

at Geronimo's
GRAVE



ARMAND GARNET RUFFO

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GRAVE

ARMAND • GARNET • RUFFO



WOLSAK
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For my brother Anthony Wayne Ruffo, who shares in the old way,

*and in memory of Mary (Orr) Slaney, Brian Espaniel,
Bill (Esber) Ritchie and Wilfred Pelletier.*

Knowing the force and action of fire, water, air, the stars,
the heavens, and all other bodies that surround it,
men can be the masters and possessors of nature.
– *René Descartes* (1596–1650)

The sun, the darkness, the winds,
are all listening to what we say.
– *Geronimo* (1829–1909)

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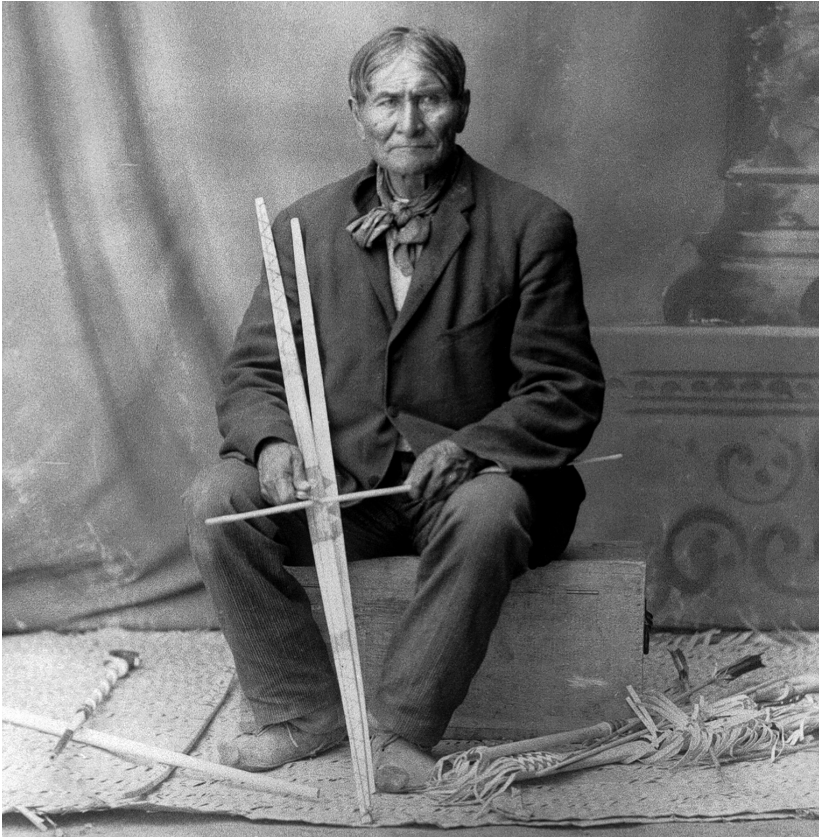
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*“Geronimo at the St. Louis World’s Fair”
— courtesy of the Smithsonian Institute*

at GERONIMO’S GRAVE

POWER

From where does the Power
come? The old ones see it
in a moment of desert twilight,
in a basket of slithering snakes,
lumbering in a white-tipped bear,
flying in a crow that speaks,
see it in you.

Beware. Do not pray
for what you might receive.
This beast, this stallion
is not for the weak willed
who bloat like frog
for personal gain
and turn themselves
to dust.

From where does the Power
come? In the voice
that calls four times your name
when wife and children
are murdered. Tells you
no bullet will harm you
(as none ever does)
as it breathes
into you.

CREATION STORY

Ascending we arrive at the end of the line
descend into Santa Fe, city of my longing
to see the world in a current of silver
and turquoise. Here under a portico of stone
eager tourists press, strangers to the people
who set out their blankets and rows
of jewellery in the age called America.
Here there are boutiques, galleries, churches.
I enter each and arrive to ask, how do we connect
to the sacred space between arrival
and departure? One step
and change is forever.

And I am at another place closer to who I am,
or think I am, steering straight ahead
travelling for what seems forever,
the sound of waves making me sing its rhythm.
Sixteen and dreaming of offerings of light
in the great beyond. Before I left
and met you, fell out of the sky
of my world, dove overboard,
and came up with a piece of soil
that turned into a warm body who smiled
and said I would never again
be the same.

