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How They Tried to Talk Indian Tony Down

by Kage Baker

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Science Fiction

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This happened about ten years ago, out at Tobin Farm.

Back in the sixties, somebody bought Tobin Farm for the purposes of holding a renaissance fair there during the summers. Offseasons it became a kind of commune for the people involved in putting on the fair. They lived modestly in sheds and trailers scattered on a hundred acres of oak wilderness back of the farm, collecting unemployment between fairs.

They had their own communal security force, in case of problems. Twenty-five years on, though, most of the members of the commune were arthritic and bespectacled and never got up to much in the way of trouble, except for domestic disputes or the occasional DUI.

Abby and Martha Caldecott lived at the foot of a hill, some distance from the center of the little community. Abby was into Wicca and Martha wrote romance novels, and during fair the sisters ran a beer booth. Remote as their trailer was, it was cozily domestic. There were bright geraniums in coffee cans. There was a small lawn and lawn chairs. There were plastic party lights strung from the awning, bright tropical fish. The lights shone out cheerily in the shadow of the hill. It was a dark cold shadow, because the hill was thought to be haunted.

On the night it happened, Abby was washing dishes after supper and Martha was watching an Alfred Hitchcock movie on the VCR (their television reception was oddly sporadic) when they became aware that somebody was up on the hill, whistling.

It was a plaintive whistle, as though somebody was trying to summon a lost dog, and as the sisters conferred they realized the sound had been going on at intervals since that afternoon. It was now pitch dark and past nine at night. Given that, and given the rumors about the hill, the sisters decided not to investigate. Abby made a pan of cocoa and Martha turned up the volume on The Birds.

They were sipping cocoa and watching the film when headlights flashed outside.

The sisters sighed and paused their tape. Abby got up and went out to investigate; a pickup truck had pulled into the gravel space beyond the lawn. Killer Mikey was just getting out.

Killer Mikey had been to Nam, a long time ago, and done very bad things there. He was okay now, though his hands still shook sometimes; but because he was familiar with things like radios and Situations, he had been made security chief for the commune. He stood now doubtfully shining his maglight up into the trees, announcing into his radio that he had arrived at the location. Abby asked him what was going on and he asked her if she knew what the whistling was. She told him she didn't, and he told her it was worrying all the people who lived up on Snob Hill, which was the cluster of trailers on the ridge opposite. He had radioed for backup.

As they stood there talking, the whistling came again, and this time right after it a faint little voice cried out Hey, from way far up in the darkness.

Killer Mikey walked backward, shining his light further up, and asked who was up there. After a long moment the voice replied Tony, and Killer Mikey frowned and then said Indian Tony?

Indian Tony was called that because he claimed to have been an Oglala Sioux shaman in a previous life.

Indian Tony affirmed that it was he. Killer Mikey asked him what he was doing up there.

There followed about five minutes of shouted questions and mostly incoherent answers, but the gist of it was: Indian Tony had gone for a hike and got himself lost, and didn't know how to

get off the hill.

Killer Mikey told him all he had to do was walk downhill toward his voice.

Indian Tony couldn't do that.

Killer Mikey went to his truck, backed it out a few yards and turned on the headlights.

There: all Indian Tony had to do was walk downhill toward the lights, okay?

Indian Tony couldn't do that either.

As they were trying to hammer out why, Killer Mikey's backup arrived: Jerry Moss, who had taken the call in his truck as he was returning from town with an order of Chinese food. His truck rattled up. He parked beside Killer Mikey and jumped out, complaining that his dinner was going to get cold. When Killer Mikey explained the situation, Jerry grew even more irritable and called Indian Tony a white asshole. Jerry happened to be a full-blooded Miwok and Indian Tony was, in fact, white, so neither Abby nor Killer Mikey argued the point.

By this time Martha gave up on The Birds and came out to see what was going on. As they were explaining to her, Indian Tony began to yell for help again. Now there were answering yells from the ridge, and a procession of headlights came bobbing down as more people were drawn to the scene.

