

TELL ME WHAT A GOD SEES

A TALE

Richard Snodgrass

One

The two Indians followed the trail through the forest, along the bank of the river as it wound through the valley. On either side of the valley, the hills were beginning to green again with spring; along the trail were thickets of budding sassafras and witch hazel and huckleberry, the air alive with bees and dragonflies and the smell of blossoms and new leaves. The progress of the two men, determined and steady, walking one in front of the other (the white settlers would have called it Indian file, but the fact was the path was narrow), was marked at each step through the stillness of the forest (it was quiet, hushed, despite the buzzing of the insects, the gurgling of the river) by the clack of a turtle-shell rattle tied to one leg and the jingle of harness bells tied to the other leg of the man walking a couple paces behind the other. The man who was wearing the mask. Ahead was the clearing made by the petticoat warriors. As the two Indians came through the trees—*clack, jingle, clack, jingle*—the man in front, the chief known as Colonel Berry, spoke over his shoulder.

“Tell me what a god sees.”

“I told you. I’m not a god,” said the other, his voice muffled, far away. He wore a parti-colored cape and his head was in the shape of a tall blue cone.

“Then tell me what the mask sees.”

The Indian in the mask, the Aholi, stopped. The blue cone-shaped mask was several feet tall, the eyes and mouth marked with black triangles, with feathers and red yarn at the very peak and sprouting out the sides where the ears should be; at the neck was a fox skin ruff. The tropical-colored cape was daubed in red and yellow and green; his torso and limbs were painted alternately blue and yellow, though the body paint was faded and worn off in places. When the clack and jingle behind him stopped, Colonel Berry stopped too and turned around to see what was wrong. The Aholi took some cornmeal from the bundle he carried in his left hand and sprinkled it on the ground in a design, a pyramid of three half circles. Colonel Berry was afraid of this; the same thing happened every time he asked that question. Then the Aholi put the butt of his staff on the center of the design and swung the top in a wide slow circle, shrieking at the top of his voice, "Ah-hol-li-i-i-i-i!"

Colonel Berry, chief of the Onagonas, sighed. Around the clearing, the white men known as the petticoat warriors had stopped whatever they were doing to keep an eye on the two Indians, the sentries weighing their muskets. Colonel Berry waited until the guy in the tall blue head was finished.

"Do you always have to go through all that? Can't you just give me a simple answer, without making an entire ceremony out of it?"

Sorry," the Aholi shrugged. "It's what I'm supposed to do."

"These soldiers will do what they're supposed to do and kill us both if we're not careful. Come on."

Colonel Berry was an old man with white hair down to his shoulders; he wore the buff-colored coat of a French officer-of-the-line, with a pinch-waist, huge blue cuffs, and wide blue lapels. He nodded to the petticoat warriors, hello hello, grunted, smiled (his teeth were mainly blank spaces); he showed that his hands were empty, nothing up his floppy sleeves, pumped his shoulders

a couple times, indicated that he didn't understand what the guy with the pointy blue head was up to either, crazy Indians, and continued on across the clearing, the clack and jingle following along behind. Gradually the soldiers in the clearing went back to work.

"Tell me again about the men in petticoats," said the muffled voice of the Aholi.

Colonel Berry looked over his shoulder and asked the other to repeat the question before he got it all. The language of the Aholi was both similar to that of the Onagonas and different; it was the old language, the language of the Ancient Ones. Usually when they talked they could watch each other's hands, using signs and pantomime to help explain what each was talking about, but even then there were times when Colonel Berry thought that they might be having two entirely separate conversations, each one thinking he understood the other. But he supposed that was only to be expected, trying to talk to a god.

"They are warriors from one of the kings across the ocean. The English king."

"I thought you said about the white men that the men wore pants and the women wore petticoats."

"True," said Colonel Berry. As he walked the skirts of his French officer's coat flared out to reveal that he wore nothing underneath except a string tied to keep his genitals in place. "Except for these warriors. It's a mystery."

The Aholi, clacking and jingling along, himself wearing a white dance kilt underneath his cape of many colors, shook his head in wonder of it all. "Do they fight like women?"

"Almost as fierce," said the chief. Remembering the last time he fought with his wife. The old woman gave him a whack on the enamel snuffbox he wore clamped in his left ear that nearly tore his entire earlobe off. "Maybe it is the breeze up underneath there that makes them so fierce. Like Indians."