Santa Fe, city of myth and glitter.
I hold to a company of friends
who hold hands to eyes to shield sun
and talk intimately of love and madness
in a time when power is a slogan,
a bullet, an ability to speak.
What would you say if you could see this stranger
standing in brilliant New Mexico?
This moment an amulet around my neck
I hold and stroke delicately
as though our hands were joined to the years
that amass in the burning heat,
blowing all the way back
to the creation
of us.

AT GERONIMO'S GRAVE

Fierce, tenacious, master of guerrilla warfare.

It's what the history books say. Though
at his grave, out of an unyielding sun,
and into a sanctuary of leafy shade, I move
through all that is said and not said
and touch the flowers left for him,
which make me wonder if it is possible for anyone
to have the last word. And I am reminded
that it took five thousand troops to track down
what was left of his Apache, thirty-five
men, women and children. Caught,
they say herded from New Mexico to Florida to Alabama
and finally all the way here to Oklahoma, to so-called
Indian territory (as if the rest of the country wasn't).

They say more.

That by the time he died at eighty he had embraced Christianity
and even taken part in a presidential inauguration.
Part of the parade I suspect, the evidence committed
to memory: last year in England, at the Brighton Museum
(of all places), I bought a postcard of him lost
behind the wheel of a Model T Ford,
looking like he had just fallen out of the sky and
onto the driver's seat. Portrait of an old chief in a top hat.
(It was my only purchase.) From there to here in one fatal swoop
as though giant talons have dropped me unexpectedly
onto this site. If I could I would ask him
if he too got plucked up by something larger than himself.

Last of the holdouts, they call him.

This morning at Fort Sill I saw the windowless cellar
they held him in (not open to the public)
and the other building they transferred him to,
the one turned into a museum and whitewashed.
A notice said he really spent little time in his cell
since he had the run of the place,
like a bed and breakfast, I am led to believe.
Yet, with wilted petals between my fingers soft as grace,
soft as old sorrow, and an even older sun overhead
guiding me beyond this arbour and back onto the highway,
I am left wondering about who he really was.
Oil fields and prairie flowers, barbed wire and distant mesas
red as a people locked behind aging vision
telling me it is the land that will have the last word.

For him whom they also call Prisoner of War.

BISCO GRAVEYARD

I follow the old woman into the graveyard
peer over a field of weeds, at tilted stones,
rotting markers.

July's afternoon heat
breathless in the pitch of cicadas,
while she wears her winter coat, handkerchief
tied tightly over her head. Smiles toothless,
pointing out family (: Alex, Willy, Dolly, Mary,
Herbie, Danny, Alexander)
below my feet. A few b&w photographs
edged into ribbon-bound albums, a handful of stories
told by people on the verge of their own death
like this old lady who walks slowly,
talks quietly, as though to herself,
someone else.

FISH TALE

My father tells me
of catching a northern pike so big
he had to tie a cord to his canoe
and head straight for shore.
And beach the canoe
and haul the beast up
to where he could club it with an axe.
One so big,
he had trouble getting it out
to the road.

He also tells of the time
my mother caught one
and wouldn't give up.
Rolling on the beach,
wrestling fingers to fin,
covered in sand
and slime
trying to stop it from slipping
back into the lake.

He warned her if she kept it
she would carry it herself.
She did.
Slung it over her back
and dragged it a quarter mile.
She had grown up hungry
and this was the biggest fish
she ever caught.
No way
was she going to let it go.

They were young, my parents,
though already with children
they both tried to keep
and lost.

My mother didn't know
the fish could have bit off her hand
or maybe she just didn't care
bent on bringing home food
for the ones left behind.

FOR ALL THEIR FAILINGS

Mom's letter tracks me down
to tell me Uncle Adam and
Cousin Doug died last month,
only weeks apart.
Stranger things have happened I guess
but not lately. I still remember the time
Doug beat up Adam
after they had shared a bottle of goof.
We all felt a bit sad and ashamed
to see what had become of them.

And now I have to admit it's been too many years
and too many miles for me to feel anything,
except in the brief moment
when I hear Dad say,
nobody can call moose like Doug.
He can make them come to the shore and dance.
Hear Mom say, Adam phoned last night, he's still crying
over the forty dollars he's owed your father
for the last forty years. When
I recall that for all their failings
they were still family.

FALLOUT

I never asked my auntie what she learned
in residential school. What comes to mind
is her beading and sewing, the moccasins
she made for us, the precision.

What I don't recall are any hugs or kisses
like my European relatives lavished on us.
As though the heirs of Columbus had a special
claim to affection for those like us
caught in between.