

The Tillman Place

Russell E. Vance, III

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR.



Russell E. Vance, III, PhD. is a retired psychotherapist who, after retiring, has followed his passions and dreams. After retirement he lived a nomadic RVer's life spending most of his time off-the-grid far out into the Sonoran Desert or in the Rocky Mountains of Glacier National Park in northwestern Montana where he and Pamela serve as volunteer campground hosts.

An unabashed tree-hugger and environmentalist, Russ' post-retirement avocation became wildlife management, living among and helping keep deer, mountain goats, big horn sheep, bears and other creatures safe. Many of his stories carry a strong environmental message. `

Russ has published three novels – *AGEH*, *New Prince of Coillearnach* and *Tree of Life* – and four novella. *Mountain of Gold*, the sequel to this story, will be available in 2023.





Chapter 1.

Under normal circumstances two women sitting in a Fiat 124 Spider Classica would not seem out of place. However, two women sitting in a Fiat 124 Spider Classica in the middle of the desert facing an old mine entrance could never be considered anything other than unusual. A bit closer to the opening was a beat-up old white Ford pickup. Now that's what one would expect.

"What are you going to do with your half of the money, Daphnia?" asked the woman in the passenger seat.

"Get my own apartment," the woman called Daphnia said sarcastically without looking in the other woman's direction.

“Why do you always have to be mean to me?”

“Because” Daphnia never finished. A man had emerged from the mine entrance and was dusting himself off as he walked toward the Spider.

Approaching the driver’s side of the candy-apple red sports car, the man said, “I’m sorry. There’s no gold in there.”

“What?!” exclaimed Daphnia. “How can that be? It’s a gold mine, for God’s sake!”

“It was a gold mine,” said the man. “That mine’s been worked out for many years. In fact, the equipment left in there goes back to the 1950s.”

“You’ve got to be kidding!”

“Sorry. You paid me to inspect the mine, and I’m giving you my expert opinion to forget it.” The man brushed some dirt off his shirt sleeve. “It probably wasn’t the best producing mine in the first place but whatever was there is gone.”

“Damn!” said Daphnia as she started the engine, put the sports car in reverse, tromped on the gas and spun the car around, leaving the poor mine inspector standing in a cloud of dust.

Good morning,” I said, “I’m Rusty Gerber. I just bought the Tillman place.”

The person behind the counter of the old mercantile just looked at me. “That’ll be three dollars and seventeen cents with tax.”

An old cowboy hat covered a heavy head of shoulder length straw-colored hair. With a faded plaid flannel shirt, well-worn blue jeans that covered all but the pointed toes of cowboy boots,

it was all but impossible to determine gender from appearance, and the few words I heard spoken were of no help.

An old cowbell sounded as a man, similarly dressed, poked his head through the door.

“Jeannie,” he called to the person waiting on me, “the gas pump’s not workin’ again.”

“Aw, George,” the clerk called back, “you know it was just some city folks who don’t know how to operate a real gas pump. Just pull the reset handle and pump your gas.”

The man politely flipped the front brim of his Stetson and headed back toward the old red pickup sitting next to the single gas pump. At least, I think it was red. What wasn’t covered with light brown mud appeared to be a dull, well-worn red.

Arriving at the gas pump next to his truck he reached, without even looking, to the reset handle, pulled it, flipped the control handle to pump, and stuck the nozzle into the truck.

I turned my attention back to the person I now knew as Jeannie. We had both been watching George. Jeannie was shaking her head. I could hear her say under her breath, “anything to make a fuss.” Realizing I was looking at her and holding out four one-dollar bills she turned back to me.

Working to give the appearance of concentrating on counting change, Jeannie softly asked, “what’re you plannin’ to do with ole Tracker’s place?”

The voice was soft and definitely feminine. I caught her looking up at me as she counted out my change. Her bright green eyes were a sharp contrast to her face permanently darkened by years of sunburn on top of sunburn. She was not looking through me, as before, but was watching carefully for

my answer. I could see fear in her eyes. She was definitely afraid of what I might say.

“Escape,” I said, trying to give her a reassuring smile. She responded with a quizzical tilt of her head. “I’m not going to do anything to or with it,” I continued. “I just want to disappear into the wilderness and live in peace.”

“Really?” I saw a relieved smile that made me feel good. I should have known that the locals in this metropolis of twenty-seven people would be worried about oil, mining or other development. I couldn’t blame them. An amazing number of small communities like this really don’t want “technology” moving in. They live with the land, they are a part of the land, and don’t want big companies like McDonalds and Walmart. Besides, you don’t have to be an economics professor to know that when mega-business moves in it is a death knell for the small town and its merchants.

I know another very small community well up in Montana that is twenty-five miles down a dirt road and sixty miles from the next nearest town. They like it that way. A couple of rich people bought land there and started pushing for a paved road. The locals threw a fit and started a successful political campaign to stop it. Their life-style and wilderness in which they lived was more important than big corporate money. “No McDonalds” was actually their campaign slogan. The fact that I was here to escape all that just made points for me in Jeannie’s eyes.

“Yeah. I’m thinking about letting someone live down by the road,” I said. “They could even have a few head of cattle. It would be nice to have someone kinda watch the front of the property and help me pay the taxes. I understand that’s pretty good grazing land.”

“Tracker only put that place on the road because his nieces kept on him about living back up in the mountains,” Jeannie replied.

“Really?”

“Yeah, I think having to come down near town was the beginning of the end for Tracker.” Jeannie looked out the front window; off into that distant unknown place filled with memories. “When they made him go into that home . . . that killed him.”

If it hadn’t been such a sad scenario I would have laughed at her comment about living near town. It was almost fifteen miles down a gravel road to the entrance to the ranch. That’s where Tracker’s double-wide modular home; i.e. double-wide trailer; sits. He had lived there until he was physically forced to move into a retirement home. The homestead, a cabin and barn, were at the foot of the mountains another three miles into the property near a spring called Sagebrush Tank. That’s where Tracker had spent most of his life.

“That’s sad,” I replied sincerely.

“I think he’d still be alive if they hadn’t forced him out of his cabin!” There was a bitterness to Jeannie’s voice. I knew that this was a painful memory for her and I began to wonder about her relationship to the old man.

Evidently she knew what I was thinking, “we were a couple.” Jeannie’s voice was gentle and filled with love. “We weren’t married, but that didn’t matter to either of us. But I didn’t have any say in things and his nieces just wanted his money.”

What do you say to a statement like that? There’s no consolation. Even though this was the type of despicable human behavior from which I was fleeing, anything I could say would sound like an empty platitude. “I’m so sorry,” I almost whispered.

“It isn’t your fault,” replied Jeannie. “They even buried him in a cemetery in the city when they both knew that he wanted to be buried up in the mountains. I told them that I’d take care of it,

but one of the nieces, Daphnia, said that he had to have a Christian burial even if he was a heathen.”

“She called him a ‘heathen’?”

“They didn’t love him,” tears began to well up in Jeannie’s eyes. “It was all a show, and as soon as they got his money and sold the place to you, they went back to the city.”

“And they had the audacity to call him a heathen,” I heard myself say, “they sound heartless!”

“Tell me about it,” Jeannie said.

I thought back to the closing of the property sale at the bank in nearby Lewis Center. The two spinsters had sat across from me at the large conference table while the attorneys and banker made sure that all of the I’s were dotted and T’s crossed.

The two women looked very much out of place. They were totally over-dressed, with pearls and gaudy rings, as though they were working hard to say ‘I don’t belong here’. Even the attorneys were a study in contrast. I had engaged a local attorney, William Anderson, Esq. He was neatly and professionally dressed. He wore dark brown trousers that broke perfectly, displaying the vamp and ornate toe box of his black cowboy boots. His striking tooled belt was set off by a large but very tasteful silver buckle. The ensemble was topped off with a beautiful embroidered western sport jacket.

By contrast the nieces’ attorney was in a very expensive three-piece charcoal grey suit. What I suspect were soft Italian leather loafers looked like they’d probably cover my closing costs. Despite their very different appearance, both lawyers had been very friendly, quite competent, and put me at ease during the slightly tense process of making sure the deal was actually done, and done properly.

The sisters had made it quite clear that they were not from Lewis Center and were anxious to get back to Denver. The one Jeannie called Daphnia seemed to be in command. The two of them had been syrupy sweet. They engaged me in conversation about everything I had no desire to discuss. Thinking back, I realized that they never once mentioned their uncle, the ranch or shared any memories. I did realize that a couple of times they had made mention of a money-grabbing hussy. That had to have been Jeannie. When the banker handed them the check, Daphnia grabbed it and the two of them got out of there as fast as possible before I could change my mind. I remember it because it was such a contrast. There were no ‘good-bye. Hope you like the ranch’ polite farewells. Just a ‘thank you’ and their backs going out the door.

Of course, I didn’t care because I wasn’t trying to make friends. Their attorney, being much more courteous, appeared a bit embarrassed at the abrupt departure of his clients. He had taken the time to chat with us before he left. In fact, he had made a point to compliment both my attorney and the banker on how well they were prepared for the closing. That hadn’t been necessary and I thought it was very nice of him.

“I’m sorry, Jeannie,” I attempted to console my new friend. “Is there anything you want from the ranch or the cabin? Where are you living?”

“I have a place upstairs. My family has owned this mercantile since it opened in 1903. When I was a little girl, we still had a livery stable out back and the post office was here. My great-grandfather was the post-master,” the memories made her smile. “My little brother owns the place now, and I’ve worked on and off for him for years.”

“Well, you’re always welcome at the ranch. You might even know someone who would like to live in the place by the road.”

“Now that you mention it, Steve Jordan’s son is getting married.” Jeannie thought a moment. “I really don’t know but I’m not sure Steve’s ranch can support two families. It might be a good way for young Bobby to get started.”

“Well, I’ll probably spend this winter in the cabin, so I’ll be around.”

“Are you going to get a telephone?”

“I wasn’t planning on it,” I replied. “Do you think my cell phone will work for now?”

“Probably not,” Jeannie actually laughed. “We had a radio at the cabin. It might still be there.”

“That would be fine. What’s your handle?”

“Believe it or not, we use call signs out here. I’m WQDZ328. Use channel twenty-one.”

“Got it. I’ll have to get a license.”

“Why don’t you just use Tracker’s. I think he’d like that. He was WQFX995.”

“That would be an honor.”

After the normal pleasantries I left. I thought a lot about our conversation as I drove my old Dodge van, in which I had been living for the last couple of years, down the dusty road toward my new home. I had only been at the ranch the one time I came to see it. A realtor from Lewis Center had shown me around. The realtor had keys to the modular by the road but we weren’t able to get into the cabin. There was a new padlock on the cabin door. I didn’t mind since I was most interested in the tremendous acres of wilderness beyond the cabin. If all went as planned, I’d be living in the mountains well

beyond the cabin, but, at this point, I was planning to stay in the cabin until next spring to give myself plenty of time to explore and find an even more remote home.

It was 14.4 miles from the mercantile to the ranch gate. I had been given three keys. One was definitely for the modular. I assumed that one was for the cabin and the other for this gate. The heavy lock hanging from equally heavy chain was a new Master similar to the one I saw on the cabin. There was no doubt that Daphnia had locked the place up tight. Since both of the new padlocks were Master, both keys fit but only one worked.

After driving through the gate with the ubiquitous cattle guard I got out and started to swing the gate closed again and then stopped. I wondered if Tracker had ever had a lock on this gate. Besides having the feeling that locking everything wasn't a part of Tracker's personality, I was 14.4 miles from a community of twenty-seven people which was another thirty miles from a town of maybe a thousand, if they counted the dogs, cats, chickens and horses. Since I had made the effort to get back out of my van to close the gate, I finished the task but didn't lock it. For some reason that felt like an act of defiance toward Daphnia, whom I was growing to dislike the more I thought about her and encountered the results and aftermath of her incursion into her uncle's privacy. I couldn't help but wonder what kind of leverage she had on her uncle. It sounded like the two nieces had an awful lot of control over their uncle's last years.

The modular sat totally unprotected from the summer sun looking very forlorn. Call me silly, but I catch myself attributing human emotions to inanimate objects, and this poor house, put there to control a man who didn't want it, looked very sad. I didn't really know a lot about Lawrence "Tracker" Tillman, but what I had learned supported my belief that Tracker's animosity wasn't toward this very plain and rather unattractive dwelling

but toward those who used legal means to manipulate, control his life, and forced him to live here.

The three-mile drive to the cabin somehow seemed different than when I had made it with the realtor. Perhaps it was because this time I was going home. The road, if you can call it that, is just wide enough for one vehicle and passes through open grassland. Since there have not been cattle on this land for quite some time, indigenous vegetation has returned. The occasional Roadrunner would dart in front of me, while the noise of the van flushed the odd Quail; evidence of renewed native wildlife. The variation of browns, with the intermittent green and a few bright colors, stretched out as far as I could see.

In ancient times a league was the distance one can see standing on the deck of a ship, about 3.1 miles, due to the curvature of the Earth. I could easily see the mountains from the road, but I was well up the trail before I could make out a small dark spot against the kaki brown of the mountains. This, I assumed, was the homestead. It made me realize how very isolated and hidden the cabin really is. That's exactly what I wanted.

As I drew closer, I could make out the cabin and barn with the old tripod windmill in between. Both the cabin and barn have barn-red tin roofs. The realtor had said that Tracker had put them on only a couple of years before he moved to the modular.

The cabin is board and batten with a full-length porch on both the front and the back. The roof is quite steep over the house, to keep snow from accumulating, with a lesser pitch over the porches. The dark brown wood is a stark contrast to the Earth around it. Like the cabin, the barn is a simple, common and efficient design, being rectangular, with a well-pitched roof. At the end closest to the house there is a door into the hay loft, two large doors big enough for a tractor, and an opening on one

corner which appears to have been put there for a car. It is almost identical to my grandfather's barn back in the Midwest.

My grandfather kept his old DeSoto in the alcove. I'd go in there and pretend to drive. I would spend days exploring all of the nooks and crannies of his old barn until he ran me out for making "forts" in the hay loft. It is hard for a young boy, visiting from the city, to understand that the hay loft of a working farm is a dangerous place. Actually, there are lots of dangerous places on a working farm. Most people don't realize how dangerous it can be.

The windmill, situated somewhat between the barn and cabin, is a classic. The rotor looked pretty much intact but the tail was going to need some repair. I couldn't see the holding tank until I was pulling into the farm yard, which is demarcated by a low rail fence. The holding tank is tucked into a cluster of shrubs on the hill just above the cabin. It's location allows for good water pressure at the discharge. Since Tracker had used this well until he was forced to move to the modular, there was a good chance that the pump cylinder might still be good.

I parked near the front of the cabin to make it easier to move in my few belongings. As I looked at the heavy Master-lock padlock on the door I shuddered. It reminded me again of Daphnia. It had to go. I opened the padlock, got out my Swiss Army knife and immediately removed the hasp.

Pushing open the door I was hit by the musty smell of having been abandoned for so long. Straight ahead were the stairs going up to the loft and to my right was a large open area dominated by the fireplace with a cast-iron insert. I was glad to see that. The cast iron is so much more efficient than an open fire and can use several different fuels. If I end up living here, I thought, I don't want to pollute. I need to check out the possibility of solar or wind power.

Walking toward the door onto the back porch I found the kitchen that opened into the large living area. I stood transfixed. There before me was the most gorgeous old wood-propane cook stove. This beautiful piece of historical cast iron craftsmanship had to go back to the turn of the twentieth century, and Jeannie had left it in perfect condition. The light brown enamel on the splash back, oven door, oven clean-out and warming oven doors looked brand new, and, though the stove had sat unused for a number of years, there was no doubt that Jeannie had lovingly cleaned it and left it spotless. I could see a gas line going through the wall. Looking out the kitchen window I saw a residential propane tank. I'd have to get it inspected and filled, but this would be great since I knew that I was at least spending the winter here. The old white porcelain drain board sink was under the window. In a cabinet under the sink I found a small propane hot water heater. Next to the sink was a Servel propane refrigerator. For me this was a treasure.

I couldn't help but wonder whether Jeannie remembers this kitchen fondly or was happy to have a modern kitchen. There were two possible scenarios. She was happy to be getting a modern kitchen but, after being called so many names by the nieces, she wasn't going to be called a bad housekeeper and left the place spic-n-span. The other scenario was that her final cleaning was an act of love reflecting her sorrow at leaving it behind. Even with our very brief encounter, my money was on the latter.

There were shelves everywhere and a pantry in one corner. The pantry had a shelf of old gas lamps. Even though they caused me to envision a warm cozy home, I was definitely going to investigate wind or solar power. Behind the kitchen I found a utility room and bathroom which had a door into the front bedroom. The bedroom, with a southern exposure, was warm and sunny.

Since my plan was just to stay in the cabin until next spring, at which time I plan to move further into the mountains, I hadn't thought about furniture for the cabin. Now I was realizing that I was going to be living here for at least another nine months, and that meant that I needed some simple furnishings. I made my list – propane, furniture, battery, wire, LED lights, water.

I spent the night in the van. As I lay drifting off to sleep, I realized that I wasn't going to be able to use the van to haul things with all of my stuff in it. The next morning, I moved everything from the van into the cabin and removed the bed I had built across the back. By the time I was done it looked like a cargo van again.

My first stop was the mercantile. I didn't think about Jeannie not working. A man in his fifties was at the counter. He said that Jeannie had the day off. When I started telling him what I had shared with Jeannie he told me that he was her little brother, who owned the mercantile, and that she had told him all about me. Since he was very friendly, I had to assume that her report was positive.

Mark, Jeannie's little brother, called the propane company for me and by the time he was done a delivery had been arranged for the next day. He suggested a second-hand store owned by a friend and a hardware store to get anything he didn't carry. I was amazed at all he did have in his store. He even had a radio that I could run on 12 volt and an antenna. He suggested that it would be cheaper and easier to get a couple of nice rechargeable lanterns rather than try to buy new batteries for the solar panel and quick wire the cabin. He was right.

As we worked together collecting things that I would need, I got him talking about Tracker and his sister. He was furious with the nieces and the way they treated Jeannie. They had called her

every name in the books all with the design of painting her as a whore after Tracker's money. Jeannie had been devastated. She was very much in love with Tracker Tillman. Daphnia had brought in a paid physician who testified that Tracker was mentally incapable of caring for himself and accused Jeannie of trying to control and manipulate him. They tried to keep her from seeing him, but everyone around here knew the truth, so the staff at the nursing facility would sneak her in at night. She didn't get to see him after he died and she couldn't go to the funeral.

I couldn't help but think about the sad story Mark told me as I drove to the second-hand store. It didn't seem to make sense that the nieces would work so hard to get Tracker's ranch considering how little they got for the sale. He evidently had a fairly sizable bank account but that all ended up going to long-term care. Were the nieces just that nasty? Well, I knew that Daphnia was pretty obnoxious, but it seemed that they went to a great deal of effort for very little return. Perhaps they thought they'd get more out of the ranch, but even their starting price wasn't out of reason. I put it out of my mind as I pulled into the Next to New second-hand store in Lewis Center.

Lewis Center, a small town of about a thousand people and the county seat of Lewis County, was a trading center during the days of the Indian wars. It got its name because it is the government center of Lewis County as well as the trading center and almost the geographic center of the county. It ended up here because of the Clarisa Mountains, a line of low mountains which are rich in minerals and water. The name obviously came from the Franciscan monks who accompanied the Spanish invaders. The commercial value of the minerals faded many years ago, but the water . . . well, no matter what a capitalist might think, water is still the most important and most valuable thing on Earth along with food and oxygen.

A pass through the mountain range is just east of town. Highway 17 that links Lewis Center, Grand Junction and Dead Horse goes through the pass and becomes main street. There is about a block or two of brick buildings with the typical western facade fronts that were built in the twenties. At the west end of Main Street the road circles an old block and adobe building that was, from 1890 to 1923, the government building with everything from court rooms to the jail. The new government complex; a compound of four two-story buildings; is just north of this old historic building.

After loading my van with my new bed, a kitchen table, a couple of kitchen chairs and an old rocker, an old set of cast iron cookware, and a variety of things I would need, I headed back to the ranch. It had been a productive day, but as I drove through Dead Horse and past the mercantile, my thoughts went back to Tracker and Jeannie.

That night was the first night in the cabin. It was amazing the difference some fresh air, a fire and a few pieces of furniture made. I had taken the solar panel off the van and put it on the front porch roof so it would get good southern sun. I put the battery box on the front porch and set up a changing station where I could charge up my LED lanterns. I had found Tracker's radio antenna mounted on the side of the windmill with a cable running to the cabin. I hooked up my new radio to the battery and was on the air.

Sitting at my kitchen table I keyed the microphone. "WQDZ328 this is WQFX niner-niner-five. Jeannie do you copy?"

After a couple of calls and a short wait I heard, "WQFX995 this is WQDZ328. How ya doin', Rusty?"

“Just wanted to give you a shout and thank you and Mark for helping me out.”

“Glad we could help.”

“The cabin is coming back to life, and I hope to make you proud.”

There was a significant pause. When Jeannie came back I could hear the tears in her voice. “I’m sure you will,” she said.

I didn’t know whether to try to apologize for making her cry or just keep my mouth shut. I decided that they probably weren’t tears of anger or hurt, but a reminder of the home she had shared with her love. I replied as gently as possible. “Good night, Jeannie.”

“Good night, Rusty.”

“QWFX995 clear.”

By noon the next morning I had a new residential propane tank and my appliances had been inspected and found in good condition. The young driver, whose father had been a buddy of Tracker’s, had admired the stove and fridge as he told me how his father and Tracker used to go hunting together. His father had had a ranch just down the road, which, by local definition of distance, means that it was within twenty or thirty miles. Several years ago his father had become tired of trying to compete with feed-lots and big ag-busines, sold out to his neighbor and gone to work for the feed company in Lewis Center. The young man, Chuck, hated living in town. He really missed the ranch. He fancied himself a pretty good calf-roper having been the one to beat at the county fair. His dream had been to become a rodeo star and mentioned several times that the National Senior Pro Rodeo Association was located in Wickenburg. When I told him that I had been there I took on a

whole new status. I didn't admit that, while I am fascinated by and enjoyed watching a rodeo, I have no idea about the contests and scoring. I just admire the skills.

Chuck had finished high school and signed on as a ranch hand for a friend of his dad's. He was able to continue in regional rodeos and picked up some prize money. "But wrangling and the rodeo is no life for a married man," he had said with a smile. Chuck had fallen in love with a girl from Cottonwood who was riding the women's circuit. He gave up wrangling and rodeo for a good job with the propane company and lives with his wife, Betsy, on a little spread outside Lewis Center. They have a few horses and Betsy teaches horsemanship.

Since I still had plenty of the day left I decided to check out more of my new ranch. I grabbed my backpack, walking stick and some water and headed north into the mountains. The elevation at the cabin is about 6,250 feet and goes up from there. Even at this elevation it gets hot during the day in late August. I hadn't hiked for two hours when I came to the conclusion that I either needed a 4x4 to drive to the mountains and then start hiking or get a horse. Since I have a strong aversion to ATV, OTV, or whatever those horrible, noisy, environmentally destructive vehicles are called, I decided that I should get a horse. I pulled out my cell phone and put "find a horse" on my to-do list.

Looking at the small device in my hand I realized that it was, for me, the height of hypocrisy. I have been so critical of such devices for so many years, but here I was using one. I had some pretty good arguments for why I still used one, but I won't bore you with them. Suffice it to say, I decided that the phone had to go. I know that there is no way I am going to totally disenfranchise myself from society. I have neither the skills nor the freedom. Don't get me started on freedom. That's a really sore subject for me. About our only choices are to do what the social systems tell us to do or reject the social systems. If we

elect the latter, we must be ready to suffer the consequences. That doesn't really sound very much like freedom to me. Does it to you? Anyway, I decided that I should keep the so-called smart-phone in the van to use as a telephone when I was away from the ranch. Once I get situated my plan is to have as little to do with the outside world as possible.

Steve Jordan and his wife, Barbara, turned out to be Laguna Indians. Steve has the most fantastic dark skin. I wondered if that's normal for a Laguna. Looking at my pasty, white, freckled European skin with a hint of red, I must admit to some serious jealousy issues. I know white-skinned people have a super strong tendency to assume superiority. We top the charts on stupidity at times too.