The chief looked back over his shoulder at the Aholi. The two men shrugged to each other and kept walking. *Clack, jingle, clack, jingle. . . .*

Colonel Berry was a man who always gave a mystery its due; he was also a diplomat and didn't want any trouble with these soldiers. The petticoat warriors were soldiers of the Black Watch, the 42nd Royal Highland Regiment, who were sent here by Colonel Henry Bouquet to build a blockhouse at the juncture where the river the English called the Allehela joined the larger river the English called the Ohio, ten miles or so downriver from the settlement the English called Fort Pitt. The same Colonel Bouquet who, a year and a half earlier, with these same petticoat warriors, defeated the Delawares, Shawanese, Mingoes, Wyandottes, Mahicans, Miamis, and Ottawas—more than defeated them: chased them, these petticoat warriors with their kilts hiked up around their groins and screaming like devils, for two miles through the woods—at Bushy Run. The same Colonel Bouquet who last autumn took an army including these same petticoat warriors into the far wilderness of Ohio where few white men had ever gone and no army was supposed to be able to go, and demanded (and got) peace from what was left of the tribes.

Colonel Berry wasn't there when Bouquet met the other chiefs on the banks of the Muskinghum, nor was he or the rest of the Onagonas at Bushy Run, but the story of what happened out there in the Ohio wilderness spread quickly back through the land. Colonel Bouquet pitched a tent and asked the Indians to meet with him. When the Indians sent word that it wasn't convenient to talk to him right at the moment, Colonel Bouquet waited a couple days until the rain stopped, then moved his troops closer to the Indian encampment, placing them in a long line across the crest of a hill where he was sure the Indians could see them—his detachments of the Royal Americans and the Virginia Militia, the Pennsylvania and Maryland volunteers, and the

main body of his force, the heart of his army, the Black Watch, Bouquet's beloved Highlanders, the petticoat warriors. Well, if that was the way Bouquet was going to be about it, the Indians decided they could at least talk to him. The chiefs told Bouquet that they were certainly sorry about all those white settlers who got tortured and murdered and scalped, but that all the trouble came from their wild younger braves whom they couldn't control; the chiefs told Bouquet that they couldn't possibly do what he asked and give back all the hostages they'd taken over the years. The chiefs smiled and shrugged at that, too bad, and hoped Bouquet had a safe journey back.

Bouquet, however, a short squat Swiss mercenary who understood Indians better than any other officer in the English army, looked them in the eye and told them that they couldn't leave just yet because he wasn't through with them; he told them he didn't believe the chiefs when they said they were sorry, called them liars to their faces in fact, the first time anyone had dared speak to these powerful chiefs that way. What's more, he wouldn't shake hands with them either—a real insult that, unheard of, especially so because it was white men who had taught the Indians to shake hands in the first place. When the chiefs got huffy, Bouquet reminded them that the petticoat warriors lined up on the hilltop behind him—their pipes screaming and their broadswords drawn and their kilts tucked up around their groins ready to start the chasing again—were not only the same petticoat warriors the Indians met at Bushy Run, but were also the friends and kinsmen of the Montgomery Highlanders who the Indians had overwhelmed with General Grant at Fort Duquesne a few years earlier, the friends and kinsmen of the Highlanders whose bodies after the battle the Indians had mutilated and whose heads the Indians had mounted on poles; Bouquet told the chiefs that the Black Watch wanted their turn at the Indians again, and that Colonel Bouquet, like the chiefs with their young

braves, wasn't sure he would be able to control them. The Indians brought in the first of their white hostages early the next morning. Colonel Berry knew the Black Watch warriors were one mystery he didn't want to tamper with.

Near the spot where Bouquet wanted a blockhouse, on a rise above the bank with a commanding view of the smaller river as it flowed into the larger, the engineers had erected a pugmill and kiln to make bricks for the fortification. To power the pugmill, an ox, which was attached to a long pole, which in turn was attached to the shaft of the mill, slowly pursued a bit of hay dangling in front of its nose around an endless circle. The smoke of the kiln firing the bricks drifted over the water, drifted up against the tall bluffs of the hills that rose steeply on the other side of the valley, the smell like that of a hundred campfires. The two Indians stopped to watch two soldiers cut logs for roof beams. One soldier stood in a long pit dug underneath the log, pulling down on the great whipsaw to make the cut, while the other soldier stood on top of the log to pull the saw back up again. To keep up the spirits of the workingmen, a piper played strathspeys and reels on the instrument that was known in Colonel Berry's language as "Wringing-the-Goose-with-Five-Necks."

"It is a mystery," Colonel Berry said, holding up his arms so the ruffles at the ends of his sleeves flopped back over his wrists, "how the white men think up all these different things."

"They're definitely creatures from another world," said the Aholi, shaking his tall blue head. "If we have time, I would like to see the animal you told me about called the pig."

The chief decided they had time, and led the way up the hill toward the pens.

