokin' in'na store." She turned away to dust the shelves.

"I had hoped to apprise him of the quality of these excellent scales of which a shipment is due here shortly before they are bought up by his competitors. They are available for sale at a pre-delivered special price which I, as the Midwest representative of the Howe Scale Company, am uniquely empowered to offer him."

"He don't see salesman no more."

"Perhaps we could work out an exchange of sorts. My plan is to travel west and I'll be needing stores."

"You an educated man Mistah, right?"

“Yes.”

“Well then read my lips. No salesmen.” She turned.

“Need to stock up on some dry goods for my trip out to,-- Nevada.” Machin deflected gruffly but with a sly edge.

Her back being toward him, made it far easier to conceal the flush of excitement which flared on hearing the last words he had spoken,

“Nevada! Why I am from Sierra Nevada. Half Paiute.” She knew he probably would not have recognized the name of the small Kutzadika tribe.

“Well I am not going to Sierra Nevada I am going to the Nevada territory. Just staying temporarily with my wife and her husband here. He runs the clinic.”

“Dumbass white eyes!” Liz now muttered as she angrily turned back to face him. “You bettah buy a buckboard instead of a wagon. Easier to make into a coffin,--- for you.” That was delivered as a statement of fact designed to end the conversation but instead Machin’s interest had been kindled, as if the flame fed directly by the spermaceti on which he perched wicked to the near invisible blue parabola illuminating his eyes.

“Between you ‘n me, I hear there is a strike I hear near the town of Bodie.” He whispered with a wink.

Liz did not answer right away, instead she slammed a can of beans onto the shelf visibly determined at occluding her own angry muttering. It caused an unsealed bag of flour to pitch to the floor.

Liz suddenly looked to be on the verge of crying.

“Now, there, there. If you are so familiar with that territory my good woman I’d be pleased to have you for company, I can’t pay you nuthin’ mind you but the transportation and grub is free.”

“I cain’t travel with you nowhere, -ain’t proper.”

“Says who?”

“You bein’ single is what, the teacher at the missionary school, say so, that’s who.” She sniffed.

Machin, momentarily confused at all this emotion, fell silent. She sensed his embarrassment and took it as an opening to attack.

“You ain’t the first yappin’ dick comin’ here to try to scare up company. I ain’t no trail squaw and I ain’t naow whore.” She was shaking one of the knitting needles at him.

He was struck dumb for a moment by the literally pointed accusation but on some level had expected this reply. Summoning his rhetorical skills he delivered a rebuttal argument he had rehearsed on the way over here.

“Now miss. I don’t know what kinda religious hogwash they been feeding you here but a true lady don’t mind her surroundings, no matter where she finds herself,-

“That so?”

“That’s so,” He was puffing as he hard now as when he first brought the scale in with him.

“So ta hell with them.”

“Ta hell with them.” Liz repeated with a shy smile, warming to the odd looking figure with the woman’s handkerchief. She realized he reminded her not only of the clinic, but of the ‘dububs’ who had befriended her back in Mono. Machin pulled out the frilly handkerchief he had taken pains to hide before and offered it to her. She accepted.

Following this inconclusive exchange Machin left, but as he turned over the events of the morning in his mind he began to perceive in them the outlines of a tacit agreement to his proposition. He returned late that afternoon with three mounts, a bay horse, a pack mule and a rather underfed donkey which he had acquired from a busted miner going home. His intuition had been correct as by the time he got back Liz was already packed and sitting on a crate stenciled ‘Canned Turkey’, her few poor possessions assembled like a scraggly but attentive choir huddled the entrance of the store. She was just changing into moccasins from the uncomfortable shoes when Enbright strode in from the back, visibly angry.

“I hear you plan on leaving me in the lurch there *chola!*” turning to Machin

“How much you paying that Injun whore to sniff your saddle oysters mister?!” Enbright had spied the frilly handkerchief immediately and assumed he was dealing with a dandy. He stood threateningly over Machin who had seated himself again on the spermaceti.

“What’s that ya said, I am slightly hard of hearing?”

“I said, get your scrawny ass out of my store.” Enbright yelled.

“I take it you ain’t interested in the Howe scale.” Machin replied nonchalantly.