Steve and Barbara worked hard to build an outstanding cattle ranch. Over their year they have expanded to slightly over 1,100 acres. With the 1.5 to 2 cows per acre equation, the land could handle 2,200 cows, but Steve and Barbara keep their herd around 1,500. That keeps Steve and his five ranch hands quite busy. His biggest problem isn't running an efficient ranch but competing with big feedlots and giant ag-corp companies. A feedlot only needs one acre for 100 cows, so they can raise the same number of cows on 15 acres that Steve does on 1,100 acres. Granted, the feedlots don't produce the quality beef but quality no longer seems to be a top priority. Steve doesn't even try to sell to the big franchise companies. Barbara is quite capable of working the herd but she is more valuable pitching their quality beef to places like Disney, big casinos and others who do their own whole carcass meat fabrication. Currently they have a good clientele but the profit margin is really slim.

Bobby, their oldest son, loves the ranch but also has a dream of returning to subsistence agriculture. He believes that subsistence farming is going to be how many small communities survive when the big super-corporations crash. He met another dreamer,

Peggy Jean, at University of Arizona's agriculture school in Maricopa. The two just graduated and are getting married in a few weeks. I told Steve that I would be glad to give them a chance to give their dreams and theories a try. I'm not only a sucker for young people with dreams but especially when those dreams include demonstrating that super-capitalism, as practiced in this country, is not only not good for the people but unnecessary and unsustainable.

"I really want Bobby and Peggy Jean to have a chance," Steve said, not looking up from the fence he was mending. "Heaven knows I know that capitalism is a damn rat-race that only the rich are winning, but I'm not sure that Bobby and Peggy Jean's theories are viable." He paused and looked me in the eye. "I just can't afford to give them any of our ranch to prove their theories no matter how much I'd like to. Believe it or not, we use every square foot of this place just to make a living." He paused and even stopped working, "If you'd be willing to give them a chance, I'd appreciate it and I know it would mean a part of their dream coming true."

"When they get here, send them out to see me. I'd love to give them a chance."

That business finished I thought to ask Steve to recommend a place to get a horse before I left. He suggested Tommy Barton's place about half way between Lewis Center and Dead Horse. I remember seeing it in my travels.

Pulling into the parking lot in front of a long low building with the name "Barton's" painted on the side. You have to get rather close to the building to see "veterinary services, farrier, and tack." Inside there were a few people looking through the tack shop and a woman sitting behind a desk by a door that said "vet". I took a quick look around and then approached the woman explaining that Steve Jordan had sent me

to see if I could get a horse. She stuck her head inside the door and said, "Tommy, there's a man here who wants a horse." I could hear the reply, "send him in."

The woman ushered me into a veterinary treatment room where there was a man examining a young dog that looked like a Border Collie. A young woman was holding the dog.

"Hi," I said, "I'm Rusty Gerber."

"Oh, you're the guy who bought Tracker's place," the man smiled as he examined the dog's teeth.

"Yes," I said, obviously surprised.

"Small town, Mr. Gerber," the man laughed and made a note on a tablet.

"And you must be Dr. Barton."

"I haven't been called Doctor Barton since I graduated," he laughed again heartily. "You can call me Tommy like everyone else."

"I find that hard to do."

"Why?" Tommy Barton seemed truthfully surprised.

"I find it hard to not show someone respect for their hard-earned accomplishment, especially when they must have passed up some really lucrative jobs to return home and help people who obviously don't have as much money as they do in the city."

Tommy stood looking at me like I had two heads. "And what makes you say that?"

"I spotted the wall where you have your credentials posted. You're Laguna since you started at the Laguna Pueblo Community College and the name on the diploma is Tauri Barton. You finished your pre-med at the University of Arizona and did your DVM at Pima, a top ranked school even I know

about, with the words “cum laude” on your diploma. Those diplomas said Tomas Barton. I’m guessing that you picked an Anglo name that was close to your real name because of good ole American prejudice. You graduated with honors from a prestigious school. I bet you had big city veterinary practices and maybe even some research institutes wooing you, but you chose to come back to an area up against a reservation where probably most of your clients are financially poor Native Americans who are working their asses off to get a break in the white man’s world . . . a break, by the way, which both of us know they’ll never get.” I paused and stood looking at the shocked vet. “Now tell me I shouldn’t at the least call you ‘doctor’?”

“I don’t think anyone has ever looked at that wall. We’re required by law to display our credentials.” He looked briefly back at the dog on the table and the assistant who was standing there with her mouth gapping open. “And you’re right on all counts. But I don’t regret my decision and being ‘Tommy’ is just a part of being a local boy. I’ll tell you what. I’ll compromise and let you call me ‘doc’. Is that okay? Now how about this dog?”

“That works for me, DOC,” I said laughing as we shook hands. “But what about the dog?”

“Do you want him? Someone dropped him off.”

“Out here?!”

“Yeah, most city people have this naïve notion that the dog will survive by joining a pack of wild dogs. Even if that were a possibility, most of them end up dinner for a Coyote or Mountain Lion the first night. Now . . .”

“You know,” I reached out and patted the dog. He immediately came to me. I could almost feel the bonding. “I . . .”

“You know you two were meant for each other,” Doc laughed. “He’s in perfect condition. Hell, he’s even been fixed.”

“Okay, I’ll take Butch here, but what about the horse I came to buy?”

“Oh, that’s right. I don’t have any horses to sell, but I’ve got a beautiful Quarter Horse mare whose owner might be willing to sell. It was his daughter’s horse. She’s married and moved to Flagstaff.”

By this time Butch – I have no idea where I came up with that name – was leaning up against me as I rubbed his chest. With a nod of the head, Doc Barton had sent the assistant away.

“How much does a good Quarter Horse run now days?”

“Oh, they go for \$3,000 to \$3,500,” Doc replied, filling a syringe. “But around here he’ll be lucky to get over \$2,000.”

“Can I see her?”

“Sure,” Doc gave Butch an injection which he didn’t seem to notice. Dropping the syringe into the sharps box he called to the woman at the desk, “Hey, Stella, do I have anyone waiting?”

“No, sir.”

“I’m going to take Mr. Gerber here, . . .”

“Rusty,” I interrupted.

“.... Rusty here out to see Janie.”

“Sure thing, Tommy.”

Doc tossed me a cord lead saying “on the house”, I got Butch off the table, and we followed the vet through a maze of rooms and hallways into a large extension on the back of his building. There was a wide sawdust aisle lined with stalls. It smelled like a barn, but not a dirty barn, if you know what I mean. Sure, there was some horse smell, but the dominant odor was fresh hay, clean straw and grain. The stalls were of a light-colored wood, probably a pine, with metal rods from the top of the sidewalls to

the ceiling. This doesn't just look good; it is a safety measure. I had a young stallion just about go over the sidewall of a stall many years ago because the stall didn't have these bars. Several of the stalls were occupied and the occupants had to check us out as we walked by. We might, after all, have some grain or other treat.

We stopped at a stall at the far end of the aisle. A beautiful chestnut face with an elongated white diamond on her forehead looked out at us. I could feel the tension of anticipation. 'If the rest of her is anything like that face . . .' I was thinking as Doc slid open the stall door. It was!

There stood a magnificent sorrel Quarter Horse mare. She was over sixteen hands high and beautifully muscled with a nice broad chest. She had socks on her left legs. The Quarter Horse is known for being a powerful horse with a broader chest than other horses. I figure that is because they were bred as working horses. They are known runners and got their name from their ability to beat most other breeds in a short sprint. They have actually been clocked at up to fifty-five miles per hour. The American Quarter Horse is used in everything from rodeo to hunter/jumpers to dressage and is arguably the most popular horse in the world.

"What an elegant animal!" I said.

"Don't be fooled by her beauty, name or the fact that she belongs to a rancher's daughter," Doc said patting the big horse as he put a lead on her halter and brought her out of the stall. "Mary was a top-notch barrel racer and never backed off from a race."

"I bet she and Janie put a lot of studs to shame."

Doc caught the double meaning and laughed heartily. "I bet they did. Yep, I bet they did."

"Look at that definition. She's perfect."

“Pretty damn close,” exclaimed Doc. “Want to take her for a spin?”

“I’d love that!”

Doc headed toward a wall where a good dozen western saddles were hanging.

“Doc,” I called. “I’ve never used a western saddle. Truthfully, I’ve never liked them. They’re an extra forty or fifty pounds. I don’t even think I could put one on.”

“Really,” Doc gave a puzzled look. “What do you like?”

“I had a jump-seat when I actually used a saddle. I prefer bareback.”

“Dang man, you sound more Indian than me,” Doc laughed as he stepped into the tack room. “I’m not sure I have ... well, dang, here is one.” He came back out with a bareback pad and a bridle with a spade bit.

“Do you think I would be able to switch her to a snaffle bit?”

“Don’t tell me,” the Doc shook his head smiling, “you don’t like spade bits.”

“It will be okay for now, but I don’t like them. They’re too hard on the horse’s mouth.”

“This lady would probably do just fine with a rope tied to her halter,” Doc patted Janie’s shoulder. “I don’t know, but I wouldn’t doubt that she drop-reins and knows body commands. She did race barrels. I have some really nice soft snaffle bits in the store.”

Janie let me put the bit in her mouth. She did take a big breath when I started to tighten the cinch on the pad. That’s a horse trick that must come naturally. They take a deep breath when you start to cinch them up. If you don’t notice and get on, you’re

soon hanging under their abdomen or lying flat on the ground. I waited for her to exhale to tighten the cinch. Butch sat to one side watching like this was an everyday event for him. Butch was fine with Janie and Janie gave Butch a quick check and evidently found him acceptable. That was good because I didn't want a horse and dog who couldn't get along.

I led Janie out into the sunlight. She danced a bit. I figured that, if she had been in that stall very long, the dance was expectation. She seemed comfortable with me moving around her.

Sixteen hands is sixty-four inches from the ground to the withers. The wither is a spot at the base of the neck and top of the shoulder on a straight line up from the hoof. Sixty-four inches is a long way up, and here's where I was going to learn whether Janie was willing to accept me. It had been a really long time since I mounted a horse bareback. Unless you have a ladder or take the horse near a fence or other elevated spot for the rider, mounting bareback is literally a hop, skip and jump. I wondered if I remembered. Worse, I wondered if I could be too old to do it.

Janie gave me a look as I stood near her head and grabbed her mane just above the withers. I couldn't tell. I think she knew what I was doing, because I couldn't imagine a young rider that didn't go bareback occasionally. The big question was whether or not she was going to let me get away with it. I gave her neck a big hug then hop, skip and jump. The ole body was telling me how old I am, but I got my right leg sufficiently onto Janie's back that I was able to pull myself up with some semblance of dignity. Janie shuffled a bit. It seemed almost as if she was shuffling me around to get me properly situated. I would never doubt that a horse would do that.

I had a magnificent Quarter Horse mare, named Lady, many years ago who was a racer at heart. We had a Saddlebred gelding

in the barn who was always itching for a race but couldn't catch Lady to save his life. One time, while racing back to the barn at the end of a ride, I evidently wasn't paying close enough attention; after all I let Lady have her head and was just along for the ride; and started to go gee when Lady was going haw. That is, her body was turning left and mine was headed right. Even at a run she did a little dance that brought her body right back under me. That was my first such experience.

A few years later a friend's child, Cindy, wanted to ride Lady. There was a hill in our pasture that Lady loved to run. When I was riding her, I'd go over to that hill, lean down on her neck, and let her run the hill. She seemed to enjoy it. While I rarely rode with a saddle, I did have an old jumpseat saddle that I used at times. I had put the saddle on for Cindy.

Lady was big. She was seventeen hands and about twelve-hundred pounds. It was all Cindy could do to get her legs around Lady, but I trusted Lady.

The two of them went walking off into the pasture. The girl's parents were city people and terrified of everything country or outdoors. They never took their eyes off their daughter as she and Lady got to know each other. I could see Cindy trying to post when Lady started to trot.

Posting with an English saddle, like a jumpseat, or bareback, is mostly rising with the knees. Keeping your legs and knees tucked in tightly to the horse's side, every other stride of the horse's forelegs you lift your butt a bit off the saddle seat. If you don't it's going to be a bumpy ride and your butt is going to really hurt after a short time. Posting takes a lot of practice. Lady was capable of a beautiful slow canter which didn't require posting. I loved that, but I knew Cindy was not ready for that. She wasn't ready for what she got either.

Without knowing, Cindy led Lady to the hill we would run. Lady took off up the hill with the child clinging to her back. In her surprise and fear Cindy had dropped the reins and grabbed Lady's mane with two hands, laying on her neck. All was fine going up the hill, but when Lady crested the hill Lady's body was coming down. As I said, Lady was so big that it was difficult for a short person to clamp on to her with their legs. While Lady's body was coming down, Cindy's legs just weren't strong enough to hold on and the teenager's body was literally suspended over the horse's back. Lady, sensing she was losing her rider, came to an abrupt stop literally catching the young rider in mid-air. Her parents and I stood watching in amazement. Both horse and rider waited patiently as I ran out to them. Her parents were right behind me. We could hear the girl's scream even though she was obviously safe and unhurt.

Lady was just standing there. As I got close enough, I realized that Cindy wasn't crying from fear or pain. She was screaming with excitement and exaltation.

"Did you see that!" she yelled as we drew closer. "Did you see that! That was incredible!"

I don't know if she realized how close she had come to a nasty fall, but the adrenaline rush was so great that there was no way Cindy was going to get off that horse's back. I handed her the reins with a smile. Her parents stood trying to talk her off the horse. Her answer was to turn Lady away from them and give her a little nudge with her heel. I talked Cindy's parents into going back to the farmhouse where we could watch them from the porch. By the time Lady and Cindy had had enough for the day, the two were cantering around the pasture like they'd been together forever.

This story flashed through my mind as I turned Janie into the arena. She quickly picked up a trot. I haven't posted for so many

years that I wondered if I could. Janie isn't as big as Lady and my legs wrapped comfortably around her. Tightening my knees just behind Janie's shoulders I lifted my butt. It was like riding a bicycle. It also helped that I was riding an obviously well-trained horse. I could see why Doc had said he figured that I could put a rope on her halter. All I had to do was touch her neck with the rein and she would respond. A short while later I learned that she had a beautiful canter and was also reacting to my body movement. That, I suspect, was from her barrel racing.

Doc let Butch into the arena with us. He ran up and trotted alongside us. The Border Collie is a natural working dog, originally bred to work flocks of sheep in Northumberland, along the Scottish-English border. While a lot of their skills, like "the eye" with which they control the flock, are hard-wired, there is still a lot they learn from humans and other collies. (Collie is a Scottish word for sheepdog.) Janie and Butch moved together as though they had known each other all their lives. I knew that Janie was highly trained. Now I figure that Butch was as well. What didn't make sense was why anyone would abandon such a beautiful and well-trained dog. I doubt whether he was lost. I don't think you could lose a collie. I wasn't going to waste time or lose sleep over why someone abandoned him. I was just happy that my search for a horse like Janie brought us together. I couldn't believe that I had found two four-legged companions like them. I was so happy that I actually felt a bit giddy.

As we stopped at the arena gate I leaned up over Janie's neck and gave her a hug. Thinking of my wonderful and close relationship with Lady I whispered to Janie, "I hope we'll get to be great friends too."

Doc came ambling up with a big grin on his face. "Bet you didn't expect that?"

“They’re a natural together, aren’t they?”

“Yeah,” Doc replied. “Butch was out here running back and forth along the fence watching the two of you, so I let him in. They really are a good team.”

I swung my right leg over Janie’s neck and slid from her back. I felt bowlegged and deformed for life. It really had been that long since I had been on a horse, but was happy and soon walked it off.

“Tell the owner that I’ll offer \$3,500.”

“You know he’d probably take less,” Doc said watching me carefully. “You sure you’re not still on a high from riding her.”

“Yeah, I’m still high, but if I don’t offer a fair price I’d feel like I was taking advantage of him. I have the money right now, so I want to do the right thing.”

“You’re not much of a businessman,” Doc laughed.

“That’s an understatement,” I responded. “When you know me better I’ll explain my theory about capitalism.” He gave me a puzzled look but laughed and gave me a thumbs up.

“I’ll give Winston a call and see what he thinks.”

Butch and I walked Janie slowly back to her stall trying to make the short walk last as long as possible. I wanted so much to take her home with me. It was like having found a treasure and then have to walk away. After a lot of hugs and a handful of treats, I finally brought myself to slide her stall door closed. I put Butch’s lead back on him as we headed toward Doc’s tack shop. Butch would stop every few feet and look back toward Janie as though wondering why she wasn’t coming with us. I noticed, reached down and patted him. “I know, buddy. I know.” Looking back down the stalls, “Hopefully she’ll be going home with us soon.”

On the assumption that Winston Angler would take my offer, we picked out tack and supplies.

Doc helped me get the food, bedding and other supplies I would need right away for both animals and helped me arrange for straw and hay to be delivered to the ranch. Doc had called Winston Angler from the office but couldn't reach him. He promised to let me know as soon as he talked to Winston. I thanked him profusely for making this day such a great day and headed home with Butch sitting in the passenger seat taking in all the sights as we passed.

That evening I sat in my rocker by the fire reading Edward Abbey. Abbey and perhaps Scott Stillman seemed the only appropriate authors for the time and setting. Butch was lying on the floor in front of the fireplace, turning over occasionally to warm the other side. The radio chatter made me realize how many of the locals use the radio instead of paying the high prices of running telephone line from the road to their ranch house, assuming that there were lines going down their road.

"WQFX995. This is WQQW467, do you have your ears on, Rusty?" It was Doc Barton's voice. I stood for a moment frozen in anticipation, then hurried to the radio.

"WQQW467. This is WQFX995. How you doin', Doc?"

"Couldn't be better," Doc replied. "I just talked to Walter Angler." I held my breath. "I shouldn't tell you that he thought you were absolutely crazy. He would probably have taken half that, but if you're willing to pay it, he'll be glad to take the money off your hands."

"Great new!" I exclaimed.

"He said that he has to go into Grand Junction on some business in the morning and could stop by my place on his way home around noon."

“I’ll be there!” I almost shouted.

“You bought yourself a horse,” Doc’s voice told me that he was laughing at my excitement. “WQQW467 clear.”

I hadn’t even had a chance to clear when Steve Jordan’s voice came on. “WQAX401, I heard you talking to Tommy,” Steve said. “Bobby and Peggy Jean would like to visit you tomorrow. Maybe they could come by Tommy’s place and give your new horse a ride home.”

“That would be awesome,” I replied.

“They’ll be at Tommy’s place shortly after noon with the horse trailer. WQAX401 clear.”

“Thanks loads. WQFX995 clear.”

By this time Butch was running around at my feet. He sensed my excitement and wanted to join in. I read for a while longer and then took Butch out one last time before bed. I didn’t want him out alone knowing that there are plenty of Coyotes in the area.

When I climbed into bed, Butch lay down next to the bed. I looked over the edge of the bed at him several times. He just looked up. I finally patted the bed next to me. All waggles and sloppy kisses, Butch was on the bed beside me and soon burrowed under the covers and stretched out the length of my body. It doesn’t get much better.



Chapter 2.

Butch and I arrived at Doc's place just before noon. Doc and Winston Angler were standing in the tack shop talking. Winston was a tall man, clean shaven, with broad shoulders and narrow hips. He was definitely in great physical condition for a man old enough to have a married daughter and I would guess that women would find him very attractive. He wore a white Stetson, white long-sleeve shirt, blue jeans, a brown leather belt with a large oval pewter buckle and well-worn pointed-toe cowboy boots. His face appeared very stern, showing the results of years of working outside, but became bright and sincerely friendly when he smiled. He appeared Anglo, but you never assume that out here. He stepped forward and extended his hand as I approached.

Bobby and Peggy Jean arrived as we were concluding our business, which didn't take long at all. During our transaction Winston made a couple of comments which told me that Doc had told him how I had fallen in love with Janie. He knew that I

would have paid more, but he didn't ask. When I made some comment to that effect he had said, "we don't treat folks that way around here. You made a very good offer which I accepted." It was impossible not to like Winston Angler.

Winston had known Bobby all Bobby's life. Bobby asked about Winston's daughter, Mary, and Winston, in turn, had enquired after Bobby's parents. Times like this, standing on the porch of Wilcox's store and listening to radio chatter were about the only ways people kept up with their neighbors. Despite distance and almost constant work, this was a tight knit community where everyone had everyone else's best interest at heart.

With Doc directing the transaction and he and Stella acting as witness, we signed a bill of sale and I handed Winston a check for \$3,500. Obviously without thinking Winston started to hand the check to Doc Barton who inconspicuously held up his hand to say 'no'. I wasn't meant to see his gesture and I pretended I didn't. Winston was obviously in debt to Doc for quite a bit of money. I moved us on to the next step of our business before there was time for any embarrassing moments.

Later, when Doc and I were alone, I asked if Winston was forced to sell Janie. He told me that he wasn't forced. He had been heart-broken when Angie chose to stay in the city. He wasn't angry with her, but he had been hoping that she'd bring home a boy who would fall in love with the country. Unfortunate for Winston, just the opposite happened. When Doc had talked to him about me buying Janie the decision had been made easy by Doc's account of my short ride and Butch. With what I paid he can buy a couple of good cow-ponies for his hands, and Janie can live the good life.

Doc had a patient waiting, so Winston, Bobby, Peggy Jean and I loaded Janie into their horse trailer and filled the remaining portion of the five horse trailer with enough straw, hay and feed

to last until my winter supply arrive. I bought Butch a fancy new collar, a long lead and lunge line, and led the way back to the ranch.

After putting Janie in her new barn, which I had spent the previous afternoon working to get ready, and unloading the supplies, we returned to the modular. Peggy Jean was practically in tears as she walked through the empty double-wide trailer.

As we stood looking out over the grassland around us, Bobby and Peggy Jean shared their dream. They want to return to subsistence farming. They believe that it is the future of families and small communities. Capitalism, they explained to me, in its present form is unsustainable, and that includes the giant agriculture corporations. They are going to collapse and are going to take a lot of small communities with them unless there are people like Bobby and Peggy Jean who have learned how to subsistence farm and how to teach others. People who currently practice subsistence agriculture can easily increase their production as needed, they explained, thereby enabling the small communities to survive. With good example and education, subsistence farming will grow. It will still be a difficult transition back to the family farm, but it will be better than the starvation that would otherwise follow the collapse of giant agri-business.

The two young people were not only excited and anxious to go to work, they were well educated and had gone to school with skills and experience that many of their academic colleagues didn't have. Both of them came from farm families and know from experience that farming and ranching are not for the faint of heart. They didn't know, as they deluged me with facts and accounts and ideas, that they were preaching to the choir. I didn't tell them. It was both exciting and refreshing to see young people

ready to give it their all in a world so encumbered by social systems run by and for an elite few. They were ready to take on the world, including big corporate agriculture.

We set the rules. They were permitted to use all of the land from the gate to around one mile into the ranch. We all agreed that letting the remaining two miles or so up to the cabin go undisturbed would be good for the land, good for plant and animal populations, as well as be a living laboratory. Besides, they still had close to four-thousand acres which is a good-sized spread by anybody's standards. They had to talk to me before building any permanent structure or making significant changes like digging a pond. They, of course, knew they were going to need a barn, and I told them that I was fine with that. I truthfully didn't think they would build or do anything of which I would not approve, but it seemed best that we have a good understanding.

In exchange for the modular, use of the land and help building a barn, they were to keep me supplied with whatever food they might have beyond their own needs. If they sold produce or animals, I wanted 2% of the net up to a maximum of \$500 a month. They were ecstatic. What I was asking was tantamount to giving them the house and land to use.

It was decided that they would move in as soon as they were able. I gave them the key to the modular and they drove off talking excitedly about their new home and life adventure. I drove home to spend some time with Janie and be sure she was comfortable in her new home.

Janie's stall was definitely temporary. The yardmen at the Grand Junction Building and Lumber are going to deliver the materials I bought in the next day or so. I'm going to fix up what was the part of the barn originally designed for a wagon

or car. The area runs the entire width of the barn, so there's plenty of room for at least two stalls and an area to groom and saddle. I would gladly have given over the central part of the barn, but I need to be able to pull a truck or hay wagon in to unload supplies. The area I picked is probably better because the ceiling is not so high and will help keep it warm in cold weather.