Colonel Berry had dealt with white men before. First there were the French expeditions into the area; then came the English traders, the few who took the trouble to look up the Onagonas; then there were the soldiers who established Fort Pitt. But for

the most part, everyone tended to leave the Onagonas alone, both the whites and the other Indians. The Onagonas were a small tribe whose only village was tucked out of the way a dozen miles upstream along the river in the Valley of the Crows. It was the Onagonas who gave the river its name, Allehela, or rather, that was the word the English thought they heard when the Onagonas referred to it in their own language as “The-River-in-the-Valley-of-the-Crows”; the Onagonas, on the other hand, could never figure out why the English called it “The-River-Cried-a-Valley-Full-of-Crows.” Colonel Berry, of course, accepted it as only another mystery. The Onagonas hadn’t participated in the Indian Wars, being a peaceful lot by nature; they hadn’t participated in Pontiac’s uprising or any of the other attempts of the tribes to scourge the white settlers from the land. But the more Colonel Berry had to do with the whites, the more he understood his brother Indians’ point of view; and if any Indians had the right to feel encroached upon by white settlers, it was certainly the Onagonas. Until the 1700s the Onagonas had the entire valley to themselves. They were the only tribe to inhabit this part of the country at all—until the increase of white settlers from the Two Kings across the ocean drove the other tribes westward from the coast. Soon enough, there were Delawares and Shawanese along with several other tribes padding around through the woods. Later came the rulers of the land, the Iroquois.

As might be expected given the nature of this world, stronger tribes moving into an area would usually wipe out a smaller tribe like the Onagonas. And they undoubtedly would have in this case too, except that these new tribes considered the Onagonas at best crazy, and at worst a village of witches, and left them alone. Colonel Berry was quite aware of what the other Indians thought of the Onagonas and was careful not to do anything that might change their minds: hence the joy of walking around the woods with a guy in a cape and pointed blue head clacking and jingling

behind him. On the other hand, when the whites saw how the other Indians, even the powerful Iroquois, shied away from the Onagonas, they figured the little tribe must be a band of mighty warriors and were glad that Colonel Berry had never given them any trouble. Colonel Berry was also quite aware of what the English thought of the Onagonas and was careful to keep them thinking that way too: hence, the joy of walking into a clearing full of petticoat warriors wearing a French officer's coat, flaunting it like a scalp. The English didn't need to know that the chief found the coat after the French left the area in a hurry after Bushy Run. The threat that the Onagonas might yet decide to rise up was the reason Bouquet wanted a blockhouse in the area, to delay them as much as possible when the demon savages came boiling down the Alleghela. As the two Indians crossed the clearing now, the soldiers maintained their strict orders to keep an eye on Colonel Berry but to never, never antagonize him.

The chief led the clacking, jingling Aholi past the rows of soldiers' tents to a barrier made of boards and notched tree trunks. The two men peered over the top.

"The pig?" said the Aholi.

"The pig," said Colonel Berry.

There were half a dozen of the young pink animals—they had twig-like legs and their bodies were like water gourds with a curlicue handle on one end and a blunt-nosed spout on the other—frolicking around in the straw and mud inside the enclosure. On one side a board lay in the straw; several piglets took turns doing nose dives and sliding on their bellies across the slippery surface, then jumped up and scampered around to try it again. In a corner, two more gnawed at the innards of a third that evidently hadn't been strong enough to hold up living with the others. The animals were the color of the petticoat warriors without their petticoats; smelled something like the white men too. As the two Indians watched, one of the piglets came over and sat down in

front of them, sitting on the side of its haunches with its dainty hind legs folded underneath itself.

“Let me see if I’ve got this right,” said the Aholi. He had to tilt his tall pointed head in order to see down at that angle; the little animal gazed lovingly back up at him. “This thing that surrounds the pig is known as a fence.”

“True,” said Colonel Berry.

“And the reason the white men build the thing known as a fence is to keep the pig inside.”

“True.”

“But why would they want to keep the pig inside? The pig could find its own food if it was outside the fence.”

“True. But the white man says that the pig belongs to him, so he has to build a fence around it to keep it.”

“But how can he say that he owns an animal? The pig belongs to the pig.”

“True,” said Colonel Berry. “But he has to be able to say he owns the pig before he is able to eat the pig.”

“But all white men do not bother to build a fence and say they own the pig before they eat one, do they?”

“True. The white man who builds a fence and says he owns the pig can sell the pig to anyone else who wants to eat the pig.”

“But if the other white men knocked down this thing known as a fence, then the pig could run around and the other white men could kill the pig when they wanted to eat the pig and then they would own the pig.”

“True. But the white men have another thing known as pen-and-ink-work that does not allow them to knock down the thing known as a fence.”

“This pen-and-ink-work,” said the Aholi, scratching the yarn and feathers sticking out from the side of its tall pointed head. “It sounds like another kind of fence.”

“True,” said Colonel Berry. “But the things known as pen-and-ink-work are kept in another thing known as a book.”