Muttering, Jerry got his portable Hi-Beam out of the bed of his truck and shone it up the hill, walking back and forth to see if he could pinpoint Indian Tony's location. When he did, it was immediately obvious why Indian Tony couldn't come down. In the blue-white beam they spotted his tiny pale face peering out from the branches of a madrone, very far up the hill and about fifty feet above the ground.

Jerry cursed and called Indian Tony a jackass. Killer Mikey shouted up to tell Indian Tony they'd keep the light on him so he could climb down.

Indian Tony replied that he couldn't do that. He sounded as though he were crying now.

The people from Snob Hill were arriving by this time, getting out of their trucks and staring up the hill at Indian Tony trapped against the stars. Old Ricker the fiddler, who lived in the trailer next to Indian Tony's, came up to tell the security team that he had seen Indian Tony go out that afternoon wearing his ceremonial regalia (a plains war bonnet replica he'd found at a swap meet), which usually meant that Indian Tony was going on a vision quest. It also generally meant that Indian Tony had dropped acid.

Killer Mikey sighed. Jerry cursed again and clipped the Hi-Beam to the hood ornament of his truck. He got out his carton of chow mein and a pair of chopsticks and climbed up on the hood of the truck to eat. Killer Mikey made a megaphone of his hands and asked Indian Tony if the reason he couldn't climb down was because he was still all messed up.

Indian Tony replied that he couldn't come down because they were down there. Martha shook her head and expressed her opinion that Indian Tony was still all messed up, and wondered what they ought to do now?

Nobody wanted to call the sheriff's department, because little incidents like this tended to contribute to the slightly unsavory reputation Tobin Farm had developed over the years. Killer Mikey called up to ask Indian Tony what they were and was informed they were some kind of animals, man. What kind? He didn't know. What did they look like? They had big pointed ears.

Martha went running back to her trailer and came out with the Roger Tory Peterson Field Guide to Western Mammals. Through Killer Mikey's patiently shouted interrogation they built up a gradual description of what Indian Tony thought he was seeing, as Martha paged through the book by the headlights, and at last narrowed the possibilities down to either a lynx, Lynx canadensis, or a bobcat, Lynx rufus. Then they narrowed it further to bobcat, because Tobin Farm was much too far south for lynxes. The only problem was, Indian Tony insisted that they were all white, which bobcats were not; and that he could see three pairs of eyes, though the field guide stated that bobcats were solitary hunters.

Jerry looked up from his chow mein long enough to observe that Indian Tony might be seeing spirit animals, and it would serve the dumb bastard right if a spirit guide chased his white ass up a tree. He added a few crotchety words about people who had the nerve to co-opt other people's sacred stuff, after taking their land away too. Then he flipped his long gray braid back over his shoulder and went on eating.

Killer Mikey nodded sadly and lifted his hands to his mouth again. He told Indian Tony that they were probably not really there, and if they were they were probably just little wild kitties, and if he threw something at them, they'd probably go away, so why didn't he just break off a branch and throw it at them and then climb down in the light of the Hi-Beam?

Indian Tony didn't want to do that.

They argued back and forth for several minutes on the subject, as Martha continued to search through the field guide. Abby asked if anybody would like cocoa and went off to the trailer

to make more. Ricker asked Jerry whether or not somebody ought to go up the hill and bring Indian Tony down. Jerry replied that he wasn't about to, because all that undergrowth up there was poison oak. Ricker replied that he thought Native Americans were immune to poison oak. Jerry said like hell they were and told Ricker about the time he'd gone fishing at Rincon and walked through a thicket of it, not seeing the leaves because it was winter, but how even that much exposure had been enough to make his dick swell up like a beer can. Ricker tsked sympathetically.

He was telling Jerry about the time he got itch mites from sitting on an infested hay bale when Killer Mikey at last persuaded Indian Tony to break off a branch and throw it down at whatever it was that had him treed. Everyone there heard the slight crack and then the crash as the branch went down through the underbrush.

