

Timponi's Tree

I stalk the white men. My moccasins are noiseless like the padded paws of a carnivorous cat. They are seven and I am one.

Ten moons ago they attacked our village, but we were ready. One of our hunting parties saw them approaching from the South. In the evening the white men rode in on their horses demanding that our Chief sign their treaty. They threatened death to us with their guns. They grabbed the Chief's daughter – Timponi. We warriors begin to shoot arrows through them and their horses from our rows of corn and quickly they retreated south to their towns.

They took the Chief's daughter – my wife – with them. Our tribe has only one painted horse, but he is the fastest in the land. I mounted the stallion and rode after the white men. They shot me in the shoulder and I fell. The pain in my shoulder was great, but Timponi is everything. My best friend from the day I was born just ten days after Timponi's birth. My life played in my head as I fell from the horse. When I hit the ground, I realized my life is Timponi.

Light flashed in my eyes and I heard the cry of a great eagle. I saw my wife and wanted to dive into her eyes – inviting emerald water. The stomping of the painted horse interrupted my vision. I pulled myself from the ground and onto the beast. I sat slumped and guided the painted stallion in the general direction of the retreating white men. They

were out of sight. Slumped, hungry, with teeth clenched against pain I tracked them. Through the night I tracked and the next morning I found my love.

Timponi's skirt was torn. She lay exposed. The result of the pleasure these men took with my wife was dry and white against her battered skin. Her moccasins missing, as well as her necklace and her scalp. The white men took the "Redskin" from Timponi's head as a trophy and a warning to other tribes that refused to sign their treaties.

Now I look at the men. They drink whiskey and I drink sorrow. For days following them on the painted horse, I drank sorrow. After finding Timponi. I rode upright – with purpose, a look of pride perhaps if someone watched, but I drank sorrow as I rode. And as I look at the men now, the sorrow I drink turns to hatred. I think of slicing the men open with my knife and swallow more hate. I see hanging from a pole next to a tent the long black hair of Timponi's scalp, and I gulp, gulp, gulp.

I put my eyes on the man I saw grab Timponi away from the Chief. The long hair on his face parts and he laughs, but it is not real. A voice behind his laugh tells me this. And I think – like me, he is only a man. And the emerald waters of Timponi's eyes bathe me as I think this.

I look at the pole with my wife's hair blowing in the wind. My feet are running and the man is still laughing – through his beard. I plunge my knife below the beard; it goes through his neck and blood sprays when I remove it. I jump to the next man and stick my knife through his throat. The white faces are blank and still for one more moment and I

jump to the next pair of haunted eyes and shove the blade into one of them. The pale faces are beginning to move. I stab a man in the chest then run over to the first one I killed. As I grab his hair and lift his head blood spurts from the hole in his neck.

I feel a disgusting warmth come over me as I slice into the front of the bearded man's scalp. I scream a warrior's cry and lift the scalp away from the man's skull as I cut. I hear the cries of my warrior brothers and I know that they will also cut away scalps in retaliation and the disgusting warmth turns to a blistering heat. I hear the white men's guns and with scalp in hand I run and I slash and stab. I hear the chief in my ear telling me to run to the tree with no leaves that stands amongst our rows of corn. I look but do not see the chief. I hear the calls of my warrior brothers telling me to run to the naked tree, so I run. Scalp in hand I run.

I hear the war behind me and look back. I feel and hear and see hundreds of wars with the white men. I feel life in the scalp that I hold and I look at it. I see the face of the bearded man it belonged to. And the voice I had heard behind the laugh says go to the naked tree. And I turn and run to the tree. And I notice my moccasins are missing. The tree has a door I have never seen.

The door opens and Timponi walks out. For a second I see her as I last saw her – her skull exposed. Then her long black hair swirls around her perfect face and the emerald water of her eyes bathe me.

"It is you....your spirit has returned to me." I run my hands through my hair, but it is not there and I touch my skull and again Timponi says, "your spirit has returned to me."