“What is a book?”

“A book is a stack of pen-and-ink-work that is used to stop the white men from doing such things as taking down a fence.”

“Who does this pen-and-ink-work?” said the Aholi.

“Other white men,” said Colonel Berry.

“I had no idea the world was so complicated.”

“True. But the white men seem very fond of it that way. They spend a lot of time making new ones.”

“Fences or pen-and-ink-work?”

“Both,” said Colonel Berry, using his fingers to comb out a bee that was tangled in his shoulder-length white hair.

The Aholi shook his blue head in wonder of it all. For him, white men were something new. He was a Hopi; he came to this part of the country that would someday be called Pennsylvania, twenty-five hundred miles across this country that would someday be called America, from another part of the country that would someday be called Arizona. He had only heard of white men before. A century or so earlier, a few white men called missionaries had ventured to the desert mesas where the Hopi lived, but they didn't stay around too long. The missionaries sent all the Hopi men away from the pueblos to the mountains, to cut timbers and drag them back a hundred miles or more across the desert, in order to build something called churches for someone call the God of Love; meanwhile the missionaries themselves stayed back in the villages and practiced their missionary position of love on the prettiest Hopi women. Eventually the Hopi men got fed up with the arrangement. Even though Hopi means “People of Peace,” the Hopi men picked up the missionaries and carried them to the edge of the mesas and tossed them over the side to the rocks below. One of the first things the Aholi noticed about

these white men called the petticoat warriors was that they were careful to stay down here on the valley floor.

The Hopi had lived in this valley at one time, various clans of the Hopi that is; they stopped off here in the course of their migrations, settling down for a few years or a few hundred years, then moving on again, in the ancient times after the Hopi first came to this continent, after they emerged into what was known to them as the Fourth World. The Guardian of this world said that they could stay in the Fourth World on the condition that each clan traveled to the four boundaries of their new land, so they could see for themselves how special it was; then they would be allowed to settle once and for all at the spiritual center of this world, back on their mesas in the desert. Accompanying the clans on their migrations were kachinas—such as Aholi and his best friend Eototo, a guy dressed all in white with a white dome head—who traveled with the Hopi to protect them. Legend had it that once when the Hopi were attacked while traveling through Mexico, Aholi stayed behind to fight off their pursuers so everyone else, including Eototo, could escape. Though the others got away safely, Aholi was killed. But death for a kachina wasn't a lasting thing, and when he lived again he spent centuries roaming around the continent all by himself trying to catch up to Eototo. It was said that the two spirits were finally reunited in this valley; the Hopi left a shrine here, tucked into the side of a gully, to commemorate the event and the great love between the two kachinas. Every generation or so, the Hopi sent men separately back here, following the ancient trails, to impersonate the two kachinas and reenact the meeting and conduct the appropriate ceremonies at the shrine. The Aholi was still awaiting the arrival of the Eototo this time when the Onagonas found him first.

The Aholi looked down at the piglet on the other side of the thing known as a fence. The piglet sat sideways on its little pink rump, both its hind legs stuck out on one side and crossed at the

ankles; the piglet gazed back with its big brown animal eyes, batting its long pale lashes up at him. In the corner, the two that had been feasting on the body of another stood nose to nose, with the flat of their snouts pressed together, leaning like two drunks holding each other up. The Aholi hadn't taken off the mask for over a week now, not since he put it on and became the Aholi when he first arrived at the shrine, not since the chief of the Onagonas found him and took him to his village. The mask was never meant to be worn for such a length of time; what started out as a rather musty, mildewy smell had become the definite odor of something rotting—either him or the mask or both—and the mask was beginning to stick to his face, he could feel it fused to his skin so he could no longer tell for sure where his face ended and the mask began. But he had known when he was chosen by the elders to portray the Aholi and make the journey here to the ancient shrine that it would be dangerous, that he wasn't necessarily expected to return. (The reality of that fact didn't sink in until he happened to see one of the elders making a new Aholi mask to replace the one he was taking with him.) Whatever happened now, it was all right; it must be the way things were supposed to be. Though he sometimes had trouble understanding exactly what the chief of the Onagonas said or meant, he knew Colonel Berry honored the Aholi as much as any Hopi, treating the Aholi as a thing of great power. Whatever happened now was the Spirit's will. At his feet, on the other side of the thing known as a fence, the animal known as the pig snorted, winked at him, got up, and sashayed away, its cute little vulva puckered high in the air, hams as nice as those of the girl the Aholi used to know on the mesas. The memory caused a slight shift in the drape of his ceremonial kilt. The Aholi looked away.

“Tell me what a god sees,” said Colonel Berry.

“I'm not a god,” said the Aholi. “I'm a messenger of the gods.”