“Not your fish stink either. You can pay her fer that.”

“She’d be more likely payin’ me and gladly, to get away from you and yore smell. Right?” He winked toward Liz extracting the handkerchief to emphasize his unconcern and as a visible argument vis the accusatory odor.

“Both of you can swing. I am a person of consequence in this town. You can take your tin contraption with you.” Enbright now turning the color of the sack of flour spilled on the floor and shaking like it was him going through a sifter.

“Glad to, but I’d be obliged to head right over to the courthouse. You see I ain’t just a salesman, and this half breed as you call her, well she’s got some legal rights according the State of Missouri and most likely is pressing charges for rape against you. See this here dollar.” Machin now extracted a shiny coin from the same vest pocket where the handkerchief had been.

“So happens I’m a lawyer. That there if I figure it right discounted, is my legal fee. Plus I figger there’s ten other little girls at your ‘school’ like her so I guess I’m gonna earn me ten dollars today, ---or I could save the judge a lot of trouble and just blow your brains out right now and take the ten out in canned peas. Whaddya think there,- Mr. Cockright ?” Machin removed his revolver from his holster.

Enbright had stopped shaking and gone limp at the sight of the revolver and as Machin cocked the gun he collapsed weakly to his knees. Liz stepped gingerly around him heading for the door. As she exited, Enbright recovered himself enough to spew out after her,

‘Injun whore’ this followed by a train of spittle arcing and landing on the floor behind them preserving his parting epithet in a glistening parabola of disgust.

“What’s your Injun name again? Big Beaver?” he yelled.

Machin reentered the store and calmly shot Enbright in the meaty part of his left thigh.

“Here you can use this to stop the bleeding and buy yourself a whisky. Compliments of Mr. Gilbert

Tillapaugh.” he dropped the scented handkerchief and a silver dollar on the floor next to it and taking out the bearing of the sample scale with another well aimed shot. They were about an hour from town before he finally spoke. She could see he had been holding something in, but had waited for him to speak first.

“Never was cut out to be a salesman anyhow,”

“How you know about Enbright?”

“Dunno, that sonuvabitch just plain pissed me off.”

“Brother-in-law tole you, huh.”

“I guess.”

“You an educated man?” She repeated the question he had declined to answer before.

“Albany Law School’ This Machin answered her now, grinning. “With honors.”

“They teched you, or you learned yerself.”

“I’m teched.” He grinned.

“You can be lawyer then. You do law.” It seemed a simple enough solution.

“I suppose so.”

“Ballbany Whore School” Liz now repeated aloud reaching for the reins.

“Yep, exactly what it is!”

“Yahhh, come on now, giddyup there”

For the next hundred bumpy miles he periodically repeated the phrase aloud to himself bursting out each time with laughter.

The two of them arrived in Mono two months later in September of 1859, just as interest in the Bodie strike was waning. Instead of going on to Bodie, at Liz’s insistence Machin had struck a solitary placer claim on the isolated north shore of Mono Lake and she moved into the cabin built by Captain John which was now abandoned, about a half mile south. The placer provided a small but steady flow of silver long after Machin learned the Bodie strike proved a bust. There was an assayer, a saloon and

a ramshackle hotel about three miles to the south west which was now being called the town of Monoville. The assayer had set up shop here as the Bodie strike drained.

The second woman to arrive, Emma Sharps, showed up two years and two days later,

“What’s your name?”

“Emma.”

“You an educated woman?” Liz eyed her and the fancy parasol quizzically.

“No, I am a prostitute. A whore.” The woman had replied in a superior tone, eyeing Liz and her buckskin clothing. Stepping down from the stage she managed to reveal in the process she was, like Liz, not partial to undergarments.

“Did they tech you to be a prostitute or did you larn yerself?” Liz asked.

“I larned myself, many hours on my back tallying up cracks in the ceiling.”

“If you larned yerself, you may be a prostitute but you sure ain’t no whore,” The two had soon become fast friends.

That night she informed Machin of the new arrival.

“Jes what this town needs. More feminine role models.” “He ventured diplomatically while retaining his native sarcasm

“She’s an educated woman.”

“So I hear, attended the Ballbany Whore School, graduated Sum Cum Louder no doubt.”