I'm going to build out two really nice stalls. I'm already thinking that Janie needs a barn-mate. I'm going to have the door open directly into a corral so I can let her pretty much come and go as she wishes. I did that once before and it worked well.

Except for the native Americans, the horse has pretty well been forgotten in American society. It's rather ironic that not much more than a hundred years ago there were those who were attempting to stop the development of the automobile because they feared the demise of the horse and buggy, blacksmiths and livery stables. Fortunately there were plenty of jobs because of the passing of the livery stable and horses are still an important part of many people's lives. The only sad part of this story is that there are countless children and young people who have never even been near a horse and are totally unaware of their magnificent personalities.

Butch must have known my thoughts. As soon as I opened the van door he immediately ran to the barn. Either he knew what I was thinking or he too was anxious to spend some time with Janie. While I was trying to make over Janie, Butch ran excitedly back and forth and jumped on me. I wondered if he was jealous until he started running over to the room where I had put Janie's new bareback pad and then back to me. No. He wanted me to take her for a ride.

I put Janie's bareback pad on and did my hop, skip and jump. It still lacked grace but the end result was my sitting on Janie's back. I assumed that she liked the pad as opposed to a fifty-

pound western saddle. I wondered if she liked her new snaffle bit. I was really quite proud of Doc. The snaffle bit he carries is an eggbutt, which is considered the gentlest of the snaffle bits. Most people, even some horse people, don't realize that an improperly made snaffle bit can be harsher than a spade bit.

Janie pranced around a bit seeming to shift me around until I was where she thought I should be. That, you will remember, is what she did when I rode her at Doc's place. Once she was satisfied, she stood still awaiting directions.

Butch took off toward Tracker Butte. "That's works for me," I said to Janie. She took off at a run after Butch.

There's a trail that turns northeast and goes along the shoulder of the mountain behind the barn toward a place called The Narrows. The Narrows is, as its name indicates, a narrow pass between Eagle's Peak and Tracker Butte. I only knew of it from the map.

After a short but invigorating run Janie broke into the most magnificent canter. It was like sitting in a rocking chair. Horses actually have their individual preferences since neither trotting nor cantering is harder. I can't help but wonder whether many horses like to canter so they don't have that silly human bouncing up and down. Personally, I love to watch a horse do a slow, easy canter. I think it shows off their grace and beauty. It didn't really matter. This was Janie's choice. Fortunately for me, I was very happy with her choice.

Later Janie slowed to a walk. I led her near to a bolder where Butch could practically step onto my lap. Without the slightest hesitation he jumped onto my lap and the three of us ambled on.

After a magnificent time wandering through the high desert we became aware that the sun was getting low. We turned back toward the barn. At the barn, Butch stayed right beside me as I

took off Janie's tack and walked her a bit. He sat quietly and watched as I brushed her.

"Soon you're going to have a palatial stall," I told Janie as I put her in her makeshift stall. She nuzzled both Butch and me, and turned to check out her food. As Butch and I walked toward the house I couldn't help think about the fact that Butch and I had each other. Janie was now alone. I didn't like that. I either had to bring her into the house, which obviously would not be comfortable for any of us, Butch and I would have to move to the barn, or she had to have a barn-mate.

After dinner I got on the radio and let Doc know that I needed another horse. Janie needs a barn-mate.



Chapter 3.

The desert sun showed no mercy on the two multistory rectangular buildings that sat perpendicular to each other joined by a single-story structure which looked like an inverted bowel. The sign out by the highway next to the gas station and convenience store identified the complex as the Kawaika Hotel and Casino. There were the usual handful of RVs in an adjacent unpaved lot. Some casinos have started charging RVs to stay overnight but the tribe decided that the nomads, who make up the greatest number of the campers, need a place and would almost always come inside to buy a meal. Most of the nomads didn't have the money to gamble. The tribe didn't charge and would let the nomads stay up to two weeks. The nomads, for their part, kept the lot neat and clean, picking up trash after the visitors who came to make their fortune at the casino. On this day there were seven rigs parked in the corner of the lot furthest from the hotel with some big rigs; a giant fifth-wheel and two class-As; parked close to the entrance. Those, of course, were the high-rollers and tourist who had money to spare.

The noticeable thing, for those who knew the casino, was that the car-park was almost full. It would have been a mystery were it not for the giant banner on the low round building and the flashing sign by the highway announcing the dedication of the Kawaika Tribal Museum.

The main concourse of the new museum, which was a large extension on the back of the round casino building, was an open and sunny three-story canyon of whitewashed adobe brick. People were hanging over the railing of the balconies watching the event below. At one end of the ground floor was a stage filled with tribal elders, academics and David Delvey of Antiquities Recovery, Inc. The room, like the balconies above, was filled with people with the news media claiming the front. This was an important event for the tribe and most, if not all, of the tribal members arrived in traditional dress. Tribal chief, George Kanteena, was all smiles as he introduced David Delvey.

“It is my great privilege,” Chief Kanteena was saying, “to introduce the man who has made all of this possible. A long-time friend of the pueblo, David rescued and restored all of the marvelous tribal artifacts in this museum. It is through his efforts that we are here today. Please give a big round of applause to Mr. David Delvey, founder and owner of Antiquities Recovery, Inc.”

The concourse erupted with applause as David stepped forward to the microphone. Behind him stood Dr. Gabriel Stevens, Eggan Chair, Professor of Archaeology and Dean of Anthropology and Archeology at the University of New Mexico. Dr. Stevens was applauding vigorously. Next to him stood Dr. Carlo Russi, Stevens’ assistant and professor of archaeology. On the ground level behind the dais filled with tribal and university leaders stood an old man and a young woman.

"I still don't trust him," the young woman, known in the community as Kachina Corn, whispered as she leaned toward the old man, who was clapping politely.

The old man, Felipe Abeita, was Kachina's grandfather and the tribal shaman. He had avoided standing on the dais with the tribal council but left that honor to the Roman Catholic priest of the local church. No one seemed to miss him on the stage and the look on his face said that he didn't disagree with the young woman's suspicions. He reached over and squeezed her hand. "We have no proof," he whispered back.

"Oh, come on, Baabaa," Kachina hissed, trying to be heard over the noise without shouting, "we've done everything but catch him in the act."

"But we haven't," said the old shaman looking sadly at his granddaughter, "have we?"

"This," Delvey was saying as he swung his arms wildly to indicate the entirety of the ancient Kawaika artifacts around them, "is what Antiquities Recovery does. This is our principal goal. This is our driving force. This is what we exist to do." Again applause.

What David Delvey, founder and owner of Antiquities Recovery, Inc., didn't mention was that, as he spoke, the originals from which many of the fake museum pieces were modeled and those items determined as "lost forever" were being loaded on a truck.

Before Delvey would finish telling a cheering audience how he had rescued the items they see around them and collect his recovery fee, one of his trusted employees would be collecting a satchel of cash for the "lost" artifacts and loading them onto a waiting plane.

David is a bad boy who steals and sells great treasures of antiquity or steals and gets a recovery fee to return them, or, as in this case, both. For Antiquities Recovery, Inc. it was generally both.

As the two less than happy observers listened to the self-adulating speech a man, standing on the loading dock of a squat unobtrusive warehouse that over-looked the San Juan River some distance away, shouted orders at a group of men loading a small box truck. The men carried wooden crates, each identified simply by a large stenciled number, handing them off to two other men who were carefully packing the truck.

A short, dark complected man approached the larger, white man. They were a study in contrast. The taller man, with yellow-blond hair protruding from under his expensive Stetson, wore a western dress shirt and well-fitted jeans which broke fashionably over the toes of his vintage quilted leather cowboy boots. The smaller man, by contrast, wore a white shirt under a black short jacket with the cuff of the shirt folded up over the cuff of the jacket, faded blue jeans, well-worn square toed boots and a bush hog palm straw hat that had long-ago seen better days. To most on-lookers one would assume the poor Mexican servant or employee approaching his boss.

“How’s the loading going?” demanded the shorter man. “The plane will be here in thirty-minutes. Make sure that truck is waiting!”

“Si, jefe!” replied the tall blonde Spaniard. “I’m driving the truck myself.”

“Good,” said el jefe without looking up. “And don’t dawdle. Get away from that airport right away.” The Spaniard acknowledged his orders. “Now I’ve got to go and play the stupid Mexican digger for that naïve professor from Chicago. He’s taking us to his site this afternoon.”

“Should I get the excavation crew ready, jefe?” asked the Spaniard.

“Not until I’m sure that we have something to excavate,” said el jefe as he started to walk away. “When is David supposed to get back from the opening?”

“Late this afternoon,” came the reply.

“Please make sure he isn’t being followed again,” said el jefe as he disappeared into the warehouse.

“Si, jefe,” said the Spaniard shaking his head and turning his attention back to the truck which was just about loaded, “Si. Si.” On at least three occasions David had unknowingly been followed by Felipe and Kachina but they had been spotted before he could lead them to the workshop on the San Juan.

El jefe is actually Ronald J. Mitchell, III; aka Ronaldo Michel; David Delvey’s unseen partner who, because of his short stature and swarthy complexion poses as a poor Mexican archaeological digger in order to get inside information about archaeological sites he and David might want to plunder.

He is, in fact, from a very wealthy Massachusetts family. There are stories about how a member of such a WASP family ended up looking so non-Anglo. Throughout most of Ronald’s life even a hint about these stories would send him into a tirade. Now he has learned how to use this anomaly to cheat, steal and become even richer. Unless you look closely at Ronald’s face, which bears no resemblance to the ancient native heritage that is so striking in the true Mexican, you can easily believe his scam. He speaks very little and generally mumbles a lot when speaking Spanish in order to cover up the gringo accent he just can’t seem to overcome.

While David is the university archaeology graduate who is quite skilled at restoration and reproduction and is sufficiently morally

weak as to take advantage of his skills to cheat and steal, Ronald is the money side of the partnership and is, by far, the most ruthless of the two men. Neither of the men trust the other. That's why their partnership is so strong.

Both men know Dr. Stevens and Dr. Russi well, but neither of the professors are aware that David and Ronaldo know each other nevertheless are partners. The success of the Antiquities Recovery scam is in its simplicity and determination to not get too greedy. A good example is the museum Antiquities Recovery had just filled with apparently priceless artifacts. Ronald had used his 'poor Mexican digger' ruse to find out about the dig site. They robbed the site and took the contents to their place on the San Juan River. There David applied his skills to clean and restore the treasure as well as make forgeries of some of the more outstanding pieces that would draw the biggest price. Ronald used his contacts in the world of stolen art and artifacts to get buyers. As a matter of practice, the two never sold more than half of the artifacts they stole. The two of them would decide which items would be returned to the university or tribe as "recovered". It was interesting, none of the authorities ever asked how they "recovered" the stolen items and there were never any arrests. Everyone was just happy to get as much back as they did.

The Antiquities Recovery, Inc., office and warehouse is in Farmington, New Mexico, about 185 miles northwest of Albuquerque. This put them close enough to the university to keep a close contact; since the university is their primary source of information and artifacts; but far enough away that people from the university don't drop in unannounced. In the case of the new Kawaika Tribal Museum, the most rare and valuable pieces were copied for the museum and the real artifact sold. Since they returned at least half, or more, of the "lost" pieces, there were enough legitimate artifacts that the copies were never

discovered. What David and Ronald had left to the museum was probably worth five or six million dollars on the black-market. What they sold brought them almost eight million dollars. The value they left to the museum was covered by insurance. If a successful “recovery” was accepted by the art and academic world, there was less chance that anyone, including the famous Interpol, would keep looking or ask uncomfortable questions.

It was almost a perfect set up except for Felipe and Kachina. They were constantly asking the difficult questions which, to date, David had been able to deflect. Being the most ruthless of the two, Ronald wanted to have Felipe and Kachina have a fatal accident. David resisted. “If we would happen to get caught with black-market artifacts we’d probably never end up in jail. And if we did, it would be a federal country club. Murder, ... well, you end up getting a life sentence in a State pen, and I’m not willing to risk that.”



Chapter 4.

Since Janie arrived, I've been spending as much time as possible working on her corral and stall. After sinking the posts for the corral in concrete, I turned my attention to the stalls while the concrete dried.

Good wood is really hard to find these days. Most of what you find at a lumber yard is still wet and warped beyond imagination. The Grand Junction Lumber Yard did its best to send me quality

wood but I still found myself picking through the pile to find pieces that look good enough to be on outside. I have to admit to being quite pleased with, even to the point of being proud of, the two stalls. I wanted to have more stalls, but there just wasn't enough room. As it turned out, I was able to get two nice stalls with a relatively small area just inside the door that will open into the corral. Before I was finished roughing the stalls I was already thinking of building a horse barn on the back of the existing barn.

Today just seemed like the right day to organize the barn. I had been so busy getting things into the barn that I hadn't really spent any time organizing them. What should be the feed and tack room was piled high with feed, tack, tools and miscellaneous other 'barn' things. There was a lean-to attached to one side of the barn that had been Tracker's workshop. All of the tools were gone except for a large, beautifully constructed work bench and a spring-pole lathe.

A spring-pole lathe is a foot-powered lathe with, in this case, a large pole anchored outside the building acting as the return spring. Operating a spring-pole lathe is difficult and requires a lot of skill. I read of a man who was actually skilled enough with this medieval tool that he could turn a cup with a handle. Since the reciprocal action of such a lathe means that the work is turning in the wrong direction fifty percent of the time, this man took advantage of that which allowed him to actually turn only eight-five percent of the work and carve the other fifteen, which was the handle. Tracker obviously had this old lathe because he had no electricity. I wondered where the rest of his old hand tools had gone. Along with the marvelous workbench; a piece of art in its own right; Tracker must have been heartbroken to be forced to leave them behind. Like the windmill, very little was required to make the lathe operational again.

I had removed everything from the tack/feed room except those things related to caring for Janie, Butch and any other non-humans who might come to live with me. Janie's winter supplies having arrived, the tack/feed room was quite full. I don't have a lot of tools, but those I have found a home in the workshop along with the few tools and maintenance equipment I found around the homestead. By late afternoon both rooms were looking respectable.

I was playing with the lathe when I noticed an extra drive belt that went into the floor. If you look casually at the lathe, there are pieces going through walls, out windows, and in just about every direction. No one would notice an extra drive belt that seemed to have no particular purpose. As I examined the anomaly, I noticed that it had to be manually connected to the drive peddle to do whatever it was designed to do.

Well, I thought, what's the worst that could happen. I decided not to follow that line of thought and attached the peripheral drive belt to the peddle system and started peddling. At first it didn't seem that anything was happening but I noticed that peddling was becoming a bit more difficult. My broom, which I had put up against the nearby wall, fell over. That cause me to look. Surprise!

As I peddled a sizable section of the floor began to rise. I continued to peddle until it stopped with the room side of the opening lifted about five or six inches. I could see a handle. Lifting on the handle the section of the floor opened like a trap door exposing a set of steep steps leading down into the dark.

Lighting a nearby lantern, I climbed down into the dark. The room below the workshop was small and filled with brown bags. I opened one of the bags. It was gold ore. Or at least that's what it looked like to me. I checked several of the bags and they were all the same. I stuck a few pieces in my pocket and climbed out

of the room. Analysis would show that it was a very high-grade gold ore.

Attorney William Anderson's office was the front portion of a two-story adobe building which was original to Lewis Center. It was a short distance from the assay office in the government center so I left my van there and walked. The difference between the two buildings was striking; the assay office being in a newer building with twentieth-century materials and sporting air conditioning while the law office was the original old nineteenth century adobe. Yes, the assay office was modern and practical. On the other hand, the sense of comfort created by the adobe enfolds the visitor. While the assay office had a giant air conditioning unit mounted on the roof, the thick adobe walls didn't need air conditioning.

The front door entered directly into a reception room with an overstuffed sofa and chair flanked by a coffee table covered with periodicals. This seating area faced a large desk behind which the firm's receptionist, secretary and legal assistant sat. She had been working at a computer when I entered and looked up with a smile.

"Hi!" I said giving a friendly wave. "I have a one o'clock appointment with Mr. Anderson."

"Sure," the woman responded, "you're Mr. Gerber."

"Yes, ma'am."

She reached forward to an old-fashioned intercom that looked like a wooden box sitting on her desk. Pushing the tab she said, "Mr. Anderson, Mr. Gerber is here."

I didn't have time to sit down before the attorney came out and escorted me into his office. If the passage into the reception room

wasn't a journey back into history, going into William Anderson's private office was almost like time warp.

The walls behind the large double-pedestal executive desk were filled with the brown banded law books so common in the law office "library" before the days of internet. His desk was neat and uncluttered. He had an old-fashioned blotter and green-globed desk lamp right out of the early twentieth century. The intercom box sat off to one side. The closest thing to "modern" to be seen was a small lap-top computer and cell phone on one corner of the desk and the document which he had obviously been reviewing when I arrived laying open on the blotter. His chair was a wooden spindle back. Watching him move in the chair, I figured that it was a swivel with casters. No upholstery. No special comforts. Facing the desk on the old faded Persian carpet were two leather club chairs for his clients.

"Wow," I caught myself saying out loud.

"Thank you," the attorney smiled at my appreciation of his office. "my father bought the practice from the man who started it in 1891. He didn't change a thing and I didn't change anything when I inherited it. Even the books are original."

"That's amazing."

"Yeah, I originally started keeping up with all of the updated volumes but soon realized that I can get anything I want from the internet. There's no reason buying new books."

After some polite chitchat I told the attorney about the gold. He chuckled as he turned the gold nugget over in his hand.

"This is ironic," he said, "well, sad and ironic."

"How so?"

"I wasn't involved in the case, but in a small county like this you know everything going on," Anderson started. "Most people

knew that Daphnia and Henrietta Wellington, Tracker's nieces, were pulling the strings and poor Tracker had no idea how to deal with them. Daphnia calls the shots and is the one of whom you need to be wary. Tracker finally got an attorney and tried to get them out of his life but it was too little too late. His attempt backfired and he found himself with the two of them having power of attorney. They pretty much ignored Jeannie. We all knew that they just wanted the old man's gold mine outside of Grand Junction."

"First they forced him into the double-wide near the road. I have no idea why they did that except it meant they didn't have to drive all the way back to his cabin. Some were thinking that they were planning on moving in with him, but I can't imagine those two being willing to live on a ranch with Dead Horse being the closest things to a town even if it did mean a gold mine."

"When he died the two of them were down here like a couple of vultures on a warm carcass. It turned out that he had a handwritten will that left everything to Jeannie. Somehow their lawyer had missed that. That is, somehow their ex-lawyer had missed that and they ended up in court. Their new attorney was very competent at keeping pertinent facts and evidence that the old man was 'of sound mind' out of court. He painted poor Jeannie as a free-loading whore just after Tracker's money. Isn't that ironic? Daphnia and Henrietta might not be whores but they were certainly free-loaders who were just after their uncle's money. They sold the ranch to you and went to claim their real prize . . . the mine."

The attorney started to laugh. "A day or so after you bought the ranch I met Carl – that's the assayer – in the courthouse. Knowing that I was representing you in the purchase of Tracker's ranch, he had to share the rest of the story. We both knew the truth about 'The Sisters', as people started calling them.

They were not welcome visitors to the county. He started laughing so hard that he had difficulty telling his story.”

“Like the peacocks they were, the Sisters waltzed into Carl’s office and demanded that he go with them to assess the value of Tracker’s mine. Carl never did think that Tracker was getting his gold from that old mine, but that was obviously what Tracker wanted people to believe. Carl told me that the nuggets Tracker would occasional sell were far too high of a quality for those old mines by Grand Junction, but he never pressed him. Tracker had done all of the legal paperwork to sell gold ore, so Carl couldn’t see any reason to push the matter. Because of their history, their treatment of Jeannie and the rude manner in which they demanded that he drop everything to go check the mine, Carl charged them double his going rate. They didn’t flinch. He told them that the mine was totally worked out and had been for a really long time. Evidently Daphnia yelled “damn”, spun her fancy little sports car around and left him standing in a cloud of dust. He said he would have been really pissed except he had been able to tell the infamous Sisters that their gold mine was useless. For Carl that was worth the insult. Did I tell you that no one around here likes The Sisters?”

I found myself extremely amused and rather happy to hear that Daphnia and Henrietta left empty-handed.

“Where do you suppose all of the gold I found came from?” I asked.

“I haven’t the foggiest,” replied my attorney. “if his is as high a grade as Carl says, I’ve never heard of anything like it coming out of these hills.”

“Did Tracker travel?”

“Just around the mountains in and around his ranch,” said Anderson. “Going to the mercantile in Dead Horse and visiting

his friends in the pueblo was about the extent of his sojourn. He was close to the Laguna. The east side of your ranch borders the pueblo. I know that he gave a lot to the Laguna until Daphnia took away his checkbook. Tracker and Jeannie would go off into the far reaches of the ranch and be gone for days.”

“If he wasn’t actively ranching and the mine was worked out, where did he get his money?”

“I have no idea. Remember, I wasn’t his attorney and I’d be violating client privilege if I did know and told you. I’m just guessing that there’s some really fine gold up in ‘them thar hills’ between you and the Laguna.”

“Why wouldn’t the tribe mine it?”

“I can think of a couple of good reasons.” I looked at my attorney expectantly. “Commercial mining really infuriates the Indians. It destroys the land and the water. It wouldn’t be something they would want.” Anderson paused. “But more importantly they wouldn’t really want anyone to know that there is a valuable mineral on their land. History has shown that as soon as the white man learns that the Indians have something they break their treaty and take it. These people don’t have a lot more to lose.”

“Let’s remember that and client privilege, shall we Counselor?” I said with a grin.

“Hey,” my attorney threw up his hands, “my Mother is Laguna and I’ve never broken a client’s trust yet!”

“I’m just kidding you,” I apologized.

“I know you are,” Anderson smiled. “but there’s a serious side to such joking. My guess is that Tracker and the Laguna had something going and you’re going to have to gain their trust before you find out.”

“Honestly, Counselor, I don’t really care about a gold mine. I came here to escape and I agree with the Indian sentiment toward mining. But native people across this country have been treated like crap for so long, I don’t want to miss an opportunity to help put that right. If Tracker and the Laguna had something secret going on, I’d like to keep it up, if it helps the tribe.”

Now my attorney, for whom my admiration grew each time we met, was very careful about client privilege, that didn’t mean that he couldn’t tell his Mother and her Laguna relatives that I really want to be friends and help the tribe. Despite the size of the tribe, it didn’t take long for the word to get back to Chief George Kanteena, Shaman Felipe Abeita and his granddaughter, Kachina Corn.

Several days later, in the tribal office, Chief Kanteena had called in Felipe and Kachina.

“Do either of you know anything about this guy, Rusty Gerber?” the chief asked.

“Nothing other than what we learned from Catrina Anderson,” responded Felipe. “She said that her son likes him and believes that he sincerely wants to be friends with the tribe and help us.”

“Even the talk in the white community,” added Kachina, “is that he’s generous and very sensitive to the poverty of the people - Indian and white. He gave Winston Angler almost twice what he could have bought Mary’s horse for and he’s letting Bobby and Peggy Jean Jordan live in the trailer and work the front part of the ranch for pretty much nothing.”

“He sounds like a person whose friendship we want to cultivate,” said the chief.

“I feel really low cultivating the friendship of a person just because they might give us money,” said Kachina.

“Poor choice of words,” replied George Kanteena looking a bit hurt. “I’m not talking about running a scam on him or even just sucking up.”

“No, you’re not,” interjected Felipe, “and we can make friends without expectation of reward. I think that’s where you’re coming from, Kachina. We do need to make friends whether or not that friendship goes beyond just being good neighbors. Whether or not he gives us money or helps us in other ways, we need to show him that we are trustworthy and kind neighbors.”

Everyone agreed.



Chapter 5.

Kachina Corn didn't have to find a reason to visit and make friends with me. She already had her own agenda which included her research into the Kawaika, her tribal ancestors. Working on her PhD in archeology at the University of New Mexico, she had spent many long, hot days at the foot of the mountains on my ranch that borders the pueblo.