Colonel Berry sighed. He thought if he asked often enough he could maybe trip him up. “Then tell me what the mask sees.”

The Aholi sprinkled his cornmeal on the ground in the design of the three clouds, placed the butt of his staff on the design, and started to swing the top around in a slow wide circle, started his shrieking, “Ah-hol-li-i-i-i-i!” chant again, when Colonel Berry put his hand on the Aholi’s arm. “Just tell me this time, okay?”

The Aholi seemed disappointed but he looked around, at the pig and the fence and the men working down the slope in the clearing, at the glint of the river and the tall bluffs rising up on the other side of the valley, at the hills turning to green around them, more green, more trees than he had ever seen in his life.

“The world is a place of wonders,” said the Aholi.

“That’s all you can tell me?” said Colonel Berry. “That’s it? The world is a place of wonders?”

The Aholi leaned on his staff, the bells and rattle tied to his legs shifting uneasily, *jingle clack*. “Wonders can mean a whole lot of different things, you know. And I told you, I’m not a god, I’m just a spirit.”

Colonel Berry scratched himself through the skirts of his French officer’s coat. He considered for a moment the difference between wonders and mysteries; he decided wonders for him were the biggest mysteries of all.

“Come on. It’s time we found The Seneca.”

Two

When he was a boy, as was the case with every young boy of the Onagonas when it was time to become a man, Colonel Berry—that wasn’t his name then, of course; it was Altoweneeha, which meant “Looks-in-the-Wrong-Place”—was sent out into the woods

alone, with neither food nor weapons. (Driven out, would be more like it; his mother had to chase him with a willow switch to get him out of the village.) The hope was that after several days of solitude and meditation, to say nothing of being hungry and scared out of his wits, he would see some animal or bird whose presence would give him a profound sense of well-being; this would be a sign that he had made contact with his guardian spirit or spirit guide, which meant that he was ready to proceed with the rest of his life. After a couple of days, however, of tramping around in the woods and finding nothing except the skeleton of one of his playmates who hadn't been able to make such contact (a boy had to stay out in the woods until he did), young Altoweneeha began to wonder how many of the stories he had heard of smiling blue jays and winking foxes were actually true. He also began to wonder what his folks had known about him when they named him "Looks-in-the-Wrong-Place."

Then on the morning of the third day, as he walked along listening to his stomach rumble, he looked up and found a bear ahead of him on the trail. It was a young bear, only a few years old, not quite fully grown though large enough that the boy froze in his tracks. For a moment the bear froze too. It sniffed the air in the direction of the boy, came a little closer on all fours and sniffed again; then the young bear stood up on its hind legs and walked over to a fallen tree and sat down, crossing its legs and resting its forepaws in its lap.

"Boy, am I glad to see you," said the bear, a big smile on its face.

"Why's that?" said the boy.

"Well, I was sent out here to find something that gave me a sense of well-being, so I'd know I had made contact with my spirit guide. And I guess you're it."

"Uh-oh," said Altoweneeha, uncertain how well a bear took bad news. "That's why I was sent out here too."

“Hmm, that’s not a very good sign, is it?” said the bear, its shoulders slumped, discouraged. Then it began to pick with an extended claw at a berry pit lodged behind one of its canines. “But I guess I’m not really surprised. I was beginning to doubt the whole idea anyway, weren’t you? I mean it leaves too many things to chance. A crow happens to shit from a tree as you happen to walk by, and you grow up thinking your spirit guide loves you every time a poor bird has the runs. Too many possibilities for error, if you ask me. I’m glad I went on ahead and ate something a while back.”

“What do you think I should do?”

“I’d go ahead and eat something too. Otherwise you’re liable to start hallucinating, and there’s no telling what you’ll think you’re talking to out here.”

“No, I mean about finding a spirit guide.”

The bear, having found the berry pit, forgot its claws were still extended and went to scratch its nose and spiked itself. “Well, one thing I know for sure,” it said, holding the end of its muzzle in both paws and looking cross-eyed down its snout. “You better not go back and tell them you were talking to a bear.”

“Why, am I hallucinating now?”

“I hope not,” said the bear. Satisfied that its snout was all right, it leaned back on the log, clasped its crossed-over knee with both paws, and rocked back and forth. “Because that would mean I’m hallucinating too, and then what could a poor bear believe?”

Altoweneeha went back to the village and told his people that a crow had smiled at him as it defecated berry juice on a liverwort plant and got himself the reputation of a great seer. He also got himself a new name.