“Guess that means you’ll be droppin’ me like a hot rock.”

“Not for all the gold plated sheepshit in Texas.”

When the Chinese arrived from Camp Salvado to set up their shacks not far from Machin’s placer operation Liz provided them with fresh game until they had a chance to get their gardens going. They

rewarded her with the job of supplying Sam's vegetable store with their produce and the occasional basket of gull eggs which they gathered for her on Paoha and delivered on the steamer *Rocket*.

## **Antelope Bones**

Like practitioners of any religion, even those of the Ghost Dance ritual, I have eventually become unbalanced by zeal. Not that I am one, not by a long shot, but Mormon would have us believe, (as goes their particular convective version of the moral palindrome), 'If God is a god of love then I must exceed him in love and if he be a vain god then I must exceed him in vanity and so on and so on, and so forth etc. etc.'. So, absent a precise symmetry we can expect nothing else much from it. Though this is approved only grudgingly, even by its more ardent adherents, and except for the Mormon Church, regarded privately to be almost pure horseshit, or, as the old joke goes, at least 50% horseshit and the rest tobacco, the question remains, if the rest of us love asymmetry beyond all else, can God tolerate the asymmetry in our lives and if not, then how will we be able to love either him or ourselves when all the other bullshit happens?

This, as I realized, when confronted with the beaten and mangled body of a not quite dead Kirlew Hume, was the central, magmatic, perfectly balanced, pivot (not of mine but) of his existence, which, when it came down to it, portended a future which I realized was now, for various reasons thrust entirely and unjustly into my hands. (Any chess player will tell you, the future remains somewhat abstract when the game is on). The moral equivocation he, in his position, left to die by the Mormon in the Bishop Tuff, posed to me was,-- how can we really love someone, something that allows us, nay insures that we become ugly just to survive, that in fact comes like an unbalanced weight on the heart, a three-legged dog, an unwelcome and improper intrusion into our happy, unknowing equilibrium. This question remains thankfully unanswered and unanswerable. A certain degree of moral blindness is the palliative religion dispense to us, a refund in the investment in prophetic impropriety and zeal, but that is still only the smallest of kindnesses, but this still doesn't answer how it came to be that this whole subject of unexpected small kindnesses came to preoccupy T.N. Machin as he worked his uncooperative placer one moonlit afternoon on the shores of Mono Lake.

“Damn, one legged frogs in hell jumpin circles!”

“What’s eatin’ you?” Liz sidled up behind him unexpectedly, no easy feat for a woman large as she.

“Aww nothin”

There was a veritable journeyman’s stew of odors being expelled from the lake and its pallid shore; sulfurous mud, the myriad corpses of brine shrimp and fly larvae deposited there, the methane gas seeping up from the lakebed in florid belches, the fringe of decaying fly larvae clinging to the shoreline, a grandmotherly oxidized yellow tinge addended to the white ruffle of alkali, all contributed to the smell and the fractious summoning of images of old lace and self-absorbed decay. And as if all this was not enough, at various points along the shore one was assailed by the nauseating perfume of petroleum.

Machin was compact and muscular, the normal physique of a wrestler, but too quick tempered to be a good one and nearsighted as an unbroken one-eyed mule. His poor vision, an artifact of long hours in the Albany Law Library where he had studied long into the cold upstate New York winter nights, often caused him to shoot first and ask questions later, thus the artifact of erudition and prudence was put in the service of the aforementioned short-temperedness rather than vice -versa. His clutch of dirty blond hair, like his glasses, often appeared totally white from the cocktail of alkali dust and mining chemicals lending him an aspect of maturity and gravitas beyond his young years. Machin had a saying; it went, ‘Silver mining is like owning a wet dog, -you can shake out the water but somehow you just can’t shake out the smell.’ Lately, since his decision to run in the last county election, he had adopted another saying; “Politics is like getting sand stuck in your ass crack. Once it’s in, it’s damn hard to get it out.”

Both silver mining and politics at the moment seemed to be producing irritants in comparable quantities as he wrestled physically with the stuck carriage of the placer and mentally with the issue of his recent election to the California Legislature. The unexpected appearance of Liz, in a process the precise opposite of what he was trying to accomplish with the placer, had alchemically fused these two irritants into one unfocused slag of irritation.