\_RRRrrrrAOOM\_, protested something, sounding seriously Big Cat in nature and quite angry. The sound echoed off the surrounding hills. Everybody froze. Jerry had lifted a big hunk of noodles and bean sprouts halfway to his open mouth, but now they slipped from his chopsticks, plop, on the hood of his truck.

Indian Tony began to gibber and scream. Killer Mikey observed that that had sounded like a goddamn tiger, man. His hands were shaking; not a good sign. Martha wondered if they maybe shouldn't call Animal Control?

Ricker volunteered. He jumped into his VW van and went puttering off in the direction of the phone booth out on Highway 37.

Killer Mikey staggered to his truck and leaned into the cab. He pulled the seat forward and rummaged among the various guns he had back there. Jerry finished his chow mein in a hurry and jumped down. Abby opened the trailer door and stood silhouetted against the light, calling out to know what was going on. Everyone told her to get back inside.

There was a crash up the hill and Indian Tony cried out that they were coming up the tree after him.

Jerry grabbed the Hi-Beam and directed it at the tree, and those present could see the distant branches thrashing in a manner that suggested that something really was climbing up from below.

Killer Mikey found his AK-47 and pulled it out, and aimed it up the hill, but his hands were trembling really badly now. Indian Tony, shrieking, was trying to get higher up in the madrone and breaking branches in his efforts. Jerry shouted up to him to stop, to hold on to the trunk with his arms and legs or he'd fall and break his neck. He handed off the Hi-Beam to Martha and pulled a handgun from the glove box of his truck.

Then the Hi-Beam went out. So did the truck lights and the lights at the trailer.

Flash, a second later the madrone was lit again, blue-white as before but not by the Hi-Beam. A column of radiance was stabbing down from the bottom of some kind of black aircraft, hovering just above the hill.

Below, they saw Indian Tony turn his face up, staring in astonishment. He rose, pulled by the light, gliding with a few broken branches upward into the craft. Something fell fluttering down: the war bonnet he'd been wearing.

There was another feline roar, a distinctly disappointed sound. Something very large made a last lunge at Indian Tony and they caught a glimpse of it for a second in the light; and it wasn't any Lynx rufus, or Lynx canadensis, either, though it was obvious why Indian Tony had been seeing three pairs of eyes.

There followed a moment of shock, in which all persons present quietly decided that they couldn't possibly have seen what they'd just seen.

Killer Mikey blinked rapidly and then took aim again, gamely trying to draw a bead on the aircraft, it being less of an insult to his rational mind. Jerry grabbed his arm and told him not to be an idiot; if the aircraft crashed the Government would be all over the farm, like what happened at Roswell.

Nobody wanted that, of course, because geraniums weren't the only plants grown on the farm. Killer Mikey lowered the gun and they all watched as the aircraft moved slowly off to the north, a darkness silently occluding stars where it passed. Something big was crashing through the woods below, following vainly after it. Gradually the sound died away.

The lights came back on, startling everybody, and Killer Mikey accidentally blasted hell out of Martha's lawn chairs. Nobody said anything, though, until Ricker came thundering back and leaned out of his van to announce that the Animal Control Department was sending a unit over as soon as possible. Then he realized they were all staring like zombies and wanted to know what had happened.

Jerry explained that Indian Tony had seriously offended something but that the Star

Brothers appeared to have bailed out his sorry ass. Ricker thought that over and announced he was going back to his trailer. It seemed like a good idea. When the Amador County Animal Control Department van crossed the tracks and bumped along the farm's dark rutted access road half an hour later, they couldn't find a soul to direct them. Finally they gave it up and left.

Nobody ever saw Indian Tony again. His disappearance went unreported and, because he had no family or job, unnoticed.

That was the end of the matter, except that the inhabitants of the commune stayed well away from the hill after that. Abby and Martha, in fact, paid Jerry fifty dollars to hook up their trailer to his truck and move them over to the other side of the ridge. Everybody knew what had rescued Indian Tony, but nobody knew what it had rescued him from, and that was a little worrisome.

Abby and Martha liked the new place. There was room to put in a vegetable garden.

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