As he grew older he continued to look for signs, manifestations of the spirit world in the everyday, tried to have conversations with dogs, squirrels, blue jays—he thought he came close once with a particularly enigmatic woodchuck—but he never found

another talking animal. That he even tried, however, was enough to get himself chosen as the tribe's sachem; the rest of the Onagonas figured that if they weren't good fighters (which they weren't) and didn't strike fear into the hearts of other Indians (which they didn't) they would at least be distinguished at the council fires with other tribes by a chief who was bizarre. And Colonel Berry certainly lived up to their expectations. So much so that few Onagonas even blinked an eye when their chief returned from the woods one day followed by a figure wearing a cape with a tall blue pointed head. As for Colonel Berry, he thought he had finally found a sign almost as significant as the talking bear. He had been sitting on a rock by a dry creek bed when he heard the other coming toward him—*clack, jingle, clack, jingle....* He stood up as the Aholi came out of the trees and the two of them stared at each other for several minutes, each one afraid he was seeing things. When Colonel Berry learned there was another kachina, the Eototo, in the area as well, it was like the answer to a prayer. The Aholi for his part forgot about spiritual concerns for a while and concentrated on more mundane matters, such as how to stay alive in the hands of the Onagonas.

As it turned out, the Onagonas were actually one of the Hopi clans—a lost Hopi clan, to be sure—who had made a stopover in the valley a century or two before, and who for some reason, either because they were tired or growing lazy or forgot their purpose after centuries of wandering of why they were doing it in the first place, decided to settle down here. Colonel Berry had heard the legends of the migrations from the old sachem, had heard the stories of the spiritual center of the earth and the home where they would find peace on the desert mesas. But by this time only the legends and stories survived, and those only with the sachems, part of the secret knowledge of the office handed down from the old sachem to the new; the Onagonas had lost all their Hopi rituals and ceremonies, and Colonel Berry wasn't sure

whether he believed any of the stories or not. But the appearance of the Aholi, the similarity of the language, and the descriptions of the mesas where the kachina said he came from, convinced the chief that the old stories and legends were true.

The Aholi was the sign he needed, because Colonel Berry could read the other signs as well. It was bad enough that other Indian tribes had been forced into the Onagonas' territory; now the whites were coming. The whites would clear all the Indians from the land the same way the petticoat warriors were clearing the forest of the trees—there would be nothing left for any of the Indians soon. The only hope for his people as Colonel Berry saw it was to try to get them back to the mesas, the last clan to return from the migrations, and hope they could find refuge there. But the first step of such a long hazardous journey involved the local representative of the Six Nations: the Iroquois would not appreciate one of their children, as they considered the Onagonas or any of the lesser tribes, picking up and moving away. Colonel Berry had put off the confrontation for over a week, hoping the other kachina, the Eototo, would show up; he was going to need all the power he could get for such a meeting. But he couldn't put it off any longer. He would have to face the representative with whatever power he already had.

He found The Seneca at his usual spot, sitting cross-legged on an outcropping of rock high in the hills overlooking the valley; it was a place befitting a lord of the forest, where The Seneca could keep an eye on things around the jointure of the two rivers, anyone coming or going, the work going on below in the clearing. Farther up the valley, the smoke from the Onagona village was barely visible. The Seneca was smoking a cigarette that he'd rolled from some particularly foul-smelling leaves; he held the cigarette with his fingertips lined up along the top as if he were playing a small brownish-green flute, raising each finger in turn as it burned shorter as though he fingered progressively fewer and

higher-pitched notes. As this was the first time he had seen the Aholi, The Seneca tried not to stare as the figure clacked and jingled behind Colonel Berry, walking up out of the trees toward him.

“I heard you coming,” said The Seneca as the two sat down across from him.

“This is the Aholi,” said Colonel Berry. “He’s a spirit, one of the Ancient Ones.”

“How do you know that?”

“How many people do you know nowadays with a tall blue head?”

The Seneca nodded sagely and looked at the view. Crazy Onagonas, he said to himself. A Seneca, a member of the Six Nations of the Iroquois, was never one to whine or complain; but there were times he couldn’t help wondering what he had done to deserve the Onagonas. Why did they have to be in his territory; why couldn’t he have only simple savages like the Miamis or Wyandottes to look after? Colonel Berry, meanwhile, sitting a little to The Seneca’s right, was trying to calculate the length of the man’s arm in relation to what he knew (which wasn’t much) of the speed of acceleration from a body at rest: The Seneca was known to have a quick temper, and an equally quick tomahawk arm.

It was hard to know how to take The Seneca, even for another Indian. The Seneca’s face was painted so that seen from one side it looked like an eagle with a rounded beak, whereas seen from the other side it looked like a pike with an open-jawed snout. Seen from the front he was clearly a man divided. Head on—at least to an Onagona who did not go in for body painting—he was also a bit of a mess and slightly silly; but far be it from Colonel Berry, for a variety of reasons, to say anything if the man wanted to walk around like that. Colonel Berry by design was sitting slightly to the man’s fish side.