There were larger issues at work to be considered, he realized as he tried to budge the uncooperative piece of pine, some nearly as persistent and enveloping as the nauseating smells from the lake. He had been elected as a representative of Mono County California. If Mono was eventually determined to be in Nevada, he would have accomplished nothing, elected to a nonexistent seat from a nonexistent county in a non-state. The presence of the Mormons in Nevada had made statehood for that territory questionable for the present however, it seemed that there was a definite shift underway.

“Damn this chute. I mean shoot, it’s Bishop and a bunch o’ them damn Mormons again, passed through here on their way to the Owen Valley right. Follerin’ Captain Simpson I expect.”

“Hnnh?”

“Gearing for a war, they are.”

“And leaking religious nonsense all the while I ‘spose.”

“Like custard from undercooked pie. Kish Taka with this Antelope Bones makes as much sense.”

“Kish Taka has medicine.”

“What? You’re lookin’ a might dressed up today there, babe. Anything special?” Machin cast an appraising eye that he knew would be received in a particular manner.

“Aw nothin’ much” Liz blushed compliantly “Just the reglar run up by Bodie. Waiting on a bucket of gull eggs now. Thought I’d bowl me a game when I get there.”

“Damn eggs, not much good for bowling.”

“Don’t I know it. Yolks on you I guess.”

“Whadda bout a slack cup a joe with me in the meantime, while you waitin on the *Rocket* to get here?”

“I gotta admit, hate them Mormons worsen’ rock salt too but not as much to guff at as them Christian missionaries back in St. Louis.”

“Jes’ more of the partickular voodoo if you ask me. Jesus Christ in person on the Grand Butte preachin’ to Shoshone. What next? Himself rentin’ a boxcar, haulin down caseloads a’ Drake’s Virgin Plantations Bitters?”

“And did he have him some red hair too, or did he rent that too?”

“So I’m told. Or dyed it on credit.”

“Tole by who.–“

“Why you sneaky kaiyute, ain’t it an ain’t I worthy of savin’”

“Maybe. Jes’ leave me outta it. Holy water don’t burn so much goin’ down, it’s comin’ back up.”

“Can’t stomach it ehh.”

“If it were jest the contents, but they make ya read the label too.”

“I’m already gettin’ me some,” he slyly extracted the square amber bottle halfway from his waistcoat, winking and standing as he unzipped his fly.

“And they say it is the best antidote to the contaminated waters, and believe me I got plenty o’ that I’m holdin’ hostage.”

“I can tell you there ain’t no truth to it,”

“To what?”

“‘tall to that story of Jesus Christ visitin’ the Paiutes unless’n he had red hair or Cap’n John woulda stole his horse or worse fer sure.” Liz laughed.

“Yeah, jes what we need, another red-headed Utah Jew, pushing more snake oil, what next?” He sat back down and began pouring her a hefty drink in one of the two glasses on the low table beside them.

“Why don’t you put that away,” she said belatedly realizing that the normally partly alcoholic medicinal bottle had been refilled with pure whiskey.

## **Amazing Grease**

There was some kind of blind therapeutic at work or at least an abatement in the pervading ambient, larcenous alchemy. Like all Kutzadika women Liz had woven her own ‘Wono’, burden basket, but unlike the others in it she carried an additional burden, the unseen burden of her mixed paternity. Still, like them, the timeless rhythms of the desert were her clock but at some point time for her had stopped. What she loved most were the solitary evenings by the lake where she had been sent to gather fly larvae, especially the long sunsets with the dying rays of the sun amalgamating the ambient dust into a glorious reprise. Her world closed each day as a cadence echoed in the sheer swaths of a granitic sonata that spoke in the inverted jagged harmonies of the eastern sierra. She learned to ignore the ambient, inescapable smells just as she had learned to ignore the scornful looks and harsh whispers

of the other women of the tribe. Even with Machin there, she felt as peaceful as she had as a child. A brisk wind was blowing down from the Sierra's whisking away the noxious odors emanating from the lake. In the hiatus, Elizabeth Machin had been conceived.