The old blue pickup raised such a cloud of dust coming up the road that no one could miss it. Butch started barking as the truck approached. Between Butch and the dust there was no way I could not know that I had company. I had been doing some repair on the barn and stood just outside the large sliding doors as the truck came to a stop in front of me.

Call me a naïve gringo hick, but I wasn't expecting a beautiful Laguna woman to climb out of the cab of the truck. My jaw must have dropped when she appeared from around the truck door. She was probably five foot tall at a stretch and perfectly

proportioned. Her shoulder length black hair, parted in the middle, framed a beautiful face with slender nose and dark eyes. I should have known she was coming to ask a favor for she wore a tee-shirt that accentuated her curves and tight jean shorts that must have been designed purposely to drive men wild. I didn't know until later that this sexy lady was a card-carrying feminist. I should have guessed that as well because when she attempted to strike a sexy pose, she looked anything but comfortable. It was definitely a stance that she had seen somewhere that was labelled as sexy, and she didn't really do it very well. Nevertheless, she was beautiful and I undoubtedly stood gawking.

Kachina Corn ABD ... where ABD stands for "All But Dissertation", having done everything toward a doctorate degree except finish the dissertation ... was doing her dissertation on a thesis that her tribe's ancestors, the Kawaika, lived in the mountains that make up the border between my ranch and the pueblo. She was wanting to make camp on my property and explore it for signs of her ancestors.

"I'd really like to make my camp over there," Kachina pointed basically east, "at the foot of that cliff. I camped there when Mr. Tillman lived here. It has a small tank and is close to the area I want to search for signs of my ancestors."

For my part, I had to work hard to be careful dealing with this beautiful and seemingly honest and open young woman. I had to keep reminding myself that indigenous people have their fair share of evil, greedy and wacko – that's a technical term you might need to look up – people. I could not think of any reason that she couldn't camp on the ranch. I doubted that killing me in my sleep was on anyone's agenda, besides they'd have to get by Butch. After quickly running through the pros and cons, I gave her permission to camp and explore.

“What type of evidence are you searching for?” I asked both out of interest and caution.

“Well, there is an old story about a large cliff city,” Kachina said “But this area has been explored so extensively, I can hardly imagine a cliff dwelling of any size that hasn’t already been found.” She paused looking east toward the mountains in the distance.

“Yes,” I agreed, “we get out in these canyons and think we’re the first person to see it, but we know that there had to be many before us. If there’s a cliff city out there, I can’t imagine it not having been ‘discovered’ already.”

“Most of my evidence is going to have to come with uncovering old camp sites and finding things which can be carbon-dated. I’ve camped over by the tank many times and find it hard to believe that my ancestors never camped there. But I can’t find anything.”

“Wouldn’t such camps be covered by a rather deep layer of dirt and sand?”

Kachina laughed a very natural and real laugh. “You haven’t been over there have you?”

“No,” I admitted, “I didn’t even know there was a tank over there.”

“If you had, you would see the signs of all of the holes I’ve dug,” Kachina stopped and gazed toward the cliff. “I just can’t believe . . .” her words trailed off.

“Can’t you get some help from the university where you’re doing your degree?”

“The chairman of my school is extremely supportive, and one of the professors is as well, but money is tight and I need some evidence before they can try to raise the funds.”

“Oh, I see.”

“They actually think my hypothesis is absolutely correct. I still have a little Laguna girl’s belief in the great cliff city, but my realistic, academic, scientific nature tells me that there is no way there weren’t some really large permanent encampments. If I can find one it would help confirm the link between the Kawaika and modern Laguna and support many of our claims about sacred and tribal land.”

“And you are betting your entire PhD on that.”

“To an extent – yes,” she laughed self-consciously. “There have been many successful PhD dissertations that show that the student’s hypothesis is wrong but in proving themselves wrong they were able to demonstrate new and unique knowledge, which is actually the traditional goal of the PhD dissertation. But you’re right.” She paused. “I’m betting everything I have that evidence of my ancestors is right under my nose – almost literally.”

I read about that guy, David something, who recovers antiquities,” I said. “Have you seen whether he can help you?”

“That con man!” she almost shouted.

“Oh, I’m” I started to apologize but she beat me to it.

“No, I’m sorry,” Kachina apologized. “It was a knee-jerk reaction.”

“I take it he isn’t as good as he wants us to believe he is.”

“That’s an understatement,” Kachina almost laughed. “He’s so full of himself. My grandfather and I know that he is stealing artifacts and selling them back to the tribes as ‘recovered’ but we haven’t been able to prove it. Even the people at the university thinks that he walks on water.”

“That’s not good,” I commiserated.

“To use one of my father’s sayings, ‘he’s lower than a snake’s belly.’”

The more I talked to this beautiful young woman, the more I felt that we had the same beliefs and goals in life. We talked for some time before she said that she needed to get going and set up camp. I told her to just knock on the door if she needed anything. She smiled, climbed into her truck and drove off.

When Kachina was as close to her camping site as the road would take her, she put the old truck into four-wheel drive and headed out across the high desert toward a cliff on the south side of the mountain. As she approached, she could see the cut in the cliff wall where the tank was located. The tank was filled by rainfall and snow melt. As she drew near she couldn’t help but think about how her ancestors must have known about this tank and frequented it.

She parked the truck by what appeared to be an indigenous hunting camp with the remains of an old lodge about twenty yards from the tank. All that remained of the lodge was the basic structure; saplings and branches bent and tied together framing a simple domed dwelling about eight feet long and five feet wide.

It appeared that it had been abandoned for many years but Kachina had just removed the covering when Tracker died and she worried about The Sisters. She had built this camp when she first started searching the area for clue of her ancestors and worked hard to be faithful to the skills and designs of her ancestors.

A short distance in front of the lodge opening was a small wall-less shelter that protected a primitive table next to a stone firepit and oven. This was Kachina’s kitchen. To one side was the drying frame Kachina had made to dry fish, and to the east of

the lodge was a corral. The corral was enclosed by intertwined Ocotillo branches held in place by Palo Verde or Mesquite posts. A section that served as the gate stood open.

She was very proud of her kitchen, especially her oven. To Kachina, the effort to build this camp in the ways of her ancestors served two ends: it helped her get into the mindset of the Kawaika who would have come here to live or hunt, and it was her way of honoring them.

Kachina's people lived with the land. They had no illusions of grandeur. They didn't own nature. They knew that they were a part of nature. Unlike the white invaders who saw land as something to possess and nature as something to conquer and destroy if it doesn't provide some reward, her ancestors, whether or not they were conscious of it, lived knowing that true freedom and wealth was the life nature – in this case the desert – gave to them. Nature doesn't ask to be paid or repaid. Nature doesn't accumulate wealth, it is wealth.

Sitting by her lodge she would often look out over the desert and wonder how people could not see the beauty and life. Then again, she thought, she had been privileged to grow up with an old shaman who led her to the truth, who shared the beauty and taught her how to live fully. Those poor city people who have been constantly indoctrinated to believe that true beauty is man-made, that true and abundant life is in the confines of their concrete bastille, and that nature is somehow their enemy.

That nature had somehow become the enemy for the invaders was not hard to understand. Her father's family had become Christians. In their holy book they use “wilderness” to describe evil, bad and uninhabitable. It didn't make sense to Kachina. Then again, nothing about religion made a lot of sense to Kachina but explained a lot about human violence and destruction.

Kachina pulled five large green tarps from the back of the truck. She wondered if she was just trying to rationalize the use of a modern material by blaming it on the growing shortage of natural materials that is a result of human overpopulation. Her ancestors, she thought, didn't have this problem. In their day humans hadn't yet cut down forty-six percent of the world's trees nor did they cut forty billion trees a day. After all, experts estimate that there were only about 500 million people on the entire globe when her ancestors made this their home. Today there are over 10 million people just in Arizona and New Mexico.

She decided not to beat herself up over her decision and went about covering the lodge frame with the tarps. Tomorrow she would add some natural materials that would help hold the tarps in place and provide some insulation, but she needed a place to live right now.

As she was preparing for evening she became aware of how she was dressed. She felt embarrassed that she had purposely dressed so slutty in order to get Mr. Gerber to let her camp on his land. After talking to him she was certain that he was a good, kind and generous man. How was she ever going to convince him that tight t-shirts and skimpy shorts were not her normal apparel. In reality she dressed very traditionally even when she was on campus in Albuquerque. She had selected the modern sexy because one thing she had learned about white American males is that they are easily manipulated by sex. She wondered how much of that was due to the oppressive anti-sexuality of the first Europeans to come to North America.

The Puritans had created psychological baggage related to sex that modern Americans are still trying to overcome. She knew an older white woman who absolutely could not say the words "sex" or "pregnant". In stead she talked about "doing IT" and "being that way." And here she had used that phenomena to make a white man look at her body and not think about what she

was asking. The thought bothered Kachina all night. In fact, it kept her awake.

First thing in the morning, dressed in her normal traditional one-piece belted dress, Kachina knocked on my door.

It rather set me back seeing Kachina in traditional dress. She was still as beautiful – perhaps more so - because this was obviously natural to her. As the day before, her face; with its beautiful dark Laguna skin, oval shape with its fine nose and mesmerizing eyes; was framed by her long jet-black hair. Her simple dress appeared to be unbleached cotton and was belted with a wide braided band with tribal symbols. From her left shoulder to right hip was a leather bandolier from which hung a large knife. I could only see the handle sticking out of the sheath, but the beautiful polished black bone made me certain that it was a traditional antler knife. On each wrist she had very simple but beautifully crafted copper bracelets.

“I’m so sorry, Mr. Gerber,” Kachina opened the conversation. “I didn’t properly and honestly represent myself yesterday. I dressed like a slut because I wanted you looking at my body and not thinking about what I was asking. That was wrong. This is the real me. I will not do anything which my outfit yesterday might have implied. If you want me to leave, I can be gone in an hour.” She was almost in tears by the end of her confession. I couldn’t help but wonder how many times she had rehearsed it on the drive here.

For a moment I just stood and looked. “Heavens, no!” Another moment to look at the distraught woman in front of me, adjust to her honesty, and pick an appropriate response. “Have you had anything to eat?” is all I could think to say.

My question was obviously not what she was expecting. “No,” she said, somewhat set back by my total change of subject. “No. I came here as soon as I thought you’d be awake.”

“Then come in and have some breakfast,” I said. “we can start all over. Okay?”

I didn’t really wait for an answer but turned and led the way into the cabin. I had just started my coffee and the aroma filled the air. I directed Kachina to one of the two chairs at my kitchen table and returned to preparing breakfast.

“My big sister, who actually raised me, is a radical feminist,” I told Kachina. “I don’t know which of us she would scold the most for yesterday.”

“Why?”

“I could see her scolding me for being a male who by my nature, mere existence, and history would cause a young woman such as yourself to feel it necessary to dress in such a manner to appeal to me. She would, however, be more likely to scold me because I grew up with a radical feminist and should have known what you felt forced to do. Actually, I did notice that you seemed uncomfortable playing the siren but I really didn’t know what to do. She might scold you for feeling that you must stoop to such whoring to get what you want, but she would be much more sympathetic with you than me.”

Kachina laughed. “I think I would like your sister.”

I put a cup of coffee in front of the young woman and indicated the cream and sugar on the table. “So, tell me about the real Kachina Corn.”

“The real Kachina Corn is a nerdy graduate student and feminist. I am Kawaika through and through. I love nature; especially the desert and mountains. While I do like what I can learn at the white university, I have a strong animosity toward the white man’s systems. I am going to the white university because I know that I will have to spend my life dealing with and trying to

protect my tribe from the white system so I need to be as knowledgeable of it as possible.”

“That sounds a whole lot better,” I called from the stove where the eggs were cooking and the bacon sizzling.

After small talk as we ate, Kachina told me her story over coffee.

Kachina was twenty-eight years old. She was born and raised on a farm on the Laguna Pueblo, the youngest child of five - four boys and Kachina. Being raised with four boys is universal - you learn to fight for everything and be tougher than nails. Of course, by the time you are a teenager and have other males sniffing around, your brothers become your protectors.

Her claim to fame was her grandfather, Felipe Abeita, an eccentric shaman whom some revered, believing that he was possessed by the spirit of his ancestors, while some thought he was crazy. Those people, according to Kachina, were unfortunately extremely influenced by white men and included her own Father. Her Mother, however, was the one who insisted upon naming her Kachina, which means spirit. Her brothers were good and honorable men, and in many ways loved the traditions of their ancestors, but they felt that since the white man had the power, they needed to do things the white man way. Two brothers joined the Army, one worked as a pit boss in the casino and one disappeared in the city. Kachina had never been like that.

Kachina told of spending many hours sitting at the feet of her shaman grandfather, learning their language and listening to stories. Just before she started high school he had told her about the Kawaika, ancestors of the Laguna, who lived in marvelous cliff cities and used gold where other tribes used silver or copper.

Tracker Tillman had been Kachina’s benefactor. No one knew where the old man got the money, but he paid for Kachina to

attend the University of New Mexico where she changed her major to archeology. Under the influence of her grandfather, Kachina started her master's degree in ethnohistory but the old stories were like a giant magnet that pulled her into finding evidence of Kawaika villages and perhaps even one of the cliff dwellings. For her, finding the hard evidence was like verifying the rights to the life, tradition and respect which she would claim for her people.

Her supervisor was Professor Doctor Gabriel "Gabe" Stevens, Eggan Chair Professor of Archaeology and Dean of Anthropology and Archeology at University of New Mexico. She spent the last year of her master's program and two subsequent years getting Professor Stevens to approve the search for the hidden city as her PhD research.

“Oh,” Kachina added, “and I really, really do want to camp by the escarpment and look for signs of my ancestors.”

There was no way I was going to say 'no' to that and it had nothing to do with her sex. By the time she finished her story I was so caught up in her search that I found myself always keeping an eye open for evidence of Kawaika civilization.



Chapter 6.

After a few weeks of walking and riding around my new homestead, I decided that I needed to check out the far reaches of my ranch. I had talked to Kachina a little bit to learn how Tracker helped the tribe. I had pretty well forgotten about the gold. Having no interest in mining, I figured that there was plenty in the cellar and it wasn't going anywhere. I'd know when it was time to start cashing it in. At this point I hadn't thought about the questions that would raise or the problems it would create with the Wellington sisters.

I was a lot more interested in exploring my new sanctuary. I figured that I needed to prepare for a trip of about a week. Firstly, I didn't want to rush. Secondly, it's a really big ranch.

The front third of the ranch is high desert that had been used for grazing for generations. The back two-thirds, that in which I have the greatest interest, is a wide high desert valley ringed by tall, rugged mountains from which extend at least five box canyons. According to the topographic maps my cabin is at an elevation of 6,250 feet and the highest peak around me is over 9,000 feet.

I actually have a lot of experience in the wilderness. That's why I bought the Tillman place, viz. to disappear into the wilderness; my own wilderness so that no one can tell me I have to get out in fourteen days. At the same time, I have enough experience to know that there is still a lot I have to learn to live totally off grid, in the wilderness for any extended period. I have spent weeks at a time alone in the desert or mountains far away from people, but, if I didn't have a vehicle with me, I was not far from one, and often there was a cell signal nearby.

The decision to make at least a week-long trek into the wilderness of my ranch was multi-purposed. First, I'm anxious to look around and perhaps find a place for a cabin well into the wilderness. Secondly, I'm anxious to test my skills and find out, under more controlled conditions, what type of skills I need to improve and new skills I need to develop.

Even before deciding upon an extended outing, I had decided to buy another horse. There were two reasons. First, Janie needed a barn-mate. Horses are a herd animal and it isn't fair to leave Janie alone. Doc helped me acquire a nice broodmare. Penny is twelve hands high and unbelievably gentle. She turned out to be a perfect companion for Janie. Penny loves to run with Janie but, obviously, can't keep up. I began to notice that Janie either stops

and waits for Penny to catch up or goes slow. The second reason for buying Penny was as a pack horse. She's not nearly as big as Janie but she is extremely well built and can easily carry two-hundred to two-hundred-fifty pounds, but I doubt that I would ever ask her to carry over one-hundred-fifty pounds.

Apart from being a barn-mate, I couldn't see loading poor Janie with supplies as well as carrying me. Some people call me a softie, and maybe I am. By my way of thinking it was either get another horse to help or walk. I'm going to have at least forty to fifty pounds of food and gear. With Penny along, I don't have to be quite so conservative on the supplies.

Most people don't think about the bulk of food. My food is bad enough but food for Penny, Janie and Butch is quite bulky. I'm hoping that there will be plenty of grazing wherever I go, but I don't want to take the chance. Yes, there are freeze-dried, dehydrated and other packaged, processed foods that are very light and easy to pack, but they are really an insult to my environmental beliefs.

Historically many people around the world had travel food to supplement hunting and gathering as you go. The Tarahumara of northcentral Mexico, for example, run great distances. They have a special running food that is both tasty and nutritious. I have their recipe and plan to take an ample supply. I would like to learn to live more off the land and carry less, but I must be realistic and accept the fact that I'm still developing those skills. I'm planning to hunt and fish. I have also been studying edible plants and trying to learn more about gathering. There is water in the river and my maps show at least three tanks. I'll carry a water purifier.

I've never been a hunter and while I really enjoy fishing, I've never been particularly good. If I'm going to live off the land, these are skills I need to develop. I got myself a Mossberg 500

20-gauge shotgun for small game. It can kill a deer with a slug. Shotgun shells are bulkier to carry but I don't think I could hit a rabbit with a 22. 20-gauge low brass #4 shot gives me greater range than smaller shot and it tends to hit with fewer pellets that each penetrate the game completely. This means fewer pellets to chomp on when you bite down on that tasty morsel.

Butch, Janie and Penny seemed to understand that this outing was special. They acted like excited children. We were out of sight of the barn before they began to settle down. I kept a lead on Penny even though I knew there was no way she was going to go anywhere without Janie. It was just a safety precaution in case something frightened her. Our first stop was to be Kachina's camp. It was a straight shot east about seven miles across the open high desert from the cabin.

The two parallel tracks that pass for a road, created by horses and old trucks over untold years, stretch out before us like an arrow pointing at the distant mountains. The shades and tones of browns and reds create a mesmerizing kaleidoscope of designs and colors. As I marveled at the beauty around me I realized that this magnificent natural mural, repeated countless places across the southwest, was undoubtedly the source of inspiration for the beautiful patterns of native weaving and beadwork.

So many eastern folks I know cannot see the beauty of this land. They see only parched earth and heat and associate the color brown with drab. For me brown and green are the banner colors of nature. Such people see the desert and think of lifelessness. No matter how sad, I guess it is to be expected. After all, when I think of their low mountains covered in beautiful hardwood forests I immediately think of mosquitos and biting midges.

The massive butte to our north, wearing its primordial history in lines and swirls of reddish brown Cretaceous sandstone, stands

like a lighthouse pointing my way home. I didn't know if it had a name. There was none shown on my topo map. I had decided to call it Tracker Butte in honor of my predecessor. It can be seen from my bedroom window and rises more magnificent and massive as one draws near.

Unless you're in one of the box canyons, Tracker Butter is never out of site. Studying its lines and colors as we pass slowly by, I could make out its capstone; a thick layer of more erosion-resistant rock that sits on top. In ages past the capstone was ground level. Erosion began to wear away the softer rock around it leaving the pillar we know as a butte. A mesa is a much bigger version of the butte. They both have the same history. The capstone on the mesa, however, tends to hang over the underlying rock which is not the case for the butte.

Forests of large Teddy Bear Cholla stretched out ahead in a sea of high desert grasses; various types of Grama, Western Wheatgrass and the like. Sagebrush, Fourwing Saltbush and Winterfat are important shrubs up here. As we drew closer to the mountains ahead, we could make out the Pinyon pine and the Juniper on the mountain slope. It wasn't obvious but we were gradually going up. According to my topo map Kachina's camp is at a about 7,000 feet; almost eighth hundred feet higher than my cabin.

We arrived at the ford where we crossed the San Miguel River. The ford was a long mud and gravel ramp that gently descended from the bank to the water with rather high sides after years of being used to cross the river. The river was no more than twenty feet wide at this point. The dense vegetation was close enough to the trail on both sides of the river that passing pickup trucks probably brush the sides. The water wasn't very deep, and the ford was easy. Janie and Penny paused to drink while Butch played in the water. The magnificent cottonwoods gave us some

greatly appreciated respite from the sun which was almost directly overhead.

From the ford to Kachina's camp by Coyote tank we were never out of sight of the river. It was like a ribbon of green meandering along beside us. I was surprised to see two horses grazing by Kachina's camp. Kachina and an elderly man sat by a campfire. They stood up as we drew near and Kachina started walking toward us when she recognized me.

She reached up and took hold of Janie and Penny as though it was something she did every day. Actually that probably isn't far from true. I slid down off Janie trying not to look as bow-legged as I felt. Butch jumped and scampered around her vying for attention.

"Welcome," she said reaching down to give Butch some loving. "It's nice to see you. Come meet my grandfather, Felipe Albeita." The elder man extended his hand. Felipe was a rather small man with long white hair held back by a wide headband and weathered skin with deep lines that made him look ancient. His collarless pullover shirt with v-neck was open at the throat and hung down over his trousers which were straight-legged and loose fitting. The shirt was belted with a leather belt, and a beaded shash crossed his chest holding a knife at his side. Both the shirt and trousers appeared to be from unbleached/undyed natural material. He wore calf high soft leather native style boots. His smile was broad and friendly and his handshake firm. By the time we had shaken hands I knew that I liked this man.

"We're having fresh catfish," Felipe said. "will you join us?"

I evidently took a quick glance toward the river.

"Yes," said Felipe anticipating my question, "we caught them right there. It's the most abundant native fish. The state stocks trout for the anglers, but they don't generally get up here."

"I'd love to join you if you have plenty," I said.

"Kawaika always have enough to share," replied Felipe with a smile.

Kachina got another plate from her lodge and served up three well-filled plates each with a whole catfish, wild potatoes and nopal. Everything on the plate had come from right around her camp. It was delicious. I'm sure that the sounds of my gastric pleasure were far more convincing than my verbalizations made between bites.

"When did you bring your horses?" I asked between mouthfuls.

"Oh, Baabaa, Grandfather, brought Nizhoni to me last night," Kachina smiled pointing at the Pinto grazing near her lodge. Nizhoni was a bit over fourteen hands high. Her short, powerful legs were incredibly well muscled. She had a broad chest which, with the shorter legs and stockier appearance than other horses, belied her Mustang heritage. Her face was white and her markings were skewbald.

Evidently I looked confused. Felipe added, "Oh, I rode over the hunting trail," pointing over his shoulder at the trail which continued eastward. "Tracker Tillman allowed us to hunt on his ranch and that's how we got here. It's just a horse trail from here on into the reservation."

"Oh, yes. I'm glad you mentioned that," I said. "I understand that tribal members hunt here occasionally."

"Yes," Felipe replied. "But we haven't since Mr. Tillman died."

"Oh, I wish I had known. Kawaika are always welcome to hunt here."

Thank you," said Felipe. "that's very generous."

"No," I insisted, "that's just being a good neighbor. I should just give ..."

"Oh, no!" Kachina interrupted, "don't even think that. If you give us our land back and anything valuable was found, you know the government would just take it. Then neither of us would have the land."

"Sadly, that's true," That really made me feel worse because I was painfully aware that the United States government has never made a treaty with a native tribe that they did not eventually break. I was at Standing Rock. "So, let's make an unwritten, unpublicized agreement."

"What do you have in mind?"

"Tribal members can use the northern two-thirds of the ranch. I have a young couple who want to practice subsistence farming on the lower portion. We don't bother them. You, your chief, tribal council or a committee; I don't care; will decide who is allowed. As long as we keep it in the tribe and no one talks about it. I just need to have an idea of who's here in case some 'law bidin' citizen' decides to challenge anyone".

We had a lovely evening sipping Indian tea and talking about our love of the land and the beauty of our surroundings. Both Felipe and Kachina work at getting young people excited about their history and culture. They often feel like they are fighting an uphill battle. Since the arrival of the white man they have attempted to destroy the Kawaik culture and language. White Europeans have done this around the world. They tried to justify their brutal behavior with religion. Their motto was "kill the Indian to save the child".

