

Excerpted from *The Scalpel and the Soul*, Chapter 10, "The Exorcist"

*In this story, Dr. Hamilton has a late night visit from a Native American medicine man who helps him to let go of a young patient who died.*

Charlie listened to the medicine man speak and then said: "My grandfather"—the term is used to name any male elder—"says that you have done this deed... You have tied this boy up... like a pony. You hobbled him by the leg...and you are holding his spirit back... You are clinging to him, yes? You have tied this boy by his ankle, and you are holding him fast... And you are holding him against his will. His ancestors call out to him but you stand in the way!" Charlie's voice was stern, almost outraged at this point, as he carried out his translation. "This boy's spirit is very angry with you... The boy's spirit is kicking you hard... to get loose... so he can be free. He wants to go. To join his ancestors in the spirit world. He's yelling at you to let him go!"

The old man uttered a few more words. Charlie began translating again.

"Grandfather says that this young spirit wants to be finished with you!"

"I don't know what he's talking about," I said. But I did. I began to just sob. My shoulders started shaking uncontrollably. My children stared at me in complete astonishment. They had never seen me so distraught and vulnerable. It was a strange experience for them—for me too.

"Grandfather says that the boy is kicking so hard to get loose of your tight hold that he has kicked you in the back. That is why your spine hurts so much. He has kicked you, like a mule would kick to get free of a coyote that holds onto his leg."

The medicine man breathed deeply again, into the fire. The smoke rose into the air; warmth from his hands and the scent of the sage seemed to be circulating inside of my abdominal cavity now. I was crying uncontrollably. Because deep inside I felt ashamed of myself for holding on to Alfred so tightly.

"Grandfather says that if you do not let go of this boy's spirit soon, it will just kill you. It will keep kicking at you till you are dead—that is how badly it desires to be rid of you."

"I will let go. I will let go!" I sobbed. I felt helpless. I continued crying out loudly. Janey jumped up to come to my aid. Charlie held up his hand to check her advance.