(Had Kirlew Hume been here or alive for that matter, he too might have cautioned Machin that only science could concoct a reliable antidote to the distilled and naked acts of antipathy to be exerted against us by religion and nature both, and I would agree with him on this.) Science exists simply so that when the universe or belief attempts to corrode our defenses, we may mount a credible defense, in my case, it was the Sicilian defense; merely a delaying tactic, true, but then so is a child sometimes, just a means to gain time to understand the nature of an impending execution.

Like Mormonism, like Mono Lake itself, the Sicilian Defense, procreation, each relies on an inherent encircling asymmetry and an interior diakinesis. It is a profoundly intricate psychological strategy. Employing it should not be an admission of inferiority but rather of inherent grace and a control of the pace of things that flow from it. It depends wholly on leveraging the imbalance that results to succeed. (When it came to Kirlew Hume however, the question of asymmetry had already become far more troublesome for me.)

Unlike most of the rest of us, Mormons looked forward to, indeed welcomed the impending cosmic attack and they had, under Bishop Snow in anticipation begun the preliminary task of judging and killing Kirlew Hume, leaving his body hanging on the Jeremiah tree, this as they left the state heading toward their destiny in Utah just as the prophet had demanded. Me? I was only left hanging around to finish the job. Thus you should understand that mine was not an act of cosmic one-upmanship for its own sake, but a complex psychological gambit, admittedly resulting in an execution but one that had been predicted, one that had already been written. 'Yea, and the prophet shall not be held false though he walk in a strange land' If it is worth killing to preserve the predicted future or at least the possibility of that future, (most GOOD people will tell you that it is) then, in exercising a defense against blind belief in that future remains, in my eyes at least, equally admirable. It is the unwritten law amongst prospectors, scientists and practitioners of faith that one must finish what one starts so,

if religion is nothing but this game of cosmic one-upmanship may not one also kill to finish a game as well? Indeed 'thou shalt kill' is not that the first unwritten law of all contests, even should religion's first and best counter move be, to reassert the balance, to correct this unwritten law with a countervailing one that is written 'thou shalt not'? And every seasoned miner knows enough to check the back of the sign in case he's being intentionally misdirected. But for me the question, as always, remained, where should one draw the line.

## **Necessity Rocks**

Some of the harsher, more acrid smells assaulting T.N. at that moment were emanating from his array of tubs containing various combinations of corrosive chemicals useful in reducing out silver ore from the insalubrious mud. Aside from his career in placer mining, he also developed a fair law practice in the area, settling claim jumping disputes, filing titles for 'feet of mine' in Aurora, even mediating domestic disputes amongst the usually obsessively secretive Chinese. In the absence of a reliable circuit judge he had earned a justified reputation for fairness and straight shooting and when that didn't work, just shooting. With Sewall having resigned following the fake inquest at Gravelly Ford, he had shuttled up next in line for the northern circuit judge spot but his recent election to the California Assembly had made that possibility moot. None of this complexity bothered him one bit. To him it seemed to be that the morning air after the recent storm blew just a bit sweeter and clearer. He removed the kerchief from his face just to breathe it in. Yes. Somehow, today it didn't bother him, none of it.

It was Friday morning in late August, a week before the strange appearance of the Aurora in the sky Ton-Wa had shown up at his diggings, obviously agitated.

"Sam Leon say you come Bodie plenty quick. Big trouble with plumcrazy miners." Ton-Wa nervously flexed his tattooed arm making it appear that the dragon had the dry heaves.

It was following the encounter with Enbright that Machin had adopted the affectation of carrying a lavender scented handkerchief which, when working the placer he tied over his nose. With his alkali

coated blond curls, dangling like unmatched participles, it sometimes lent him a particularly effeminate appearance. Secretly it made him feel good, as if it was he, not Liz, who was some kind of refugee from a Turkish harem. Despite the inevitable jokes he found it went a long way not just to mitigating uninvited aromas and more than once saved him from being punched in the face by a suddenly motivated would-be claim jumper.

“First I gotta go to Aurora. You can come along if ya like.” Machin had planned his trip to Aurora to coincide with the arrival of Governor Nye’s new circuit judge appointment hoping he might settle the irritating legal wrangle regarding his legislative seat. In the last week there had been rumors of a Paiute uprising. He didn’t at all mind the prospect of having the intimidating Chinaman accompany him on the desperate stretch between Mono and Aurora.