The next morning I was awoken by the smell of fresh coffee and a traditional Navajo breakfast. Felipe left almost immediately for the reservation, taking off at a gallop. Kachina showed me her digs before I headed on my way. Everything she had found was indicative of a hunting party camp, not a permanent settlement. She told me about seismic refraction.

Even though it isn't used a lot, it is one way to find something buried. The problem, of course, was the cost. Immediately an image of the bags of gold under my barn came to mind.

As I rode off, I looked back at Kachina. She was staring into one of the holes she had dug. I wondered if she was feeling overwhelmed. I knew that her PhD was important to her, but more important was the potential historic and cultural impact of her work. The PhD was just another white man tool for her to use to strengthen her tribe.

I rode west about halfway to the ford then turned north along the foot of the mountains that divide my ranch from the reservation. The mountains, which are quite rugged and mostly barren, rise steeply with two massive tables. The day was awesome and the landscape magnificent but I couldn't get the image of Kachina standing there alone out of my mind. What must it be like to have your family history so destroyed and so misrepresented? What must it be like to know you have a wonderful heritage but have it buried under the lies and false stories of invaders until it has been lost?

My first night alone was in a box canyon looking out at T-Bone Peak which dominates the center of the mountains in the northern two-thirds of my ranch. I had not attempted to hunt or fish when I arrived. One must realize that my confidence level is a lot lower than my actual skill level. In the hundreds of nights I've spent in the wilderness I have always had something that was packaged; commercial or otherwise. At this point in my life, I had stopped using the commercial packages, but I was still making food packets when I had a kitchen. This night I decided upon a rice mix I had made with my dehydrator, to which I added some fresh napole – prickly pear cactus. Maybe tomorrow I'd try my hand at finding some wild potatoes or catching some fish to go with the travel food I brought.

The sunset behind T-Bone Peak was phenomenal but it was the Milky Way, resplendent in the moonless sky, that was far beyond the ability of a mere mortal to adequately describe. To say that it not only excited me to the point of being almost giddy while at the same time made me feel exceptionally small and insignificant would be an understatement on both counts. I spread my sleeping bag on the ground and lay looking up at the stars. Butch curled up beside me. In the stillness of the night I could have sworn that I heard the faint, far away strains of a native flute. It was like the wilderness summoning me and reassuring me. I lay there lost in the stars listening intently. One would think that it would have been impossible to go to sleep, but the next thing I knew it was morning.

After a simple breakfast, that didn't hold a candle to yesterday's but was quite sufficient, I packed up and returned to the north-south trail that would lead me to the northern boundary of the ranch. I had decided that, even though it wasn't very far, I was going to stay at a spot where the canyons make a tee. At the top of the north-south trail I ran into a mountain. Actually the canyon I was following appeared to turn west, but if you looked closely to the east you see a very narrow passage that leads into a box canyon. It is a hidden canyon, and I was anxious to see what was in there. I decided to make camp at the entrance. Another starry night with more far-off melodic sounds.

In the morning I made my way into what I would soon be calling Kawaika Canyon in honor of the tribe that had once called this home. Kawaika Canyon is the only canyon I had not yet explored. It is at the far north corner of the ranch nestled up against the pueblo. This canyon isn't a place one would go on a day-trip from the cabin or anywhere else. You go here because you intend to.

As I traveled deep into the canyon I saw smoke coming from high on the canyon wall. I followed the smoke. I found a trail and soon came to a point where I had to lead Janie. When I got to the top I found an elderly man sitting by a fire. He was dressed in breech-cloth, leggings and moccasins with a blanket around his shoulders. His heavy head of hair was almost white and hung past his shoulders held back by a brightly colored headband. On the ground by him lay a gourd rattle, three cloth bags and a flute. He looked up and said nothing.

"Hello," I greeted him.

"Hello," replied the man.

"I'm sorry to bother you, but I saw the smoke from your fire."

"Why would you apologize?" asked the man.

"Because, if I were asked to guess, I'd guess that you're a shaman out here to find some peace and quiet to meditate, and I'm interrupting."

"I am a shaman," replied the man. "but I'm always here. I'm the keeper and protector of our ancestral home", he motioned around him causing me to follow his hands and look at the canyon around us. "And you're not interrupting."

"Did the Kawaika live in this canyon?"

"I understand that you are an honorable man and a good friend to native people," Istaqa sidestepped my question.

"How do you know that?"

"I guess I'm not here absolutely all the time," Istaqa smirked. "Felipe and Kachina both think very highly of you, and Tauri thinks that you are the incarnation of Tracker Tillman, or at least the one the Great Spirit sent to replace Tracker."

"Oh," I said truly embarrassed, "I just try to be a good neighbor."

“Your generosity goes well beyond being a good neighbor,” Istaqa said without lifting his gaze from the fire. “What makes you the way you are?”

I thought for a long time. Istaqa just sat and poked his stick at the fire without moving anything except his hand. I had never thought about it. It was just me.

“My Father, I guess.” Had I really said that? It just came out. Istaqa looked up and smiled. I thought about what I had said for a moment and continued as though compelled to spill the proverbial beans. “My parents weren’t rich but I grew up with privilege. Being a white boy I knew that the cards would always be stacked in my favor. My Father was almost always upset and angry with the white males who run the world. He gave a lot of money to the ACLU and organizations that worked to help indigenous people, blacks, immigrants and other people of color. He taught me that we are all the same, and he practiced what he preached. He also got physically involved as well, advocating for a truly egalitarian society, willing to stand toe-to-toe with authorities. One time a police officer started bullying a man of color who was traveling with my father. My father literally stepped between them and firmly reminded the officer of his oath to serve and protect. My father always believed that people were basically good. That’s the only thing on which we disagreed. I’m rather misanthropic, and I find that I am really quite ashamed to be a white male. What’s a bit funny ... I’m probably more charitable, even with those I dislike most, because my Father taught me that was what made us different.”

“That’s awesome,” Istaqa smiled. “You respect and honor your elders.”

“I think I respect and honor all elders.”

Istaqa looked back at the fire. I stood quietly and respectfully. He was obviously pondering something I said and was deep in thought.

“What are you seeking?” Istaqā finally asked.

“Honestly, . . .”

“Please,” Istaqā interrupted.

“Honestly, I want to escape. I'm seeking a way out.”

Istaqa looked up in surprise. He turned toward me, “please sit and tell me more.”

I sat down next to the shaman, who had now turned his entire attention to me. He was studying me with his head slightly cocked.

“I want to escape our so-called civilization.” I could hear the anger in my voice. “I want to live off the grid where I don't have to be constantly confronted by the demand of the System to comply. I want ... I want ...” I stopped a moment then asked “but why are you so interested?” I really dislike this topic and wanted to change the subject.

“You want to escape the fear, the pain and the shame,” said Istaqā not taking his eyes off me.

I must have looked shock. Dang, he nailed it! All I could do was look away. I was also afraid of the truth.

“You are a good and honorable man.”

“I try.”

Istaqa let me change the subject and was very open answering my questions about the hidden canyon and his presence there. His ancestors, the Kawaika, had indeed lived in the canyon for some time. It was safe and it had iiná yí'ááh, the life-giver. Istaqā could see me looking around for signs of a village. He laughed.

“It's a cliff dwelling up on the side of the mountain. You have to be standing right in front of it to see it.”

“Why don't you tell Kachina?” I realized that the realization that this man not only had the key to Kachina's search but knew her and purposely didn't tell her had me a bit angry.

“I'm afraid,” he said sadly. “I know she wants to find the truth to help our people. I'm afraid that public knowledge would be as bad as it would be good.”

Istaqa turned back toward the fire and began to fiddle. It was my turn to fix my gaze on him.

“Explain.”

“You know that the white man would come and, treating us like ignorant children, take over our sacred place just like they've done before, and leave us out of any decisions. Some of them would want to study the village to gain understanding and knowledge, while most would look for ways to use it to make money.”

I knew he was right. That's been the fate of every native archeological site I've known.

“I can refuse to let them on my land.”

“Sounds good. Then they just sneak in and loot.”

“Damn, you make it hard.”

Istaqa couldn't avoid a hollow laugh. “Why do you think I sit here? Why do you think I keep my secret from the one person to whom I would most like to tell it? “

“Why did you tell me?”

“I believe that you will not tell anyone, even Kachina, if I ask you.” He looked me squarely in the eyes. “Would you?”

“No, I'll keep your secret.”

“Besides,” he continued, “it important for you to know. I need you to help me protect it. Tracker and I were close friends. He knew. It tore him up too because he loved Kachina very much.”

“There's got to be an answer.”

“Good luck.”

After eating a piece of pemmican wrapped in fry bread, Istaqa led me up the steep path toward the Kawaika village.

Leonardo DaVinci once said, "we look but we do not see." Our vision is so confined by our expectations and brains restricted by what we think is or should be, that we miss countless unbelievable phenomena. It's a human thing and we all suffer from the condition.

I followed Istaqa with great expectation, but I had no idea where he was taking me or what I was to see. It was rather like an old movie line that passed briefly through my thoughts - "he's all excited but he has no idea why."

I was quite aware of the high cliff ahead of us. It seemed to grow larger as we got nearer. I noticed the green of plants and trees on the light grey top. Were this a butte or mesa, that would be the cap stone; a harder, less erosive stone. As we grew nearer, I could see a line of almost chocolate brown below the grey. It looked like the top of an arch with signs of bending. Whether in the uplifted northern Rocky Mountains or the volcanic mountains of the Sonoran Desert, bending rock has always boggled my mind. To consider nature taking a land mass and pushing it over sixty miles and up ten thousand feet or more challenges the imagination but it's doable. However, trying to comprehend bending rock is beyond my imagination.

There was a heavy stand of pinyon pine and large juniper

obscuring the vast majority of the mountain side from view. In fact, at one switchback we entered an area so thick with this vegetation that branches brushed us as we passed. Twenty or thirty yards further and the trail turned again. This time my view of the side of the mountain was unobscured and what confronted me caused me to stop and stand in awe.

The sun was well up and, this time of year, was crossing a bit lower in the southern sky. I have no idea how long it took for my brain to comprehend at what I was looking. The dark brown stone that had appeared to be curved was, in fact, the top of a gigantic arch. Nestled in the shadows of an enormous niche peering down over the treetops was a city of block and adobe so hidden in the massive protective recess of the mountain and camouflaged in shades of brown that it blended in so that we were less than a quarter of a mile away before I saw it.

Between this natural camouflage and the line of pinyon pine and high desert shrubs that obscured the cliff, the city had gone hundreds of years without being noticed. Of course, you also must take into consideration that the only way to get into the canyon is by knowing where to find the entrance. I have roamed the desert mountains for many years and know that it is not uncommon to look at a wall of mountains and not see the canyons or passes. Not only is this village protected by the mountain, it is in a truly hidden canyon. This is what Istaqa has dedicated his life to guarding.

The cliff opening faced in a southerly direction. This way the inhabitants got as much sun as possible during the winter months when the sun was low in the southern sky. In the summer, when the desert temperature will easily pass one-hundred degrees, the sun is almost overhead so the overhang of the cliff provides much needed relief.

The recess was packed with multistory buildings, and there were buildings of all shapes and sizes.

Dr. Carlo Russi stood in the corridor of Hibben Center for Archeology Research watching Kachina Corn tell a story about iiná yí'ááh (life giver) in her usual animated way. Anyone passing by could tell that Carlo was love-struck; everyone, that is, except Kachina. Even as Professor Gabriel Stevens approached, he paused to notice the way his young protégé looked at Kachina.

“Dang, girl,” said the professor greeting the two archeologists, “you must have some serious connections!”

“What do you mean?” Kachina asked.

“I just got a call from the ISRG” Both Kachina and Carlo gave the professor a quizzical look. Realizing they had no idea, he added, “International Seismic Research Group, Ltd. They do large site seismic refraction studies for anyone who has a need and the money.”

“And this has to do with me having connections, how?”

“They called to say that they have an anonymous donor who is picking up the bill for your research.” Kachina was shocked. The professor continued. “They evidently called your house and were told you are here. They asked me to have you call them to arrange a time and they want me to assign another archeologist to help you at the site.”

Young Dr. Russi stood tall and straight. His sudden change in posture wasn't lost on the professor. “And, yes,” he said looking at the young man, “I thought of you, Dr. Russi. If you have time,” the older man almost smirked.

"I have three classes right now." The love-struck young doctor was double anxious. He was anxious to go and experiencing anxiety over whether the professor would let him out of teaching for whatever time it might take. "But I have one graduate assistant, Roger Eastman, who would love to do some lectures."

"Excellent! What's left?"

"The class on the northern plains tribes."

"Oh," Stevens exclaimed. "I haven't taught that class in years. That could be fun."

The three archeologists talked about the seismic refraction. Kachina was still a bit overwhelmed and wondering who could have done such a thing. The only person she could think of with whom she had talked about seismic refraction was Rusty Gerber. Would he do such a thing? Did he have the money?

Carlo Russi was anxious to solidify his position while Professor, Dr. Stevens, Eggan Chair and Dean of Archeology and Anthropology, looked on in amusement. He too had to share Kachina's wonder about her benefactor. The cost was going to be sizable.

Sitting on an overturned five-gallon bucket in a nearby janitors closet listening in on the three academics was Ronald Mitchell. He also wondered about who would put out so much money for a graduate student's research. Because he was incapable of comprehending a person who would do such a thing without there being a significant reward, Ronald figured that there must be a prize worth stealing. Maybe it was that iiná yí'ááh he heard the girl talking about. He and David hadn't had a really big score since the Kawaika tribe collection.

In the office of The Wellington, a private gallery in a fashionable section of Denver, Daphnia Wellington continued being mean to her sister and yelling at their employees. The only employees she had left were those who couldn't afford to quit. She still wasn't over having invested so much time and effort into old Uncle Lawrence, known to others as Tracker. She had worked so hard to get that gold mine and the fact that it had been worked out many years before not only made her dislike the old man more for fooling her but wonder where he got all the money to help the Indian kids. Her only conclusion was that it was on the ranch, which she had practically given away.

Sometimes a sequence of events is almost unbelievable. As it happened, one of Daphnia's rather dubious clients, Stella Beanolck, had been one of the people who had bought a piece that David stole from the Kawaika. Stella asked Daphnia to sell something for her. Daphnia had gone to Stella's mansion to see the piece. She knew that it was probably authentic because Stella knew better than to try to get Daphnia to sell a fake. It wasn't that Daphnia had any qualms about selling fakes -caveat emptor – but it was a whole lot safer to sell authentic pieces that were hot. When she was in Stella's private gallery she spotted the piece Stella had bought from David.

“Aw, that's a beautiful piece,” Daphnia said pointing. “Kawaika isn't it?”

“Yes,” replied Stella, “I didn't know you were into Indian art.”

“I'm not,” Daphnia gave a wicked smile, “I know nothing about Indian art, but I just saw that piece ‘returned’ to the tribe with great pomp and ceremony.”

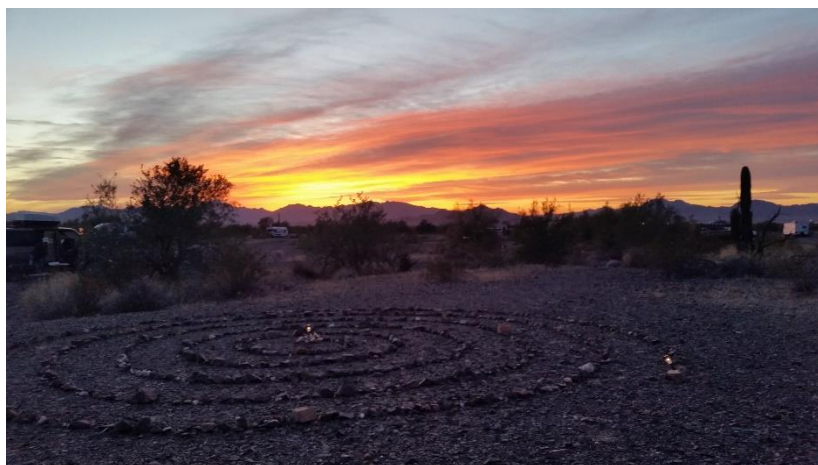
“David said ...”

“Oh, that's okay,” again Daphnia’s wicked smile, “you got it from David Delvey. I knew he was a thief. Is the piece you want me to sell stolen?”

“No,” exclaimed Stella, “honest. I bought it years ago.”

“You'd better tell me the truth or I might have to turn you and Mr. Delvey in to the authorities.”

Stella Besnolck went ashen. Daphnia again gave her wicked smile. She knew that somehow she was going to capitalize on this.



Chapter 7.

Daphnia was still mauling over how she could use David Delvey to get the gold when the antique shop doorbell rang. Out of habit she glanced at the security monitor on the corner of her desk. There stood David Delvey.

Stepping into the gallery facing David Delvey, Daphnia spread her arms in greeting and said, “well, if it isn't David Delvey! How are you doing you old thief?”

Delvey tried to smile but Daphnia saw his face go scarlet and his quick glance around the room to see who might have heard. He started to reply but, by this time, Daphnia was close and interrupted him.

“The other day I went to a client's house to appraise a piece she wants me to sell.” That said, Daphnia dropped her voice so

David had to listen carefully. “Guess what I saw when I was there. One of the Kawaika artifacts that I watched you return to the tribe.”

“There’s no way ...”

“Don't try to con me, Mr. Delvey,” Daphnia interrupted. “I’m sure she has the original since she would be the one most likely to have it authenticated. Those poor Indians think you're a freakin hero.” David stood silently. He had no idea what to do.

“And I bet,” Daphnia continued, “that you didn't come almost 500 miles to buy something from me. I bet you need me for some sort of caper.”

There was that famous Wellington wicked grin. She knew she was now in control of the situation and whatever was to come. Delvey continued to just stand silently.

“Oh, come on. Out with it. If I was going to turn you in, it would have been a done deal and you'd be wearing an orange jump suit.” Daphnia laughed. “Okay. Come on back to my office where we can talk.”

David followed Daphnia to her office. He looked around. It wasn't a particularly large office but it was opulent. The floor was parquet without rugs or other covering. In the center, facing a large ornate fireplace, was a magnificent wood desk that looked like the Resolute Desk in the White House. Its chair was a high back leather executive chair. Two finely upholstered chairs that looked as uncomfortable as they did elegant faced the desk. Daphnia Wellington didn't want visitors getting comfortable. At the far end of the room was a leather recliner next to a window. Behind the desk was an unbelievable built-in wooden credenza-bookshelf that consisted of two glass doored bookshelves on either side of a credenza. The fine, high polished wood went almost to the ceiling.

Daphnia pointed at the straight chairs as she walked to the crystal decanter that sat on the credenza. David Delvey sat down. She poured the amber liquid into small crystal tulip glasses and, saying “I hope you like cognac, Mr. Delvey. It's Remy Martin's XO” as she put one of the glasses down in front of David.

She sat down in the executive chair and took a sip as she stared at David.

“Now, Mr. Delvey,” she finally said, “you can tell me why you traveled all this way to see me.”

“You have the wrong idea . . . “

“Stop!” Daphnia commanded holding up her hand. “Don't attempt to con me! I don't play well with other children. Just ask my sister. Now let's try again. Why are you here?”

“I was going to try to sweet talk you into giving me some information about your late uncle's ranch.”

Daphnia about doubled over laughing. “So what are you looking for that I might have information?”

David paused but decided better not resist. “There's an Indian girl who is searching for something called *iiná yí'ááh* on your uncle's ranch.”

Daphnia gave him a questioning look.

“Seriously!” he exclaimed. “she's doing a doctor's degree and she thinks she's found this *iiná yí'ááh*, which we figure is some sort of treasure.

Henrietta Wellington entered her sister's office.

“Wasn't the guy I just saw leaving the man who recovers stolen artifacts?”

Daphnia was still starring off into space running through a plethora of scenario in her head about how she was going to use David Delvey. She looked at her sister for a moment.

“Wasn’t that the guy . . .” Henrietta started to repeat.

“Oh, yes,” Daphnia laughed. “the reason that he’s so good at recovering those artifacts is because he’s the one who stole them in the first place”

“Really?”

“Yes,” there was that wicked smile. “and we’re going to use him to find the gold.”

“How?”

“I’m not quite sure exactly how, but he’s going to help us find the gold.”

Samantha Madlow – Sammy to her friends – is a long time nomad friend of mine. She is several years older than me but she is so physically fit that one would never know. She has spent a lot of her life hiking through desert mountains by herself.

Sammy travels and lives in an old Ford Transit that some of us helped her build out a few years ago. It is tall enough that Sammy can actually stand up. That was a major plus. The old van is great for stealth camping as well as off-road. The suspension is jacked up so that she has excellent clearance, and, with the large all-terrain tires, can go anyplace Sammy wants to go. There are no windows and the ledge around the roof hides the skylight, solar panel and other indicators that this was more than a delivery van. We put a black curtain behind the front seats so that she can have privacy in town and still be able to quickly get to the driver’s seat if needed. The living area is done in highly

polished blonde wood and includes a bed, cabinets for her cooking area along with storage. She built a small box for her toilet so that it can be easily stored out of sight.

A nomad for more than a decade, Sammy is like so many of the other single women who wander the desert alone living in everything from small trailers to cars. Many of their stories are the same. They got screwed over by the system. One of three scenarios: (1) the woman doesn't have her own Social Security because she stayed at home to take care of the kids and support the husband's career, then the husband runs off with his secretary, (2) the woman spends her life raising children and supporting her husband who dies leaving her destitute, and (3) the woman has a career and her employer finds a way of getting rid of her, leaving her without her pension. Sammy was from group three. Sammy had been a developmental editor for a good-sized publishing and printing company in Los Angeles. The owner had seen the writing on the wall and decided to be selfish. He ran the company into the ground and declared bankruptcy, giving himself and his board – made up of family members – a large bailout. That left employees without a job and without their pension. It also left stockholders and creditors holding the bag. After all, if a President of the United States can make his fortune doing this over and over, the owner saw nothing wrong with doing the same. Sammy was left trying to start over. She was too old for most employers. She was trying to survive in the city living on unemployment and what work she could find.

One day a friend of hers told Sammy that she was going to live in the desert. A short while later Sammy spent the last of her money on an ancient Sienna mini-van and headed into the Sonoran Desert of Arizona. She took early retirement and has been work-camping ever since to pay her bills.

Nomads are an extended family. They keep track of each other, and are there to help in times of need. Those who have share

with those who don't. No strings attached. There was a nomad whose van died. While one fellow nomad made sure she had transportation, another gave her a trailer. It was the first time the woman could stand up to gets dressed, the first time she had running water and could take a shower without going to a truck stop. No 'pay it back when you can.' A simple pay it forward. I know where most of my nomad friends are staying. One of the few things that takes me to town is to go to the café that has Wi-Fi to check on 'family'.

I recognized Sammy's rig as she came up the road toward my cabin and was standing in the farm yard when she pulled in. I gave her the option of camping by my cabin but I know Sammy and figure she'd prefer to be out by the mountains by Kachina. Yes, Sammy will want to visit, but she's doing some nature documentaries to make money and out by Kachina was a great place for her.

We spent the rest of the morning sitting in the shade of the Ponderous Pines that protect my cabin as we caught up on news. As I had figured, when it came to picking a camp site Sammy was far more interested in Coyote Tank. I had already filled her with stories of places like Tracker Butte and T-bone Peak.

After lunch I led Sammy to Coyote Tank. Kachina spotted us coming down the road and met us at her camp. Kachina and Sammy hit it off immediately and worked together to find the best place for Sammy's Transit. She ended up a few yards away from Kachina's lodge. I figure these two women would be bosom buddies before bedtime. They were already so engrossed in their conversation that I was surprised they noticed that I was leaving except they took time to wave and yell "goodbye".

Bill and Norma Lindiman had left their trailer at the KOA in Gallup while they went looking for me and were now sitting in their truck down the road from the entrance to the ranch. Bill and Norma were city folk, and sitting in a pickup truck on a dusty road in an Indian reservation was the last place on earth they wanted to be, but they had no choice. They owned a very successful ski lodge. The COVID pandemic was about to put them out of business. People don't go to ski lodges or ski trips during a deadly pandemic. They owned an original Charles Russell painting. They came up with the foolish idea of having a copy made and selling it. They had a letter of authenticity, so they figured that they could sell the copy without anyone ever figuring it out. They had tried to sell the forgery through Daphnia. Daphnia spotted it as a forgery and the couple have been doing things like this for her ever since.