The Iroquois were the undisputed rulers of the land, at least among the Indians—the English seemed to have other ideas. Their power was so great that a single brave, in this case The Seneca—none of the Onagonas could say his given name, and this pretty well described him—could control an entire section of the country simply by being there. Colonel Berry had had little contact with the Senecas or any other member of the Six Nations until a short time before, when word came that not only were the English going to build a blockhouse near the mouth of the Valley of the Crows, but that they wanted to sign a peace treaty with the Onagonas and pay for the land involved, the first such arrangement with any tribe west of the Alleghenies. The Seneca called a meeting one night of the chiefs in the area to discuss the offer.

First the Delaware chief stood by the fire and said, “The Delaware say that we will sell no more land to the English.”

“I thought it was supposed to be Onagona land,” said Colonel Berry from where he sat.

Then the chief of the Shawanese stood by the fire and said, “The Shawanese say that we will sell no more land to the English.”

“I thought it was supposed to be Onagona land,” said Colonel Berry, still sitting down.

Then the chief of the Munsies, who didn’t even live in the area but were only passing through on their way west, stood by the fire and said, “The Munsies say that we will sell no more land to the English.”

“I thought it was supposed to be Onagona land,” muttered Colonel Berry in the direction of his moccasin.

“What I want to know is,” said The Seneca, who up to this time hadn’t said a word, “whose land is it, anyway?”

The Delaware chief, a man with black circles painted around his eyes and thigh-high leggings, drew himself up proudly. “The

Delaware are the most powerful people in the area. Therefore it is Delaware land.” He sat down again and grunted with a sharp nod of his head: so there.

The Seneca grunted acknowledgment, cocked his head so that the eagle side of his face showed, stood up, and before anyone really saw it, took out his tomahawk and sliced the Delaware chief’s head open down to the jawbone. Then he calmly took out his knife, cut off the man’s topknot, and sat down again.

“On the other hand,” Colonel Berry said in the silence that followed, “it is good to be able to talk about these things.”

The Iroquois definitely considered it Iroquois land, and considered it an Iroquois decision as to what to do with it; The Seneca let Colonel Berry know that for the Onagonas to have any dealings with the English about it, one way or the other, would not be a friendly thing to do by Iroquois standards. Sitting in the sun on his rock now, overlooking the valley tinged green with spring, The Seneca, down to the last stop on his smoky flute, stubbed out the cigarette on the sandstone in front of him. The ash let off a small stinky cloud; the Aholi coughed, clacked and jingled as he shifted position. The Seneca looked up at him from under his eyebrows, his face a dichotomy of feathers and scales, then leaned back.

“Well,” said The Seneca as he cocked his head, trying to show his less threatening fish side, “what have the Onagona decided?”

The old chief squirmed around to find a cool spot for himself on the rock—when he sat down, he made the mistake of flaring out the skirts of his French officer’s coat, the way he’d seen the French and English officers do, forgetting about the sunlight on the sandstone and the fact that he was wearing only a string underneath. Finally he got himself situated so he could sit on the coattails.

“We’ve decided to sell the land to the English.”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” said The Seneca.

“In fact, we’ve decided to sell the entire valley, everything you see here spread before us, this side of the valley as well as the other.”

The Seneca, both fish and fowl, looked at him straight on. “You don’t own the other side of the valley.”

“We don’t own this side either,” smiled Colonel Berry. “Nobody owns the land, you know that.”

“Yes, I know that,” said The Seneca. “But that doesn’t stop the English from wanting to buy it from us.”

“True,” said Colonel Berry. “So it shouldn’t stop us from selling it to them.”

The Seneca turned his head to full eagle. Colonel Berry looked for the first sign of movement in The Seneca’s tomahawk arm. The Aholi began slapping himself on the side of his blue head. The Seneca and Colonel Berry looked at him.

“Bug in the mask,” said the Aholi.

“Yes,” said Colonel Berry. “That could be a problem.”

The Seneca gave them both the eagle-eye.

He understood intuitively what the white men called business; aside from representing the interests of the Iroquois, there was a lot at stake personally in all this too. In a later age he would be called a futures trader: he found that he could arrange loans from the fur companies for the tribes under his protectorate against the coming year’s supply of pelts and skins, in return for which he collected a fee (there are other names for such things) from both the fur companies and the tribes. He had a nice little arrangement here, he didn’t want to give any of it up if he could help it, a man gets used to certain amenities. When he heard the English were going to start offering money for sections of the territory, he thought he might be able to get into what someday would be known as land speculation as well. The idea that the Onagonas were talking to the English certainly cut him out of any deal. But all his personal ventures were only minor

considerations; the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy would not stand for any lesser tribe making treaties with the white men and selling land without the Iroquois' involvement. There was no help for it, if that's what the Onagonas had decided to do: the Onagonas would have to be wiped out, obviously. Crazy Onagonas. He'd have to arrange for somebody to take care of it right away for them—Shawanese or Miamis most likely, those tribes didn't care who they killed.