“First Bodie. Then go Aurora! You come now. Ton-Wa very like not wait!” The emphatic tone of the reply was intended to end the conversation.

Machin had taken a deep breath as if to summon his rhetorical skills but before he could expel any argument, Ton-Wa grasped him firmly by the arm and instead what came out was,

“Well, screw me in a rabbit’s glass eye.”

The recent alkali dust storm had rendered everything in sight an opaque monochromatic void that merged seamlessly with the ghostly, surreal off-white taffeta of the horizon. As the two headed north, the Bodie Turnpike seemed no more than a intuition, a shadow lined with Horsebush Thistle and Indian Paint which at best could barely be confirmed out by the periodic appearance of a rattlesnake trampled by a horse or run over by a wagon wheel. The name ‘Mono’ had never appeared more apt.

They had not made much progress in the two hours since departing Machin’s shack, having traversed only five miles when another alkali storm suddenly whipped up forcing them to seek shelter under a large group of nearby boulders. The limestone and granite formation they cowered under had aptly been named ‘Necessity Rocks’. Even huddled thus under the saddle blankets the driving dust insinuated itself coating Machin’s glasses, obscuring his already poor vision and though a brute force of nature, confirming his usual quip on politics by quietly infiltrating every available orifice. When

they finally emerged from behind the boulders Ton-Wa immediately spied the partially obscured matched set of tracks indicating where two wagons had recently traveled by them. Obviously they had missed them when they passed by in the storm. Machin then heard the thud of rapid hoofbeats. As he turned and stood he felt momentarily dizzy. He involuntarily blinked at the abrupt brightness when he removed his glasses, squinting with his weak eyes at the brush and boulders.

“Sure t’ain’t no reg’lar fall to me,” Returning them to his face he could make out a short distance away what looked like two braves staring at them with oblique interest from horseback. Silent and motionless, they loomed like negative inviolate voids somehow scoured from the landscape by the recent abrasive winds. It was if they had been there all along in some alternate reality revealed now in their full multi-dimensionality by some new chromatic alignment in the liquid morning light and miraculously without a bit of dust on their bodies as if inhabiting some dust free parallel dimension.

He had at first taken them for Paiutes then quickly realized, to his relief, that these were most likely Kutzadika, basing this on the rawhide bags slung round their necks which most likely contained ‘Koo-Cha-Bee’, a Kutzadika delicacy consisting of dried fly larvae harvested from the lake shore. Unlike the fiercer Paiutes, the Kutzadika had declined to take arms as a group to oppose the intrusions of the whites into Utah and Nevada. They were descendants of an ancient agricultural tribe, the Anasazi, who had moved west to the Sierras centuries before when their native lands near Chaco Canyon New Mexico had faced an extended drought. The Paiute on the other hand were not a true tribe but a hunting confederacy, an assemblage of various bands that had cohered after failed migrations eastward following the game around the same time the Anasazi had moved west and who had adopted a common language.

While Kutzadika almost never attacked whites in any organized fashion there had been two recent incidents that inflamed local passions. The first occurred a month before at Lucky Boy Pass when an Indian had shown up at a miner’s camp after dark apparently looking for work hauling firewood. Thinking he was a claim jumper, the miner had shot him. As he phrased it later, ‘Sure I been drinking but I probably would’da shot the bastard sober anyway’.

Whites accused of killing Kutzadikas were usually hauled before the tribal council. This time, the Bridgeport sheriff had ridden directly into the Kutzadika encampment demanding custody. The man had to stand trial in Bridgeport. California was asserting its jurisdiction. They had delivered up the miner but then thinking better of it they had then followed them to Bodie demanding his return to face justice at an Indian tribunal. The circuit judge refused to surrender him so a few days later they broke into the Bridgeport jail and took him. The sheriff had taken a posse and pursued them back as far as Saddlebag lake where they stopped to water the horses catching up with them there.

“Hand over that reprobate and we will make sure he gets a trial.”

The three surprised Kutzadikas were about to surrender the man again when yet another sweaty white man with a badge had ridden up in a huff yelling.