Daphnia had researched my Facebook page and learned that I had been a nomad. That was going to be their way in. Bill and Norma were to make contact with me and tell me that one of my nomad friends had suggested that I might let them boondock on my ranch.

After sitting most of the morning they spotted my old pickup coming down the road from the cabin. I didn't notice them as I turned right toward Dead Horse. Bill didn't have any trouble following me. Just follow the dust. It became a bit tougher when I turned onto highway 35, the blacktop that ran through Dead Horse.

I stopped at the café to get a cup of coffee, piece of pie and use their Wi-Fi to check on a couple of friends. I had hardly had a time to order before Bill and Norma came in.

"Hi," Bill Lindiman said as he approached. "Sorry to bother you, but we were just asking for directions to your ranch across the street, and were told you were here."

I invited them to sit down and they made their pitch. I don't think I was being naïve. I think I wasn't expecting to be conned. I didn't think to ask who had sent them, and I had no reason to expect anyone to go to such lengths to get on my ranch. I should have been suspicious when they told me that they were nomads with a 45 foot fifth-wheel which they left at a KOA.

After a lot of chitchat I told them that they could camp on the ranch. I told them to camp near Tracker Butter so they didn't have to ford the river. They could get water at my place but would have to go back to the KOA to dump. I had no idea that my instructions might as well have been in a lost dialect of Mandarin Chinese. They were clueless but never let on.



Chapter 8.

As time went by it became habit to meet and visit with local friends at the Dead Horse Cafe. On the rare occasion there might be three or four of us. Generally it was just Jeannie or Doc. Jeannie joined me more than others because the cafe was across the street from the mercantile.

Today Jeannie joined me. I don't know what started it but Jeannie was getting nostalgic and telling stories about Tracker working in his shop. Without thinking about it, I told her that I had found the bags of gold. She just sat and looked at me. Her gaze was a bit uncomfortable, but I figured that she was processing what I had said and trying to second guess why I had told her. It was rather like the first day I met her when she wouldn't look me in the eye until after she knew what I intended to do with the ranch.

"I assume you knew it was there," I said.

"I figured it was nearby, but I didn't know exactly where," Jeannie replied. "I didn't really want to know."

"You're entitled to at least half of it."

"Oh, I don't want any of it," she paused. "we never used any for ourselves. Tracker used it to help the tribe and our friends and neighbors. We're a poor area and Tracker was kind of like a secret Santa but twelve months of the year."

I couldn't help but laugh. It was just so Tracker and Jeannie. She gave me a look when I laughed which turned to an embarrassed smile when I explained that I laughed because I envisioned the two of them sitting around the fire in the evening thinking up ways of helping others.

"I'd bet anything that you had as much part in his philanthropy as he did."

"It was fun," she admitted. "we set up scholarships for Bobby Jordan and Mary Angler as well as Kachina Corn. Tracker would pay off neighbors' debts to keep them from losing their ranches. One time we paid for a hot-shot city lawyer to help the tribe fight some big company that thought they could get the government to let them come in and take tribal land and minerals."

"You two were a great pair."

"From what I hear," she smiled impishly, "someone is following in Tracker's footsteps."

"You're kidding!"

"Some of the Laguna seem to think that he's a reincarnation of Tracker."

I just smiled.

As we talked, she told me that there was a very rich mine on the ranch. He had bought the mine near Grand Junction to explain where he was getting the gold. "That turned out to be one of the best things he did. It kept those greedy sisters from finding it," she concluded.

Jeannie didn't really know where the mine was located. She had only gone there a couple of times with Tracker. She knew that it was on the east side of Eagle's Peak where it was almost a sheer wall. She wished me luck and headed back to the mercantile.

After scouring the side of the mountain, I finally came upon the remains of a campsite. Everything about it met Jeannie's description.

The mine turned out to be almost directly above this camp which looked well used. I spent the night. In the morning I started systematically searching the area and came upon the end of a ladder just barely visible under some rocks. If I hadn't been looking carefully, I would have missed it. Tracker actually had ladders hidden there so he could get up to the mine entrance.

Standing back and looking at the wall I could see the ledges to which each of the ladders led. I put all three of the ladders up against the wall and climbed to the first ledge. There I pulled up the two remaining ladders. I put the second ladder up against the mountain side and climbed to the next ledge, and, as I had done

before, pulled up the remaining ladder. The third ledge was just under the mountains peak. There was no mine in sight. I looked around and found a narrow trench. There, deep in the recess of the trench, was the mine.

The trench was no more than five feet wide. Because of the steepness of the mountain at that spot, the sides were soon higher than my head. The mine entrance sat a good fifteen to twenty feet back into the mountain.

It reminded me of just about every old, non-commercial - that meaning not large corporate - mine in Arizona. There was a large wooden door at the entrance with a sign that read "DANGER! Keep Out". There was no lock. Tracker obviously shared my belief that locks are to keep honest people honest. Once a person crosses the line, locks are an inconvenience. The only reason a thief would pay any attention is if it would make too much noise and/or take too much time. There was what appeared to be a random collection of heavy timbers that seemed to be designed to hold up the rock outcrop above the entrance.

I wondered if Tracker had dug this himself. I looked around. There was no obvious overburden either from digging this trench or digging for the gold. Overburden is the material that is removed to get to the ore. I walked to the end of the ledge. It had to be over one-hundred feet almost straight down. At the bottom I could just make out a pile of broken rock. There was Tracker's overburden. Tracker had worked very hard to make his mine look unused and derelict.

What still puzzled me was the mine itself. From what I understand, the ranch had been in the Tillman family for generations. How could there have been a mine on the property without at least the family knowing. If Tracker had dug this mine, how did he know where to dig? I kept going back to my visit to the assayer's office. Carl Wilson didn't seem very surprised to

have me show up with a gold nugget. Since there was enough mining activity in the area to justify a full-time assayer, I guess there's enough activity that he shouldn't be surprised. Nevertheless, there was something eating at me. Was he professionally not supposed to ask where one got their mineral, or, in my case, did he already know. Note to self ... talk to Carl.

I had a light with me but just inside behind the door was an old lantern hanging from the rafter. It was filled and ready to go.

Except for a very slight curve near the entrance the tunnel ran straight back into the mountain a good hundred yards or more. It was very low and I found myself often ducking support beams and rocks. I know absolutely nothing about mining except that it can be quite deadly even when you do everything right. The tunnel was actually quite neat. By that I mean that, besides there being no clutter on the ground, the support beams seemed close together and there was netting between the beams to catch falling rock.

Gold is most often found in quartz. This is one reason that the Gold Rush in Arizona started by the town of Quartzsite. (Yes, the town fathers misspelled quartzite.) In Quartzsite one sees giant piles of quartz and prospecting is still quite active. Despite the difference in elevation, Quartzsite and northwest New Mexico have one thing in common; viz. quartz.

At the end of the tunnel I entered a small room with slightly higher ceilings. It was almost like walking into a giant geode except this one had lines of gold ore running like a spider web through the crystal. There were tools and a wheel barrow neatly stacked. I just stood looking around me. At \$1,700 an ounce, there was a lot of money around me.

All I could think about on my way home was Tracker and Jeannie and how they had this tremendous wealth yet they lived in an old one bedroom cabin without any of the modern comforts their contemporaries would consider essential. They chose to keep it a secret and use the money to help others. They were definitely my kind of people and it seemed that Tracker had passed their mission on to me.

The day after I got home from Eagle Peak I invited Jeannie for pie and coffee at the cafe.

I tried to be very calm and casual when I said, "I found the mine."

"I'm happy for you, Rusty", Jeannie said with a big smile.

"And you know what struck me as I was looking around the mine?"

"There's a lot of gold there?"

"No," I laughed, "I began to wonder how Tracker knew where to dig and why he started digging in the first place."

"Those are good questions."

"And I bet that I'm having coffee with someone who can answer them."

"Who me?" Jeannie paused. "I guess there's no good reason not to tell you." Jeannie leaned forward and lowered her voice. "Istaqa knew that there was gold in those mountains. Tracker offered to give the land to the tribe but Istaqa talked him out of it. We all know what the white man will do if he learns that the Indians have something they want."

"So," she continued, "Tracker enlisted the help of a few people he could trust, found the gold, and we started our philanthropy."

"Let me guess," I interjected. "Carl Wilson and Doc Barton, along with Istaqa for starters."

"Yes. Also Felipe Abeita, Bob Proper, our attorney, and Lance Ritter, the president of Lewis Center Bank."

"Wow! What a marvelous conspiracy!"

Jeannie looked across the street at the mercantile. "I really need to get back," she smiled. "welcome to the club".

"One quick question before you go. Why didn't you buy anything for yourselves? There's plenty there."

"We had everything we could want," she paused. "Like you, money is an evil necessity and we didn't want a bunch of things. We just wanted to live in peace in our sweet cabin in the mountains."

I lifted my coffee cup in a toast as Jeannie left.

On the way to Lewis Center to see Carl and Bill, I stopped by Doc's place.

"Thing were getting a bit tough for some folks around here until you bought Trackers place. I knew you were Tracker's replacement within a week but I didn't know if I should mention the mine. I thought you might have found it and were keeping it a secret."

"I'd have never found it without Jeannie's help."

"Jeannie was the only one who had ever been there, with the exception of Carl who showed Tracker where to dig. We all agreed that that was safer."

"Do you want to continue?"

"Are you kidding? Count me in!!"

Carl Wilson is one of those men who looks like a cream puff but can probably best a lot of men half his age. With a baby face, balding and wearing large round horned rimmed glasses one has a tendency to immediately assume a soft, weak, nerdy man and totally miss the fact that he stands over six feet tall, weighs little more than two-hundred pounds and has muscles where few other men have muscles.

He was sitting at his desk studying a paper lying before him. Reference books were piled on either side. It was obvious that Carl Wilson was out of the old school since his computer sat on a credenza looking very unused.

Carl looked up and smiled when I entered.

"Ah, Mr. Wilson," I said cheerfully. "I need your advice."

"Sure," came the reply.

"If I were to want to dig for gold, where would you say the best place would be for me."

He just looked at me. You could almost see the wheels spinning trying desperately to come up with a good answer. I had caught him totally off guard.

"You mean on your ranch?" he finally asked.

"Yeah," I answered. "What do you think of Eagle's Peak?"

Carl stood looking at me trying to figure out what to say. I wasn't here to torture him. I started laughing.

"You were a good friend to Tracker," I said. "Did you help him dig that mine?"

"I did a wee bit," Carl had relaxed and was now smiling. "Tracker, Jeannie and I were the only ones who were ever there. It wasn't that the others weren't willing to do the labor. We all

agreed that the fewer who knew the mine's location, the safer the mine and all of us were".

"I'd like to keep the group going. I'm going to ask Bill Anderson to be our legal counsel. Do you want to continue?"

"Definitely count on me!".

"I'm going to need another decoy mine."

"Actually I think I have a good candidate. Give me a couple of days."

"Sounds good to me. Just send the info to Bill Anderson."

My next stop was Bill Anderson's office. I told him about Tracker's group. He was quite excited about being a part of the group and suggested that I might want to consider an LLC - Limited Liability Corporation. New Mexico, he explained, is one of four states that permit what are called "anonymous LLCs". With such an LLC we would not have to identify ourselves and could bank legally with complete anonymity.

I told him that Lance Ritter, president of Lewis Center Bank, had been a part of Tracker's group and that I was going to ask him to continue. He could honestly and legally help us maintain our banking anonymity.

"You know this doesn't hide you from taxes", said Bill.

"I understand that. I may think that government is a necessary evil but I have no intention of trying to hide from paying my share of the costs like those who actually run the System. If I did that, I'd be as bad as them."

"You know who you remind me of?"

"I know. Edward Abbey," I laughed. I have often been accused of that.

"Actually, I was thinking of the economist, David Graeber," Bill exclaimed, "but Abbey works for me too."

Bill figured that we'd have the LLC legal within a week. I'd have to come up with a name. I didn't want any name that would identify us in any way. In the end all I could think of was 'Memorial Foundation.' At least the eight of us would know that it was in memory of Tracker.

The first bank in Lewis Center was built in 1905, about the time the town was incorporated. The town had started as an Indian trading post and then as the business center for the expanse of ranches in the area.

The first bank was owned by the Amheryst brothers, Reginald and Samuel. The current credit union president, Lance Ritter, helped found the credit union about twenty years ago when the Grand Junction State Bank decided to close up shop in Lewis Center. The building is the same one that the Amheryst brothers built in 1905 with relatively few modifications. It is a single-story adobe building with a metal pitched roof, tall wooden facade to give the building some height. The front of the building was covered with stone and wrapped part way around each side. The two windows on each side of the front door were quite tall and now covered by fancy iron work and bars that were added after a failed bank robbery in 1913. The most striking feature of the old building was its front door. After the brothers' bank was so successful, they had one of the most beautiful entrances you've ever seen built out of local oak with a natural, high-polish, finish. It is rather sad that just inside this beautiful entry is a modern glass box built to provide modern security.

As one would expect by this point, Lance Ritter was also excited to be a part of Memorial Foundation. He's a friend of Bill Anderson's so I turned everything over to he and Bill.

"I'm a bit hesitant to tell you this because it's not public record yet," Lance stumbled over his words, "but if I don't I'm afraid some big ag company is going to own the place before we can save it."

"Sounds serious," I replied, "but if some big ag corporation can get information before it is public record, then I don't see why we can't. It just puts us on equal ground with them."

"Terry Hudson is about to lose his farm."

"He's my neighbor."

"Yes. We're not the lenders but Terry was asking me questions a few days ago and it came out. Some big ag corporation is putting the squeeze on him. He's just too old to keep up."

"How much are we talking?"

"We'd probably have to come up with a hundred thousand just to buy time."

"Who knows Terry well enough personally to get him to come and talk?"

"Probably me."

"Go for it. "



Chapter 9.

Lance called this afternoon and said he wanted to talk to me. I suggested that we meet at the Dead Horse Cafe. I knew it had to be about Terry Hudson's farm. I immediately turned around and invited Bill, Doc and Jeannie.

The next morning I sat in the cafe and watched Jeannie cross the road.

"Mornin', Rusty," she said smiling. "What's up?"

"How well do you know Terry Hudson?"

"Fair to midlin," she replied. "Is this about his losing his farm?"

"How did you know?"

"Few secrets in a small town."

"I want to help him."

Jeannie smiled. She'd been here before. We didn't have time to say any more when we spotted Terry and his wife Elsa approaching with Lance. As Lance introduced me to the Hudsons, Melba, the owner of the cafe, could tell we needed room. She offered us the "back room" which was occasionally used for groups, parties and funerals. As we moved into the musty smelling room Bill and Doc were close behind.

After a bit of small talk I decided that I needed to take the lead. It was, after all, my idea.

"Terry ... Elsa, I know it may seem like we're ganging up on you . . . "

I didn't finish my sentence when Elsa started crying. When she was able to control her sobs she tried to smile.

"I'm sorry," she said, "we don't feel like you're ganging up on us. Quite the opposite. We feel like our friends and community are gathering around. It's wonderful."

"I'm glad you feel that way because I think we can work this out without you having to loose your home. It will mean selling your farm, but not to a large ag corp."

"What do you have in mind?" Terry asked.

"I asked my attorney, Bill Anderson, to come along to make sure that I can do what I want to do."

Everyone laughed.

"There's a foundation called Memorial Foundation that I'm sure we can get to pay your mortgage so you're up to date. I know it's hard, but after we get your delinquent mortgage paid, I want you to sell your farm to Bobby and Peggy Jean Jordan."

A murmur went through the group.

"How do you expect to pull that off?" asked Jeannie. "Those kids can hardly keep their tab with us paid."

"Oh, I'm painfully aware of that, but I have confidence in those kids, and I think I can get the foundation to help them get a mortgage," I said with conviction as much to reassure myself as the others.

"Here's my idea in a nutshell. If we can get this Memorial Foundation to take care of the delinquent mortgage, that gives us time. If we can get them to then guarantee a mortgage, Bobby and Peggy Jean could buy your farm. If we can convince Lance's board that, with a deposit big enough to guarantee the mortgage, they can actually venture into large loans without fear, they would give Bobby and Peggy Jean a mortgage. That would have at least a triple benefit; it would give the kids a local, affordable mortgage; it would enable the credit union to confidently move into giving larger loans which would tremendously benefit the entire area; and we can reduce local defaults." Everyone was looking at me trying to digest what I had just said. "What do you think?"

Looking at Doc and Bill, Lance asked, "do you think we could sell this to the board?" I didn't know that Doc and Bill sat on the Credit Union board.

"He's talking about a guarantee," said Bill. "Even if they didn't let us expand the idea for others, I can't see why they would turn

that down. It would get a nice loan on the books at almost zero risk."

"I agree," Doc added. "And I think the others would be excited about helping the community as well as building the credit union."

"Well, " said Lance looking at me, "that's over 40% of the board. We just need one other person to agree and the board would approve."

"That sounds doable," I exclaimed. "It would be such a tremendous and powerful benefit to the area for locals to get fair loans. We all know that, when they have to go outside the community, they're going to get screwed."

"Oh," I said realizing that I'd forgotten an important part for the Hudsons, "I forgot to mention that the deal would be for you to keep your house and a few acres. That would be paid off with the sale, so you can retire without any debt."

"That would be wonderful," both of the Hudsons exclaimed in unison.

"Now you have to remember that you'll be selling the land for what you still owe for it. That sounds like a big loss, but if you keep your house, that's going to be worth a whole lot more than you originally paid for the entire place."

"That's better than just losing it," Elsa exclaimed.

"Can't argue that", I was almost giddy with excitement as I turned toward Bill. "Okay, Counselor, you're on the clock and it's my bill. What do we do next?"

That was Bill's cue to take over. We hadn't set this up as a cue, but he got the message to take over the meeting.

"Okay," Bill took a moment to gather his thoughts. "Terry, How long do you have to make a payment?"

"I have about two weeks."

"Do you have an attorney?"

"Never used one much," Terry said, "I went to you whenever I needed."

"Fine," replied Bill, "I'm your attorney now, unless you don't want my help, and my fees have been covered."

Both Terry and Elsa gave Bill a puzzled look.

"Don't ask," Bill smiled. "I bet you anything that your big city bank with offices in all fifty states, is pushing you to take a ridiculously low offer by a big corporation."

"That's about it," Terry replied.

"So you're going to tell them that you will have their money to them before the deadline and, if they have any problems or questions, they should call your legal counsel . . . that's me." Bill paused, "I'll work with Lance and the board to draw up the bill of sale to Bobby and Peggy Jean."

"Who's going to contact the Memorial Foundation?" I asked.

"It might not look good if I do that," said Lance.

"I'll do that," Doc chimed in. "No one can accuse me of anything other than being a nosy neighbor trying to help."

Everyone laughed.

"That's great," I was totally stoked by this point. I can't remember the last time I felt so good about a project. "Jeannie and I will talk to Bobby and Peggy Jean"

"Is this the same group that helped Mike and Betty Goya?"

"One and the same," Jeannie said with a grin.

Terry and Elsa headed out the door leaving only those who are now a part of the Memorial Foundation. We stood silently looking after the elderly couple. They just seemed to stand straighter and move more easily. From their body movement one could tell they were having an animated conversation. We all noticed and smiled.

Doc looked around then said, "okay, what does the Memorial Foundation say?"

"Do I hear a motion?" I asked imitating the way a board decision would proceed.

"So moved," Doc said with as much pomp as he could muster.

"Second," chimed in Jeannie grinning from ear to ear.

"Move the previous question," said Bill, not to be left out.

"All in favor?" All hands went up. "The motion passes."

"Damn that felt good," said Lance. "This is what I got into banking to do." Everyone agreed that the feeling was great.

Lifting my coffee cup, "To Tracker Tillman, who made this possible".

Everyone lifted their cup in salute as we stood silently looking out at where Terry and Elsa had just been. Jeannie's eyes were filled with tears but she was smiling. "To my dear, sweet Tracker". I could hear her say softly.

The only two variables in the plan were the Credit Union Board and Bobby and Peggy Jean. Bobby and Peggy Jean obviously loved the idea. Doc said that he was amazed at how easily the board was convinced. Of course, they knew how "the foundation" had helped others and with it as a guarantor, including having deposited enough in the credit union to cover

the loan, they realize that it was a tremendous opportunity for their community.

I had to come up with 38 ounces of pure gold to cover the mortgage and another 147 ounces for the guarantee deposit, but I actually came up with it out of the bags in the cellar and still had plenty left.

Carl had found me a good decoy mine. I'm sure the owner thought he was really pulling one over on me by selling me a worked out claim for twenty-five thousand dollars. He had no idea. I named the mine 'The Confidence Mine', because it is a total scam.



Chapter 10.

I was surprised at how quickly the International Seismic Research Group got around to Kachina's project. I was expecting her to be fairly far down the list, but they called with a date less than two weeks after I signed up. Having met Istaqa and learning of the existence of the Kawaika cliff dwellings I thought about calling it off, but I realized that I couldn't do that without telling Kachina about the village. Now I knew how agonizing it must be for Istaqa and have been for Tracker to keep her in the dark. Knowing that she could actually write a successful dissertation showing that her hypothesis was wrong was of little comfort. I wanted her to see and experience the cliff dwellings.

The ISRG team came rumbling up my lane bright and early. It was quite impressive. Three SUV filled with technicians led the way, followed by two large box trucks. The larger of the two box trucks looked like a giant Class-C RV and was evidently the hub of the operation since there were windows, an air conditioner

unit and an array of outlets on the side with the top piled with satellite dishes, antenna and other communications equipment. They stopped at the cabin and I told them that I would guide them the rest of the way.

I stayed out of the way once we arrived, but I hung around to watch. The woman in charge and a couple of her crew spent a short time talking with Kachina and Carlo then went for a tour of the area. I could see a lot of pointing and hand gestures. Once finished, the chief seismologist gathered her entire crew, and gave them instructions. From that point on it was like a well oiled machine. There was not a wasted motion to be seen.

The boss, who was later introduced to me as Dr. Linda Peterson, walked to a spot and pointed. The driver of the larger box truck pulled right up to her extended finger. The other box truck went to a spot near Kachina's digs and unloaded Several large crates. The truck had just pulled away, heading to another spot, when a team of technicians began opening the crates and organizing a massive pile of wires, sensors and other devices from the crates. While the crates were being unpacked and equipment laid out, two men started following a GPS device to find a specific spot. One of the men appeared to take a compass reading, and, with his eyes glued to the GPS screen, carefully stepped off ten paces. The man behind him took a bright orange bag from a large bag he carried over his shoulder and placed it by the first man's tenth step. He tapped the man with the GPS, who had not taken his eyes off his device, on the shoulder and he moved out for another ten steps. A woman and a man were close behind feeding out cable and connecting whatever was in the orange bag. A woman stayed where the line started and assembled, what I assumed, after her pulling out a directional antenna and pointing it at the command center truck, was their communications link. I could see her talking on a radio as she made minor adjustments.

Looking around I saw the same process taking place in two other locations. I must admit to being extremely impressed. I never expected the process to be so big. I realized that I knew the principle but really had no idea how they did it.

By noon everything was ready. I got to talk to Dr. Peterson and her crew during the lunch break.

"This is amazing," I said.

"Oh," said a smiling seismologist, "we're just getting started. Wait ... " The squawk of her radio distracted her and she never finished her sentence. She excused herself and was talking on her radio as she headed toward the command vehicle.

Within an hour my ears were assaulted by the roar of an enormous engine. Coming up the road was a giant vehicle that looked like something out of a Star Wars movie. It looked similar to and similar in size to a giant earth mover. It was all white except for the banner on the front which proclaimed OVERSIZE LOAD in large red letters.

It wasn't long before Dr. Peterson was walking ahead of the giant vehicle. She too had a GPS device along with a topographic map and some notes. When she would stop she would speak into her radio, guiding the equipment exactly where she wanted it. The huge machine put down a large pad and sent shock waves in all directions. I learned later that before this giant device was created they would create the wave with small explosive charges. Believe it or not, I was told, this was actually more economic and much more accurate.