"You know what they're going to say in the longhouse when I tell them about this, don't you?"

"Yes," said Colonel Berry. "That's why I brought you the Aholi."

The Aholi took new interest in the conversation.

"What am I supposed to do with him?" said The Seneca. "You know I travel light."

"No, I mean I brought him as an offering. You have heard of the white man's religion?"

"The Christians." The Seneca rolled his eyes heavenward.

Colonel Berry nodded. "The white man has the idea that if you consume their god you will receive holiness. Part of their idea of the thing known as property, I guess. It's an old idea, of course; Indians have always eaten the flesh of their enemies in order to have their power, and the way they act the whites certainly must consider their god an enemy too. For myself the only thing about the white man's three-in-one god that ever made sense was the part about the bird. But whatever, it has made them very strong, they can kill like crazy. So I brought the Aholi here for you. This is the first chance you've ever had to eat an Indian god. In return, maybe you'll try to fix things up for us in the longhouse."

"I told you before," said the Aholi with new insistence. "I'm not a God. I'm a spirit."

"That's good enough for most people," said Colonel Berry.

“If I’d known what you had in mind,” said the Aholi, “I wouldn’t have come with you.”

“That’s why I didn’t tell you.”

The Seneca sized up the guy with the tall blue head. He wasn’t much of a meateater himself, human flesh. that is. Besides, he had talked to a couple renegade Miamis a few days earlier who had just eaten a guy similar to this one except that he was all white and had a white dome head; the Miamis said he tasted the same as any other red-blooded Indian. Crazy Onagonas, they’d believe anything. But The Seneca thought he might be able to trade the Aholi for something useful at Fort Pitt—maybe a brass jew’s harp, he had always wanted one of those. Or better yet, he thought he would keep him as a slave. The Aholi would add some class to The Seneca’s loan presentations; it wasn’t everyone in the woods who had an Ancient One trailing along behind him.

“I’ll see what I can do,” The Seneca told Colonel Berry and stood up, signifying the meeting was over. As Colonel Berry was about to leave, he leaned over and whispered—on the fish side—in The Seneca’s ear.

“Before you cook him up, have him do a couple of his tricks for you. Ask him to tell you what a god sees.”

He winked at The Seneca, patted the Aholi on the shoulder—the Aholi looked at him with blank, still eyes—and headed back down into the valley.

As he made his way down the hillside into the trees, the steep slope pulling him along, the air slipped under the skirt of his French officer’s coat, cool on his sweaty skin. Colonel Berry smiled to himself, satisfied. He could read the signs, he knew what was going to happen. Whether he sold the land to the English or not, he knew the white settlers would soon come and run the Onagonas out; he also knew his people were too lazy to get out of the way of the whites until it was too late and there was nothing left of them. But selling the land to the English would

infuriate the Iroquois, they would massacre the village—or have it massacred by the more vicious Shawanese or Miamis—and the knowledge that the mad dogs were coming would be enough to get his people moving again, on the road again, back across the country, back to the mesas in the desert where they belonged. When the raiding party arrived at the Onagona village, they would find only one crazy old man in a blue-trimmed French officer’s coat waiting for them, waiting to die, everything else important taken care of. The Aholi wouldn’t have had a chance; he wouldn’t have gone with the Onagonas, he was determined to fulfill his mission, to stay for his shrine and his ceremony and to wait for the other kachina, and the blood-crazed warriors would have eaten him for sure. The Senecas weren’t cannibals, at least this Seneca wasn’t, he got his power from other ways. The Aholi would be safe now.

There was a distant clack and jingle from up the hillside behind him. When he was deep enough among the trees not to be seen, Colonel Berry stopped and looked back. The Aholi stood on the table of rock high above the valley, facing the river below, the butt of his staff planted firmly on the sandstone as he swung the top in a wide slow circle and shrieked at the top of his lungs, “Ah-ho-li-i-i-i-i!” The Seneca sitting on the rock beside the Aholi gazed up at the figure with the tall blue head and shook his own head in amazement—eagle to fish, fish to eagle, eagle to fish.

Colonel Berry flat-footed on down the steep slope, adjusting his lapels, the ruffles flopping over his wrists. As he shook out his long white hair he listened to the cawing of the crows farther up the river toward his village, the sounds of chopping wood near the river and the rustling of something small and frightened scurrying away ahead of him through the ferns and dead leaves on the ground. He felt at peace with himself, with his world. With the white trillium. The greening trees. The song of a warbler. The Spirit, everywhere.