“That man got no authority here, I am the law in these here parts and as is this boy’s goin first to Aurora and then to Carson City ‘n if’n he stands trial in California you’ll never see hide or hair of him again. I kin guarontee that” The confused promises and bickering of the metal with the metal sun symbol were so irritating and confusing that they now refused to hand the man over and were preparing for a fight when Machin rode up to ask for a sitdown and a smoke to clear matters up. The miner was duly handed over to the Bridgeport sheriff after Machin settled the matter by shooting the poor man in the leg. Bridgeport had the only doctor.

Machin had little patience for these quibbles. The overlapping legal jurisdictions emanated from the exact same irksome boundary dispute as had put Machin’s legislative seat in limbo. Then there had been the second incident. The murder over in Owen Valley, by the Bishop Tuff. When he had first seen the two braves he thought perhaps it had something to do either with that or the case of the miner but the sly actions of these two now seemed to indicate otherwise.

As they approached, Machin instinctively reached for his rifle which was still in his saddle holster. The shorter of the two Indians walked his horse up closer and in a swift motion leaned over and grabbed it abruptly from his hand. Rather than menacing Machin, he began admiring the intricate etched silver inlay on the Remington stock, turning it over and over.

“Don’t worry.-- Kutzadika” Machin reassured the already completely unconcerned Ton-Wa sotto voce. The taller one was cleaning his teeth and seemed less interested in Machin’s firearm than his horse. Throwing down the stalk of grass he had grunted and struck himself in the chest with his free hand indicating the two horses with two fingers extended on the other hand. Machin’s glasses had once again become coated with the fine powdery ambient alkali dust so he had been busily and impatiently cleaning the lenses while all this transpired and his lack of response seemed to irritate the braves further. He was spitting repeatedly and energetically on the lenses and holding them up to the sun. After a few minutes, losing patience one of the Indians threw a rope around Machin’s bay mount and begun backing it away. Machin was still holding onto the reins with his free hand so the horse bucked. The Indian holding his rifle now brandished a knife. It appeared uncertain if he meant to either cut the reins or attack Machin. In any event the jerking of the rein caused Machin to again drop his glasses on the ground next to Ton-wa who had been sitting there throwing Joss sticks the whole time.

“Shit!!”

“No argue with you.”

“I think we oughtta jes give ’em the horses. Whatta you think? I don’t like the look of that toothpick.” Machin now yelled at the preoccupied Ton-Wa. Machin was not only half blind now but suspected that the all pervading dust had left the functionality of the firing mechanism of his colt revolver questionable. He did not relish an altercation under these circumstances.

Ton-Wa, who had been picking his teeth with an ivory toothpick leaned forward to pick up Machin’s glasses from where they had fallen embarrassed, thinking the last remark had been directed at him. “Here you go boss. Long walk to Bodie. Stinkin’ fly-eater, no scalp us lug-lug no-how Huhh?” He whispered conspiratorily, handing back the lenses, smiling for the first time that day.

“No, they ain’t gonna scalp us.”

“Damn fly-eaters all right and you know damn well they don’t prefer no Chinee scalps anyway. You’d think they like ‘em pigtails, make for a slingshot.” Machin joked with more bravado than he felt at the

moment, grabbing the spectacles ungraciously from Ton-Wa's outstretched palm.

Having managed barely to hold on to the horse through all this he now let the rein drop completely and strode up to the taller of the two. It seemed they were at first taken aback by his sudden rather strangely aggressive behavior. Taking care not to look directly at the blinding sun just behind them or at his rifle glinting in its rays, he tapped his lips with two fingers in the gesture that ordinarily meant, 'give me a smoke', but which now indicated he wanted to sit and parlay. The brave still in possession of Machin's rifle to his side instead leveled it at him.

Holding his hands up Machin gingerly inched forward further toward his horse and the slack rein. Instead of grabbing the rein, rolling up his sleeves he wiped his horse's saddle removing the fine coating of dust, revealing the expensive and elegantly hand tooled leather work, the inlay of hammered silver arabesques interspersed with what appeared to be delicately studded black, polished stones. Burned into the pommel was the name 'Livingston' with the initials W.S. preceding it. Cautiously he uncinched it with his stubby fingers and let the expensive saddle drop to the ground. He then motioned toward it and then made as if to grab the horse's bridle. He was hoping the braves would get the picture, be satisfied with taking either just the horse or just the saddle, though, how he would then get back to Mono mystified him.