Dr. Peterson spent much of the afternoon walking around the area between the tank and the river followed by the giant white machine. When she was satisfied, she disappeared into the box truck. It wasn't long before one of the radios near me cracked

and Dr. Peterson could be heard to say, "We've got a good read. Wrap it up."

That's all it took. The process we had witnessed before noon ran like a movie put in reverse and within a couple of hours the repacked crates were going back into the smaller box truck. Dr. Peterson emerged from the her lab on wheels and motioned for us to enter.

The sides and front walls were lined with electronic equipment, computers, large terminals filled with data and graphics, and a number of workstations each with their own keyboard. There were three technicians at workstations.

"What you just witnessed," Dr. Peterson started, "was the seismic refraction method applied with 12 channels of P geophones in three lines with a geophone interval of 0.5 meter and a 1.5 meter distance between profiles. I had the vibroseis truck lay down vibrations at fifteen points based upon your knowledge of the area and the people who might have lived here. The technicians in here were using Siesimager software to do preliminary evaluation of the raw data to identify possible archaeological features, especially adobe wall structures."

With a big smile on her face Dr. Peterson brought up a large screen of lines and dots. It reminded me of the computer screen in the movie Matrix where the operator could tell what was going on in the real world by looking at a series of moving lines.

"I'm sorry, Dr. Peterson," Kachina was studying the screen, "but I know nothing about seismology and that just looks like a bunch of lines."

"In short, we got some really good pics," the seismologists replied. "I can't say too much until I get the data back to our lab in the city, but I've done a lot of these studies and I can say that there's a lot of evidence of humans, and some features that look

very promising as foundations and walls". Dr. Peterson said pointing to some dark spots on a screen of lines and squiggles.

Kachina could hardly contain her excitement.

"That's pretty deep for one person and a shovel", Dr. Peterson laughed obviously referring to all of Kachina's holes. "I've been doing this for quite a few year, and what I see looks very promising. I think you're going to have to give up your shovel and start doing some fund raising."

After the seismic crew was gone and the excitement began to subside, Kachina looked at me. "I haven't forgotten that this is your land and whether or not there is an archeological dig is up to you."

"I think it would be exciting, but I do have some stipulations."

"Just tell me what you want," Kachina grinned. You could tell that she was still bursting with excitement.

"Pretty simple," I reassured her. "First, you will be in charge, get your name on all reference, publications, and whatever might come up where tenured professors have a tendency to get credit for the student's work. I want Istaqa and your grandfather to oversee the dig as shaman and representatives of the tribe. Kawaika tribe members get first dibs at jobs with non-tribal locals getting next opportunity. And please don't totally destroy my ranch."

Kachina gave me a big hug and kiss. We had a deal.

Kachina and Carlo talked excitedly as they walked down the hallway of the Hibben Center. Person after person stopped her to ask questions or called out 'Congratulations!'

As usual Mithell was there gathering information and looking for a possible score. Since he was already convinced that Kachina was hot on the trail of a tremendously valuable artifact called iiná yí'ááh, the current talk of success and congratulations led him to believe that she had found iiná yí'ááh. As Kachina and Carlo passed through the entrance to the administrative offices, Ronald Mitchell scurred off snickering like Muttley, the sinister dog on the old Rocky and Bullwinkle show.

"This is so exciting," Professor Stevens was saying as he studied the ISRC report, "I can't remember when we've had a project with such potential. I started looking for funding as soon as you called."

"That's great, ... " Kachina started but was interrupted by Dr. Russi.

Deciding that, despite the dean's admiration of and fondness for Kachina, it would be better if the dean heard my stipulations from someone other than Kachina. Carlo decided that he should be the one to tell the dean. Despite the fact that he knew they were my original ideas, because he was there and heard me tell Kachina, it could be misconstrued that they were Kachina's ideas. Of course, anyone who saw the way Dr. Carlo Russi looked at Kachina knew that he was protecting more than an outstanding grad-student.

"I think you should know that while Mr. Gerber was very excited to have the dig take place, he did give some stipulations," Carlo said.

"And what might those be," Dr. Stevens looked at Carlo with a wee bit of apprehension.

"When we talked to Dr. Peterson after the tests, Kachina acknowledged that we would need his permission. He was very excited and happy to agree to the dig but told us that he had a

couple of stipulations. They aren't anything problematic. He said that Kachina must be in charge and she will get all credits. He specifically said that her name will be first on all references, publications and credits. Her grandfather, Felipe Albeita, and another shaman known as Istaqa must oversee the dig as spiritual leaders and tribal representatives. Members of the tribe get first dibs at jobs followed by other locals. Mr. Gerber is well known for looking out for the well-being and benefit of the community." After a short pause while Dr. Stevens was pondering what Carlo was saying, "Oh, and he asked that we please don't destroy his ranch."

Dr. Stevens smiled, "well, young lady you seem to have gone from a star graduate student to a major archeological dig supervisor in one giant step." He wasn't upset by the stipulations. He knew that Kachina had the skills and knowledge to do the job, and he knew that she was also smart enough to look for and accept guidance and help. He had been in charge of several digs in his career and knew that Kachina was facing a steep learning curve. It was a good thing for everyone that the knowledge this dig would render and the best interest of his students was foremost to Gabriel Stevens.

They talked for quite some time about things like fundraising and site preparation. It was decided; because it made sense; that Dr. Stevens would lead the fundraising. Besides the fact that the dig was going to be a university project no matter who was in charge, Gabe Stevens was a seasoned and very successful fundraiser. Kachina would have her hands full preparing the site, organizing and managing the actual dig.

Dr. Stevens had to break it to Kachina that, even though he was the fundraiser, she was going to have to attend the parties and dinners Gabe would set up. He also had to explain that she needed to show up in her native finest not because of tribal pride but to dazzle the investors. Thankfully, thought Gabe, he didn't

have to worry about Kachina impressing them with her knowledge and skill. Sadly, many of the would be investor were still lost, or perhaps mired down, in American prejudice. They were going to be expecting the dig to be run by a white male, not a native female. That was probably going to be Dr. Steven's hardest sell.

Daphnia hated Arizona, or New Mexico, or wherever the hell she was. Life away from Denver - most specifically Cherry Creek, University or Lodo - was almost intolerable and to travel into a rural area of the US southwest was right up there in her list of things never to do like be tortured or going to a black tie event in a short formal. Nevertheless, it had to be done.

Daphnia hadn't really told Delvy much and had him believing that she knew a great deal more than she did. As a result, Delvey had kept her in the loop. When he told her that Mitchell had overheard Kachina and the professors talking about finding the treasure, she insisted that they have a meeting. It was worth it to her to endure the trials, abuses and inadequacies of the wilderness outside of Denver. She booked herself into the Town Place Suites in Farmington. She couldn't believe that a Marriot was the best she could do, but it had to beat the Grand Forks Inn. She shuddered at the memory of the one-room accommodations with no room service.

Henrietta was babbling on about some pottery that she saw in what passed for the hotel gift store making it very difficult for Daphnia to think.

"Will you shut up, please!" Daphnia yelled at Henrietta.

"I'm sorry," Henrietta said; her happy, excited mood once more totally deflated by her overbearing sister. At least she said 'please' Henrietta thought. "This is a nice place . . . "

"It's a dump," Daphnia interrupted, "and I have to be ready for Mr. Delvey."

Daphnia didn't have a long time to think. A knock came at the door. It was David Delvey.

After what passed for pleasantries, both began to tell the other that they had news. Delvey insisting that 'ladies go first', Daphnia told him about her spies reporting the visit by the ISRG. Delvey, in turn, told Daphnia that he knew of the tests and his inside man had heard the results. "They've found iiná yí'ááh."

And so the plotting began.



Chapter 11.

At just under fifty thousand residents, Farmington, New Mexico is the county seat of San Juan County which is one of the geographically largest counties in the United States at 5,538 square miles. It is the social, financial, medical and economic center for northwestern New Mexico and the Four Corners region where New Mexico, Colorado, Utah and Arizona share a common junction. For people living on the reservation,

Farmington is the big city. Even though Kachina spends a lot of time at the university in Albuquerque, she grew up with Farmington being her big city. Even now, going to Farmington provided a sense of adventure and excitement.

When Sammy told Kachina that she needed to go into Farmington to take care of some business, Kachina offered to drive so that Sammy didn't have to take her van. Besides, it would be fun and a distraction from all of the work required to get ready for the dig.

They had enjoyed a fun day of shopping along with a lovely lunch at an Italian restaurant to which Carlo had introduced Kachina. As they headed home, Kachina pulled in for gas.

Some people do not believe in coincidence. Now, I'd be the first to admit that everything happens as a result of cause and effect. I would, however, never say that means everything happens for a reason. For example, what are the odds of David Delvey and Ronald Mitchell being together at the Speedway gas station in Farmington at the same time as Kachina and Sammy?

Delvey and Mitchell pulled in while Kachina was pumping gas. Kachina spotted them first and stepped closer to the cab of her truck to avoid them seeing her.

Getting back into the truck Kachina said to Sammy, "Try to look casually over your right shoulder at the silver-grey Honda." Sammy did as instructed and Kachina pulled out of the station.

"The man pumping the gas was David Delvey."

"The antiquities thief you told me about?"

"One and the same," said Kachina pulling over into a vacant lot.

"And I think I now know how he gets all of his stuff. The man with him is a Mexican digger named Ronaldo. He's always hanging around the university. We all thought it was to get jobs.

I'll bet anything that he was working at every dig site that was robbed."

"What are we going to do?"

"My grandfather and I have been trying to get the goods on this crook for years," replied Kachina. "I'd want to follow him to see if he leads us to where he hides the artifacts."

"Let's go," commanded Sammy as the Honda passed them.

Farmington is at the confluence of the Animas and San Juan Rivers. Delvey drove east on Murray Drive and turned south just after crossing the Animas River. The area is quite open and there are almost no buildings, so Kachina had to stay way back. She could see him in the distance. Stopping at a farm she saw Delvey approach the San Juan River and turn right. She gave him quite a bit of time and then moved closer.

There was a drive where the road ran out; not more than a couple of ruts; that led along the river. They could just make out a building in the distance. That had to be Delvey's secret warehouse.

Carlo Russi found every excuse possible to go to see Kachina. I don't think anyone remembers what his excuse was this time, but he showed up at Kachina's camp that evening. She was still excited about finding Delvey's place. She had tried to tell her grandfather, but he wasn't home, so she was left to pace and talk excitedly to herself and Sammy . . . mostly herself.

"Shouldn't we go to the police?" asked Carlo.

"We don't have any evidence," replied Kachina, still pacing back and forth around the campfire.

"How do we get evidence?"

"I'm going to have to sneak in."

"You mean breaking and entering."

"Semantics!"

"No," Carlo said hesitantly, "jail time."

"That's okay," Kachina replied casually, "I'm not asking you to go."

Most of the known world . . . well, at least everyone who knows Carlo . . . knows that there was no way Carlo was going to let Kachina go there alone. Kachina was evidently still the only one who didn't see the love-struck puppy.

"I'm not letting you go alone, and I know that I can't stop you."

"Then you're in?!" Kachina said excitedly.

"I guess so," said Carlo looking at Sammy.

"Oh," said Sammy, "someone has to stay here to bail you two out."

After a lengthy discussion about breaking and entering, and how they were going to accomplish it, Sammy excused herself. Carlo sat with Kachina for a long time and finally retired to his Sienna, which he had outfitted for just such occasions. Saying their goodnights, Kachina had stood so near that it was all Carlo could do not to grab her and kiss her. But he didn't. She just smiled at him with that beautiful sweet smile.

Kachina, Carlo and even Sammy took turns watching the warehouse to see if there was a pattern of comings and goings. They watched for almost a week. Kachina found a spot on the north side of the Animas River where they could see the warehouses easily with binoculars and didn't have to worry about getting caught. Even if someone at the warehouse

saw them sitting in the trees, they would be too far away to identify, be on the other side of the river so they couldn't be pursued and on a known trail that is a part of the Among the Waters Park and Trail. Kachina actually doubted that they could be seen sitting among the Cottonwood trees on the embankment.

Comparing notes they realized that the warehouse was rarely occupied. If they could get in and out in a few minutes, they shouldn't have any problem. Of course, their biggest problem was that none of them were thieves and knew nothing about breaking into a building. They were smart enough to decide to break in during daylight. There were two good reasons. Firstly they wouldn't have a problem seeing the trails, especially if they had to run, and, secondly, they wouldn't have to worry about motion sensor night lights coming on and causing the neighbors, albeit almost a half-mile away, to call the police.

Kachina and Carlo made a couple of dry runs. After checking to be sure there was no one at the warehouse, they would park the truck near an access to the Animas River about six-tenths of a mile from the warehouse and on the other side of an orchard. From there they would walk around the north and west side of the orchard on a trail that ran between the orchard and the river. When the trail came into view of the warehouse, they would cut across the field.

When they decided that they were ready, they took a large pair of bolt cutters, crowbar and a bag of tools. As they got close to the building, they waited a few minutes just to be sure it was empty even though there were no cars.

On the river side of the building was a long loading dock and two tall overhead doors, next to which was a single man-door. The overhead doors latch on the inside, and the man-door had a deadbolt. On the other side of the building, however, was a man-door that was padlocked. It was a formidable lock, but between

the giant bolt cutters, crow-bar and hacksaw they were able to break it.

"You know," said Carlo as they cut, hacked and pried, "I never thought about the fact that these guys probably aren't going to want to have a security device that calls the police to a warehouse filled with stolen goods."

"Good point. But I wonder if they have something that will notify them."

"I guess that wouldn't be hard these days."

"Some of the home security systems will notify you on your phone when the sensor is triggered no matter who it might be."

"Well, as long as we get in and out as quickly as possible, we should be well away before they can get here."

The lock finally gave up and Kachina and Carlo were soon standing inside. No alarms went off. Switching on their flashlights, they began to look around. There wasn't a lot there, but there was enough to establish probable cause. The two snapped lots of pictures. There were a few crates of artifacts, but there was no way of telling in that light whether they were fake or not. They got pictures of the room where Delvey made the forgeries but making copies isn't against the law and it is even legal to sell copies as long as you identify them as copies. Carlo found a broken copy of one of the pieces "returned" to the Kawaika. That alone should be sufficient to get police to take a closer look.

"Listen," Carlo suddenly stopped. Kachina followed suit, both listening carefully. "There's a vehicle coming."

"Damn," spit Kachina. "Good thing our door is on the back side."

The two hurried for the door, took a moment to close it, hang the broken lock on the hasp, and scurry off toward the trees that ran along the river.

Almost 450 miles away, at the Tohono O'odam Desert Diamond casino on the south side of Tucson, Arizona, the police were dealing with a bomb threat that turned out to be a diversion to steal priceless tribal artifacts from the small museum housed between the hotel and casino.

This wasn't Delvey and Mitchell's usual MO, but there was a shortage of rich archeological digs. Mitchell had been hanging around the university for weeks without any good leads. Even Kachina's iiná yí'ááh wasn't ready to steal yet, and they had bills to pay. They kept the well-trained and well-disciplined crew that did the actual theft on retainer. It takes time to put together a good crew that a crook can trust, so it is cheaper to keep your crew together. They also had to retain artisans and others who are a part of the copy and distribution process. In truth, they were running out of money. The Desert Diamond hotel museum wasn't going to bring a lot, but it would pay the bills until Kachina found her treasure. The best pieces from this heist would just disappear into some private collection. In the case of native artifacts, these were usually clothing and personal items. They were not only the most unique but impossible to replicate. Delvey would pick out some nice pieces that are easy to copy and, as soon as the tribe came to him to find and recover, would return them to the tribe for a recovery fee.

The theft had been very well planned and executed. Delvey had used a voice modifying device with a burn phone and called in the threat from the airport, which is practically across the street as the crow flies. He had rambled on about the heathen Indians getting everything the white man had worked for, and made sure

that he hung up before they could run a trace, if they even had the means. Several harmless boxes which were numbered so security would know there was more than one, were placed throughout the hotel and casino. Because of the size of the complex, it would take quite some time to search for and find all the boxes.

Mitchell was sitting in the casino parking lot among the RVs. He had dropped off the men who were going to do the heist at four different entrances. They were to make their way to predetermined hiding points near the museum. Mitchell would alert them by radio when it was obvious that the casino was being evacuated and there was enough confusion for them to go to work.

The actual theft was not going to be sophisticated. It was more of a smash and grab. There was a harmless explosion that filled the museum and adjoining hallways with smoke. Each of the men on the inside were assigned a display case. They were to smash the cases, grab designated items that fit in special bags that were under their coats, and walk out with the people being evacuated. With all of the chaos and sirens already sounding, the display alarms would most likely not be recognized until it was too late. Even if they were noticed, Delvey and Mitchell knew how long it would take to get someone there. They had sufficient time.

Each of the men had their own route to the RV parking lot, which was the farthest away from the casino entrance. With people running everywhere, and others trying to make their way toward the police line to watch the action, the men were lost in the chaos. Delvey and Mitchell knew that, if the police didn't realize the theft almost immediately, they would have plenty of time to get away. Clearing people from the casino was the authority's first priority and that alone was going to be almost as much of a nightmare for authorities as finding the bomb(s). Because of the

tremendous amounts of money involved in a casino, the casino security people were most likely going to be concerned about people taking advantage of the situation and trying to get out with chips and money. Sadly for the tribe, the artifacts in the museum were probably security's lowest priority.

Delvey and Mitchell had planned the heist for late morning so that there would be maximum people around. With people checking out of their hotel rooms, others arriving for lunch and the usual gambling crowd, the chaos was everything the two thieves wanted. Because of the number of people, it took the police until after noon to get people out, find and deal with the fake bombs and then realize that the museum had been robbed. The two vans carrying the perpetrators was coming into Copper Hill, Arizona, east of Phoenix, by the time the theft was discovered and hit the news.

Time can be one's greatest ally or most deadly enemy. For Delvey and Mitchell today it was an ally. For Kachina and Carlo it turned out to be their enemy.

The two vans were just outside Farmington when the security alarm on Delvey's phone notified him that there was someone at the warehouse. The camera showed Kachina and Carlo.

"What the hell?!" Delvey exclaimed.

"What's up?" Mitchell demanded.

"That little bitch is sniffing around the warehouse."

"What?" Mitchell took Delvey's phone and watched as the two figures disappeared from the sight of the loading dock cameras and reappeared by the door at the back of the building. "They're breaking in!"

The vans went as fast as they felt they could without getting pulled over. As they made their way down Animas River Road they spotted Kachina's truck. Mitchell and three men stayed by the truck while the other van, with Delvey, went to the warehouse.

By the time that the van stopped by the loading dock Kachina and Carlo were running down the treeline along the San Juan river heading toward the confluence. There they would stay among the trees and shrubs and follow the Animas River northeast to where the truck was parked.

It seemed like a clean getaway until they walked up to the truck and Mitchell stepped out.

"Well, well, what have we here?" Mitchell said cattily pointing a 9mm pistol at the two. "I do think you two have been up to no good."

"Then why don't you call the police?" Kachina almost taunted him. She didn't know that he was the one who wanted to have her killed and would pull the trigger without a second thought.

Mitchell gave a wicked laugh. "Wouldn't you just love me to do that." He shook the muzzle of the pistol in the direction of the van. "Let me give you a ride back to the warehouse instead." Carlo and Kachina took a step back. "Oh, I insist!" Mitchell lifted the gun to shoulder height and pointed it at them.

The two captives looked at each other. This hadn't been a part of the plan. It was all that Kachina could do to not show how terrified she was. She looked right at Mitchell with his evil grin. Carlo was hoping that no one could see his hands shake, especially Kachina. As far as he could tell she was fearless. He was so frightened that he was having a hard time thinking. He could remember that young women were told not to get into a vehicle; that their chances of survival were much better if they

ran and got shot. That, however, was not an option for them. This wasn't a single perpetrator. This was four armed men.

Hesitantly the two climbed into the middle seats of the waiting van with Mitchell sitting in the passenger seat with his gun trained on them and two others in the seats just behind them. It took only a few minutes to drive to the warehouse where Delvey was waiting.

"They didn't take anything," he told Mitchell.

"Probably just pictures," Mitchell replied. "Get their cell phones," he instructed one of the men guarding them. "I told you we should have killed her a long time ago."

"And I told you that If we get caught stealing artifacts we get some jail time but if we go down for murder, we could face the death penalty. I just don't like that idea."

"Well, now we don't have much choice, do we?" Mitchell again gave his wicked laugh. "If we don't get rid of them we're definitely going to jail. You know that archeological digs can be quite dangerous."

"People know we're here," Carlo said defiantly.

"Why do I doubt that?" Mitchell laughed. What he didn't realize is that, indeed, Sammy knew of their plan and would surely call the police if anything happened.

"We've got to keep them for a while," Delvey insisted. "The girl is our key to the treasure."

"What treasure?" Kachina demanded.

"Iiná yí'ááh," Delvey replied.

"That's not a thing," Kachina tried to laugh, "iiná yí'ááh is a place. It's the water of life."

"Yeah, sure," Mitchell put his face close to Kachina's. "No one spends that type of money looking for a place unless it's worth a lot."

One thing about people like Delvey and Mitchell, they have no comprehension of people finding value in anything other than power and money. The idea of *iiná yí'ááh* being something other than a great treasure that could be sold was beyond them. Kachina and Carlo quickly realized that there was no convincing them otherwise. Of course, in truth it was probably Delvey and Mitchell's inability to understand and believe that was keeping Carlo and Kachina alive. If they didn't believe that they needed these two in order to find the great treasure, they would be looking for a way to kill them.

Two of the henchmen pushed Carlo and Kachina into a small room in the corner of the building while a third man brought two chairs. The room was lined with metal shelves holding wooden boxes. This was undoubtedly a place to store artifacts.

"Okay, mastermind," Mitchell said to Delvey when the men were gone, "what's your big plan?"

"The girl is too injun to break, but if we threaten the boyfriend, . . . "

"That isn't bad for a creampuff," Mitchell laughed.

"But right now we need to take care of the items from Tucson," Delvey reminded him. "As much as you are looking forward to some torture and murder, we need to move the merchandise as quickly as possible. I already have buyers for several of the pieces."

"We can't keep them long," said Mitchell.

"I know that, but we can wait until tomorrow. I think we need to let them know what's coming so they can think about it for a while. That will hopefully soften them up a bit."

The evening had been more emotionally terrifying than painful. Delvey and Mitchell knew that Kachina had figured out that Mitchell was the killer of the pair and used that to their advantage. If they had had time, and a less stressful situation, to think about it, they would have realized that there was very little actual physical contact. Most of it was Mitchell acting as though he was going to kill one of them with his bare hands and Delvey pulling him off at the last minute. They had heard enough through the door to know that at some point they were going to be killed. Only Delvey and Mitchell's firm belief that Kachina knew where there was a treasure of unbelievable value was keeping them alive. Kachina and Carlo didn't have to talk it over to take advantage of that.

Even knowing that it was what was going to keep them alive, it took all of the courage Carlo could muster to look defiant and say to Kachina, "Don't worry about me. You can't tell them where it is."

The cat and mouse game went on well into the night. In the end it was like a typical football match; i.e. soccer game; score – zero zero. Neither Delvey nor Mitchell were competent interrogators or torturers. Despite the fact that Mitchell was quite willing and capable of killing, he knew that, if he killed one or both of them, his chances at the treasure was gone. Their only hope was to keep the pressure and fear on them until one of them finally cracked.

The two men left Kachina and Carlo in a dark room duck-taped to their chairs. The two hostages could hear the men in the other room.

"Okay," said Delvey, "that was a bust."

"Maybe and maybe not."

"Because?"

"Because they now know that we are quite ready and willing to kill them, and"

"And we have work"

"Damn it man, I know we have work to do," Mitchell hissed. "I say we get the crew together in the morning. There really isn't anything to copy, so it will be a matter of contacting buyers and getting things shipped. As soon as we're done, we take these two out to the ranch and carry on from there."

"What do we do with them tonight?"

"Nothing," Mitchell grinned. "Some pain and hunger will do them some good."

"What about guarding them?"

"You watch too many movies. As far as they know there will always be someone out here. Besides, how are they going to get out of that duck tape?"

"Shouldn't we gag them?"

"What for? Who's going to hear them? A bit of unrewarded screaming should demoralize them."