The shorter one suddenly let out a triumphant little yip. Machin took this as agreement to his offer and bent down to hand over the saddle when he suddenly realized that it was not the horse or the saddle, but the exposed whiskey bottle protruding from the saddle bags which his recent maneuver had dislodged that the buck was interested in. He instead removed the bottle slowly from the bag. Both Indians were now curious. They dismounted and approached Machin with quick confident strides. The shorter one grabbed the bottle, baring his teeth and threw what looked like a bag of rice at Machin's feet. The contents which were as Machin had surmised, dried fly larvae, spilled out. He breathed a long sigh of relief. It was beginning to look more like a trade rather than a robbery.

This idea of providing liquor to Indians, even to the normally friendly Kutzadika grated on him but less than the idea of losing his saddle which was after all a family heirloom. The fact of the imminent ill consequences of handing over the bottle were reinforced by an increasing sick feeling in his gut as the morning wore on. Ton-Wa having abandoned the joss sticks was glumly chewing on a wad of tobacco, spitting and uttering derisive grunts as the two Indians rifled through the remainder of Machin's belongings. Fairly inebriated, the tall one now was staggering and periodically firing the rifle off into the shimmering air and to Machin it looked like he was periodically attempting to kiss the other one. In any case it seemed they were not going to get to either Bodie or Aurora this day.

Machin leaned against the rock and extracted a pinch of tobacco and paper from the same pouch Ton-Wa was fishing his chaw. Images began flooding into his mind with impressionist fluidity. He pictured both their corpses lying astride the rocks riddled with rifle bullets, another picture floated up, of them horseless, trudging slowly back to Mono. Instead of alarming him further, these fugitive phantasms of his own death instead seemed paradoxically to calm him. Perhaps it was just the effect of the nicotine. It was not likely anyone would be traveling the section of the road anytime soon, - maybe Cherokee Liz carting some vegetables up to Bodie. Anyway, judging by the frequency of rattle snake corpses, in the best case it would be a good while before anyone stumbled onto their bodies.

A shot suddenly brought him from this reverie as it ricocheted off the rockface with the high-pitched immediacy of a ukelele string breaking just above their heads. He lurched unsteadily to his feet which sent the Indians into a paroxysm of laughter; Ton-Wa also jumped up grabbing at his chest as though he had been shot for real. As the echo of the shot died away in the far hills, the Indians both fell suddenly, strangely silent.

"Wovoka!" the shorter one yelled, excitedly gesturing behind them.

Machin craned to see what had scared them. He could see they were both staring wide eyed with fear and trembling. The bottle held by the now frozen Indian fell to the ground and shattered on a rock lying next to the saddle sending an involuntary tremor thru the shorter brave's torso.

“Wovoka! Na’a Nugga!” he had leapt onto his horse. The taller one seemed only a trifle less terrified but summoning the extra bit of courage, or maybe greed, he reached out grabbing the mane of Machin’s unsaddled horse. The horse reared again and despite his exhortations, his companion refused vehemently now to return to help.

‘Na’a Nugga’ he yelled from the stand of Manzanita to which he had retreated. Machin knew this phrase meant ‘ghost dance’. Letting go of Machin’s uncooperative horse the second now took off into the brush as well. Whatever had scared them it obviously meant more to them than the horse. In his excitement the first brave had climbed into the branches of the Manzanita causing the tiny red berries to drop off. Machin’s horse, spying these, to Machin’s chagrin, now ambled after the two and reaching the Manzanita began nuzzling the ground for the delicious treat.

The Paiutes had first developed the ghost dance and it would later be adopted by the Sioux as a means of preserving their culture. The original Paiute version was in no way a war dance, -to them it was a secret ritual and to witness it for a non-initiate meant death; a painful death by stoning. This possible consequence was apparently what had scared the two braves as riding through the brush were two strange and ghostly figures; one was on a horse and the other on a mule slowly picking their way curiously not along the road, but through the scrub horse thistle and small boulders, cutting a vague arrhythmic trajectory down from the butte. The voice was getting louder and more piercing, coming now from the stretch of scrub directly behind the rocks.