Kachina and Carlo couldn't hear the outside door close, but they were aware of the silence. Lucky for Carlo and Kachina that Delvey and Mitchell didn't seem to think that their conversation could be heard. Now Kachina and Carlo knew that they were alone.

"I'm so sorry that I got you into this," Kachina apologized.

"That's okay," Carlo tried to smile even though he knew Kachina couldn't see him. "Believe it or not, I'd rather be here with you than out there wondering what had happened?"

"Do you think Sammy will be calling the police soon?"

"I don't know," replied Carlo. "She could be afraid that she would get us caught, not rescued."

"Oh."

"I'm no expert on escaping, but these guys are pretty bad at keeping hostages."

"How's that?"

"They should have left a guard because these restraints aren't really that good."

"Carlo Russi, you've got an idea. Out with it."

"We're ducktaped to chairs, right?"

"Come on. No games."

"If I'm right, I'll have you out in a minute," Carlo smiled and in his native tongue said, "dove c'è una volontà c'è un modo!" (Where there is a will there is a way.) `

Carlo was absolutely right. He was no expert on holding people captive or escaping or anything related to any of that world which, to him, was only found in the movies. Fortunately, Carlo was a thinker. His professional life was all about solving mysteries and problems. In a moment of enlightenment he realized that they were both strapped to their chairs at a few key points. As long as the chair was in one piece, they were quite immobilized. If, however, the chair was broken, then the remains of the chair would simply be dangling from their appendages. The chairs were wooden.

Even though he could see nothing in the dark, Carlo remembered that he was quite near a wall. While the chair was designed to hold the weight of a person sitting on it; viz. downward pressure on the legs; it was not designed to be mashed between his two-hundred pounds and an immovable object; viz. the wall. As Kachina sat expectantly, listening carefully for more from Carlo, the young archeologist tried to imagine how far he was from the wall and how he could throw himself against the wall.

"Carlo?"

"Shhh, I'm thinking."

Suddenly Kachina could hear Carlo working to move his chair toward the wall. It was like short leaps. Very short leaps. Carlo hit the wall and fell. Nothing broke. He lay on his side by the wall.

"Are you okay?"

"If being totally demoralized counts, . . . no!"

Squirming and wiggling, Carlo tried again and again to roll his chair against the wall with enough force to break it.

Luckily for Carlo this chair wasn't old. Older chairs are put together with glues and wooden pegs. To break them one must break the wood. That's a lot harder than breaking one of the simple, and rather pathetic, joints found on modern mass produced furniture. Cheap modern furniture is generally held together with staples and similar devices. They work for a while because they are designed not to last. You can't make money selling more chairs if your chairs last one or two hundred years. Their salvation was that this chair was a cheap modern chair. After being banged against the wall again and again the cheap stapled joints broke and Carlo found himself lying among the debris with pieces of chair taped to his arms and legs.

Soon Carlo had freed himself from the chair.

"Where are you?" he called to Kachina.

"I'm right here."

"Keep making noise so I can find you."

"Are you free?"

"Yes!"

Carlo made his way to Kachina and freed her from her chair. Now they only had to find the door. Since observation was the foundation of their work, it didn't take them long to figure out where the door should be and a bit longer to find it and a light switch.

"We need to get to the police," said Carlo.

"No, we need to go to the rez and get help," replied Kachina.

"You heard them say they were going to the ranch."

"Yes, but . . . "

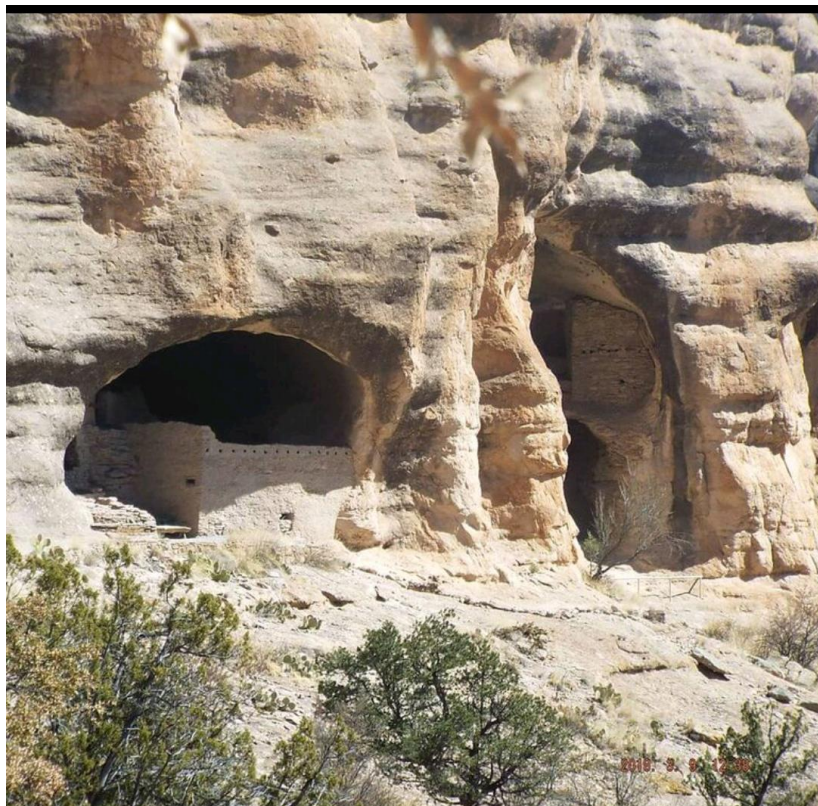
"But, by the time it would take to get the police to get a search warrant and investigate, Delvey would have a chance to clean up or disappear. That's assuming that the police would believe and immediately act upon the word of a Kawaika and an Italian immigrant against a pillar of the community known to return stolen artifacts."

"But . . . "

"But, you've been here long enough to know how the American mentality thinks about us."

"You're right," Carlo said thinking about how he constantly struggled against American bigotry and prejudice. "What's our next move?"

The next move was to get to the rez where they would be safe, believed and helped.



Chapter 12.

Kachina and Carlo's escape didn't go unnoticed. Just as they had been caught breaking into the warehouse by the home security cameras, so were they seen escaping. Delvey was livid and quick to remind Mitchell that he was the one who said Delvey had been watching too many movies when he mentioned guarding the two. The first thing they did was send

out their thugs to try to intercept the two before they could reach the police station. While a couple stayed near the police station, the others started where the Animas River Road intersects Murray Drive watching any business where they might go for help.

Despite Mitchell's pleading, Delvey called Daphnia Wellington. She was probably one of the few people in the world of whom Mitchell was actually afraid. As one might expect, Daphnia was quite angry causing Delvey to hold his telephone away from his ear during her tirade. As with any true coward, Delvey blamed it all on Mitchell. Delvey explained that if Kachina and Carlo didn't go to the police they would undoubtedly head toward the reservation or her camp on the ranch. After some discussion it was decided that if the two didn't go to the police that night, that Delvey et al. would go to Kachina's digs the next morning. Daphnia insisted that she go along and threatened to cut off certain male parts of their anatomy if they tried to cross her. Neither of the men had any doubt that she would gladly keep that threat.

While Delvey and Mitchell's men were searching Farmington, Kachina and Carlo were walking toward the reservation. They were walking by the Lotaburger restaurant near Murray and Main Street, thinking about how they wished they had some money to get food, when Kachina spotted Raymond and Cynthia Haaland and their two girls, a family from the reservation. Kachina approached them and explained their predicament. Only someone who has experienced prejudice first-hand would understand why the family did not insist on taking Kachina to the police. They knew that she would likely be the one who ended up in jail. Buying a couple of burgers and a drinks for the two fugitives, the family drove them to Felipe's home on the reservation.

When they stopped, Raymond got out with Kachina and Carlo and followed them a few yards where he would not be overheard by his family.

"Kachina," he said. "We have been friends our entire lives. Don't forget me if you have trouble." He gave her a peck on the cheek and returned to his family.

"That's why I insisted that we come here," Kachina said smiling at Carlo.

Felipe was understandably upset. He was not happy that Kachina had broken into Delvey and Mitchell's warehouse, but he was far more concerned and upset about what was going to happen next.

"Have you ever encountered a mountain lion, Dr. Russi?" Felipe asked Carlo.

"No, sir. I've only seen pictures."

"Our mountain lions here grow to be one-hundred and fifty pounds and are almost eight feet long," Felipe continued. "In New Mexico we have barbary sheep, bear, bighorn sheep, cougar, deer, elk, ibex, javelina, oryx and pronghorn antelope. Every one of them is capable of hurting, if not killing, you. I fear none except the mountain lion."

"Yes, sir," said Carlo. He didn't know where this was going, but he knew that Felipe wouldn't be saying it if he didn't have an important point to make.

"What do you think would happen if you got two of those big cats in a corner where they had no way out?" The expression of Carlo's face told Felipe that he had made his point. "Those two men are now like trapped mountain lions. You and my

granddaughter are the only ones who stand between them and freedom. What do you suppose they'll do?"

"They'll kill us."

"But Kachina's people aren't going to let that happen," Felipe said with a sudden smile. Carlo wasn't sure why the sudden change in mood, but he was glad for it. "We're going to start by calling George Kanteena."

It was pushing midnight when Chief George Kanteena arrived. Kachina and Carlo told him about Delvey, Mitchell and the warehouse of stolen artifacts.

"They also believe that iiná yí'ááh is some sort of treasure that I've dug up," Kachina added. "We tried to tell them that it is a place, but they wouldn't believe us. They are going to go to the ranch and everyone there is in danger."

Chief Kanteena made a few phone calls and soon Felipe's small house was filled with people, one of them being Raymond Haaland.

"Raymond," said the chief, "we're going to need a war party."

"A war party?!"

"Yes, a war party. From what Kachina tells me these men are going to come with a small band of soldiers. We must have a group of men who are skilled and brave. We need a war party."

"Yes, sir," Raymond responded scrolling through the contact list on his telephone as he went off by himself.

"Do you think that's necessary?" asked Carlo.

"Yes," said the chief and Felipe in unison.

"Who's at the ranch?" George asked.

"My friend, Sammy, is camped by my lodge and there are a couple of campers by the butte on the west side of the ford," replied Kachina. "Of course Rusty is at his cabin and Bobby and Peggy Jean are in the house by the gate."

"Damn!" exclaimed the chief. "We can't ride tonight. It's too dangerous. We can't try to go around by the roads because we don't know when they left. They might already be there. We're still better off waiting until its light and going through the hunter's pass."

"We could radio Rusty and the Jordans," Kachina offered.

"That's a good idea. Who do we know who has a radio? Do you know what channel they use?"

"Tauri Riley said something about liking to listen to a radio," Felipe offered.

"Call him and find out," ordered the chief. "And someone run down by the river where Istaqa camps when he's here and see if he's around. We need him."

Everyone jumped to their assigned task. By the time the sky was beginning to become light Chief Kanteena had his war party and was riding hard toward my ranch. I didn't hear the radio until daybreak. Seeing no reason that Delvey and company would not just drive by Bobby's place, I jumped on Janie and headed to be sure Sammy was safe and meet the war party. Doc Barton had heard me on the radio. He started calling around, including the county sheriff. Soon they had a group of seven men and Jeannie gathered in Dead Horse. Deputized by the Sheriff, the group and Sheriff Tendell's two regular deputies moved out toward my ranch.

Satisfied that Kachina and Carlo had not gone to the police, Delvey and Mitchell, along with five of their thugs, loaded into their two vans, picked up Daphnia at her hotel and were on their

way toward my ranch well before the radio warning. That meant that they arrived at Bobby and Peggy Jean's place by the time Sheriff Tendell's posse had gathered at Dead Horse. Why they stopped at Bobby's place is anyone's guess, but they did. Since Ronald Mitchell and Daphnia Wellington were more like piranha than mountain lions, the situation at the double-wide was not good. When the young couple proved to be of no value, they were all in favor of shooting them and moving on. Only David Delvey's intervention kept that from happening. They left one of their men there to guard the couple and moved on.

The war party had been riding hard. When they arrived at Kachina's camp they found Bill and Norma Lindiman holding Sammy at gunpoint.

"Stop right there," Bill Lindiman yelled as the war party rode in. "We'll kill her if you try anything."

It didn't take much to realize that the Lindiman had no idea what they were doing and were terrified. The war party didn't know that they were working for Daphnia Wellington, but had they known they would have understood the couple's fear and behavior.

"Please stay calm," Felipe said in a calm and gentle voice. "I'm the tribal shaman, and I don't want to see anyone hurt." He paused. "But tell me please, what do you think would happen if you hurt that woman?" There was no answer. "Do you not think that you too would be dead before her body hit the ground?"

The two Lindiman glanced at each other. They hadn't really thought of that.

"We can sit here as long as you like, but you know that sooner or later you're going to either have to kill her or let her go. The only way for you to leave here alive is to let her go."

Within moments the two had thrown their guns on the ground and sat blubbing. It was all that the war party could do to understand them saying that they worked for Daphnia Wellington and were begging for mercy. Whether or not the war party really wanted to hear, they explained how she had been blackmailing them for years, making them do all sorts of nasty and illegal things. They had no intentions of hurting Sammy but they were more afraid of what Daphnia was going to do when she found out that they failed than of what the war party might do to them.

Tying the two of them back to back, Sammy and Felipe stayed behind to watch the Lindiman as the rest of the war party rode off toward my cabin.

At the same time I was headed toward them as fast as Janie could carry me, and that's pretty fast. I encountered them just east of the river ford. Kachina gave me a brief update on what had happened to she and Carlo while Chief Kanteena told me about their encounter at Kachina's camp. We had no idea about Delvey and company's location, but knew that they would not be far away. We decided that an ambush at the ford would be the safest way to deal with them.

About the time the war party and I were arriving at the ford, Delvey, et al., were arriving at my cabin. The time it took for them to search the house and barn gave us time to prepare for the Battle of San Miguel Ford; aka our ambush. As I think I told you, the ford is a long mud and gravel ramp that gently descended from the banks to the water with rather high sides. The river is no more than twenty feet wide at this point with dense vegetation on both sides close enough to scrape a passing vehicle. We tied the horses in a thicket well away from any possible gunfire. Carlo sheepishly accepted the

job of tending to the horses. He knew that he didn't have the skills to be of any particular value in the ambush so he really was most valuable where he was. It was more of a worry to him that Kachina might think that his accepting that assignment meant he was a coward. She knew better, but he didn't know that. I told Butch to stay with Janie and help Carlo. It was beginning to grow light so it was more difficult to find places to hide.

The guard at the doublewide was somewhat surprised when the sheriff and his posse arrived. He took a shot at the sheriff's car and steam started pouring from the radiator. The sheriff looked over the car door behind which he had been taking shelter and muttered, "he's going to pay for that."

With a bull horn the sheriff called to the gunman holding the young couple hostage.

"Let the couple go , throw out your weapon and come out with your hands up," he said. "You know this can't end well."

"It will end just fine if you let me go."

"You know I can't do that."

The sheriff kept a conversation with the gunman as Jeannie moved around the line of pickup trucks looking for a shot. I was the only one in the county that didn't know that Tracker and Jeannie didn't get all of that deer and elk, much of which they gave to folks in town, from Tracker's hunting skills. In fact, it was pretty well agreed upon by everyone in the county that Jeannie Wilcox was, in fact, the best shot in the county, if not the state. Shooting people, however, was not in her resume.

Sheriff Tendell was running out of conversation and kept looking around to see where Jeannie was. Finally he spotted her. She gave him the thumbs up.

"Sorry, young man," the sheriff said through the bull horn as the rifle cracked. Moments later Bobby and Peggy Jean came hurrying out the door. Sheriff's deputies and the posse ran to them sweeping them up, holding them tight, and lead them to a nearby truck. Doc and a couple of others went inside.

Soon Doc Barton stuck his head out the door. "He's alive, sheriff," he called, "but he won't be for long if we don't get him to a hospital."

Jeannie stood smiling. She had worked hard to make that a no-kill shot, but a 30-06 Springfield can just about kill you just by the shock if it hits you anywhere. She had been able to see the gunman holding his pistol in his right hand, so Jeannie had put the bullet in his right shoulder. Assuming that he would live, he would likely have no use of his right arm. A bullet like that does a lot of damage. But the man can be thankful that Jeannie's such a good shot. Otherwise he would probably be dead.

Sheriff Tendell stood facing the trailer saying a quiet 'thank you' to powers unknown. This could have been so much worse. He had read accounts and heard stories of bad hostage standoffs when he went to the police academy, but in his long career he had never had to face one. Being the sheriff in a small county where he knows almost everyone and the idea of a hostage crisis was, until today, unheard of, Bob Tendell felt the wave of emotions pass over him. He really wanted to sit down and cry. He had been terrified with fear of the children of a dear friend being murdered. The thought of losing anyone to cold blooded murder was upsetting enough but he had attended Bobby Jordan's parent's wedding and was part of the paramedic team who witnessed Bobby's birth. This was the downside of being a

small county sheriff. It was terribly hard to stay objective on the job when anything that happens to anyone in your county is personal.

Giving one of his deputies instructions to call for a helicopter evacuation, the Sheriff went to Jeannie and gave her a big hug. "Damn, girl, you're good! You saved at least three lives today. Even that scum laying in there bleeding has got to be thankful for your skill."

Jeannie, who had to this point, been standing stoically watching the aftermath of her shot, started to cry. "Thank you, Bob," she blubbered. "Thank you. I was so scared." She took a quick look at the trailer and at Bobby and Peggy Jean being tended to by one of the trucks. "If I missed, he'd have probably killed them. I had a head shot, but I've never killed a person."

The two just stood there for several minutes holding on to each other. Then the Sheriff went to check on the two young hostages. He could tell as he drew near that Bobby was quite agitated.

"Sheriff! Sheriff!" he called as Bob Tendell drew near. "The rest of those guys are going after Mr. Gerber and Kachina. They think Kachina has some sort of treasure and that Delvey guy and his partner are willing to kill her for it. There's also one of The Sisters with them, who is scary as hell. She's out to get Mr. Gerber. They're going to"

The Sheriff put his arms around Bobby and held him. "It's okay, Bobby. Thank you for telling me." The Sheriff stepped back and looked Bobby in the eyes. "We're not going to let anything happen to them."

Leaving Doc with the bleeding gunman and a couple of people with Bobby and his wife, Sheriff Tendell gathered his posse and headed toward the tank. He had just taken a moment to console Jeannie.

"I'm sorry, Jeannie. I'm afraid that I might need you again," he said indicating for her to ride with him.

By the time we heard Delvey and company's vehicles coming down the road the sun was well up. I was sitting under a Palo Verde tree. My 20-gauge shotgun wasn't the biggest gun in the pack, but I was hoping that I wouldn't have to do much more than make noise. There were only three of us who were not armed with high power deer rifles. For some reason I found it a bit unnerving when I saw that Kachina and Istaqa had bows.

Most people I know, most of whom would be white and, to be honest, somewhat historically ignorant, would believe that showing up here with a bow would be like taking a knife to a gun fight. What made these two showing up here with bows a bit unnerving was the knowledge that the Native American composite bow was actually a very superior weapon. Historically, the first Indians to fight the white invaders were far superior. The blunderbust, and firearms well up into the nineteenth century, were famously inaccurate. The European invaders actually did most of their killing with disease spread either by accident or on purpose. Historically the three most feared weapons were the English longbow, Mongolian recurve bow and the Indian composite bow made with wood, horn and sinew. The belly, or inside, of a bow gets most of the compression and horn can store more energy than wood when compressed. On the back side of the bow you lay sinew, soaked in animal glue, in layers with the strands running along the length of the bow. This is the flex side of the bow that causes it to spring back when the string is released. Since sinew has greater elasticity than wood, it too increases the amount of energy that can be stored in the bow stave. Mesquite and Palo Verde are popular bow woods around here. Knowing Kachina

and Istaqa, I knew they were probably quite good with a bow, and, despite the power of the high powered deer rifles, their bows just hit me as much more deadly.

Looking around it was hard to spot the others even when I knew basically where everyone was located. Two of the warriors were on the west side of the ford. They were high up on the side so that they didn't get hit by any stray bullets. The rest of us were in a rather open V formation so that everyone had a clear shot at the ford.

I could feel my tension and anxiety growing as the sound of the vehicles grew nearer. Then I could see the grey vans approaching. I wanted to pick up my gun and shoot at them, not to kill or hurt them but to make them go away. I wanted them to leave us in peace, but I knew that wasn't going to happen. It was a good thing that Chief Kanteena was in charge.

The vans slowed down to enter the ford. I watched as the first vehicle slowly entered the water. These were obviously city folks with little knowledge or experience of a ford. The second van should have waited for the first to cross. The fact that it didn't was to our advantage. We now had both vehicles in the water at the same time. The Chief yelled "fire". Four riflemen, previously designated, fired almost simultaneously. The front two tires of the front van and the back two tires of the following van exploded. The vehicles sat still in the water. Three men from the rear van and one from the front van suddenly sprang from the vehicles and tried to make it to cover. The driver of the rear van sent a spray of automatic weapon fire in all directions as he ran. I caught sight of Kachina with her bow drawn following the man who was shooting. She was carefully tracking his movement and suddenly let the arrow fly. Looking back at the river, I could hear a scream of pain as the man grabbed the arrow that had hit his thigh.

While I was watching Kachina deal with the shooter, I was aware of rifle fire on the other side of the vehicles. Warriors had fired several shots in front of the running men who wisely dropped their weapons into the river and threw up their hands.

Delvey threw open the front passenger door of the first van and put his hands up. Mitchell jumped out of the drivers seat and started toward the east bank only to end up with a rifle against his forehead. He stopped and put his hands out to the side. The look on his face was so angry and so evil that it would scare the devil.

Daphnia had slipped out of the passenger-side sliding door and was sneaking around between the vans. She had a pistol. She definitely saw a target but before she could raise her weapon Kachina sent another arrow flying. This one penetrated the skin of the van just above Daphnia's head. Daphnia froze and dropped her weapon. Having seen Kachina place an arrow into the thigh of a moving man, I had no doubt that that arrow had gone exactly where she wanted.

Chief Kanteena, who had moved closer, was yelling instructions at the perpetrators. They slowly made their way up the eastern bank. One of the warriors was giving the injured gunman first aid by cutting off the shaft of the arrow and applying compression to stop further blood loss.

Sheriff Tendell came flying down the road like the proverbial bat out of hell. Climbing out of his squad car he called to the Chief.

"Hey, George! If I had known you were going to be here and be so efficient, I'd have stayed home." He laughed.

"Oh, no, Bob," Chief Kanteena replied, "we just stopped them. They're in your jurisdiction."

"Aw, come on," the Sheriff mockingly complained. "I just had my jail cleaned."

"Hey, we're so law abiding, we don't even have a jail on the reservation."

Daphnia Wellington, standing there in handcuffs, started screaming as Kachina and I approached. She was yelling that the treasure – meaning iiná yí'ááh - was rightfully hers and how she had worked so hard to manipulate and get rid of the old man to get it.

Kachina walked up to her and stood silently as Daphnia spit and swore and threatened. After a bit more ranting and raving Daphnia stood defiantly looking at the young Kawaika woman.

"You just don't get it, do you?" Kachina says. "Iná yí'ááh isn't a mine or a buried treasure. It is much more. Priceless. Iiná yí'ááh means 'life giver' and is, according to legend the name of the spring that provided water for their village and never ran dry. We won't have any idea until we excavate the village by Coyote Tank. The tank could be iiná yí'ááh."

Delvey looked at Mitchell. "She wasn't lying," he said shaking his head. "She was telling us the truth."

Delvey, Mitchell, Daphnia and their men were unceremoniously put in the back of the posse pickups.

"Remember," the Sheriff said to his prisoners as he checked to make sure they were secure, "it is only legal to sit in the back of a moving pickup if you keep your butt on the truck bed. So no moving or sitting on the side panels." All he got for his levity were a lot of angry looks.

The only ones left at the ford were the war party and me. I called Istaqa aside.

"I think that Kachina needs and deserves to see the cliff," I said. "Today has made me realize how important protecting it

is, but Kachina needs to be a part of that, and I think I have a way around the dissertation problem." He looked at me expectantly as I glanced toward Kachina who was totally engrossed in conversation with Carlo.

"A lot of doctoral students fail to support their thesis. Actually, it's not a failure. Whether or not the hypothesis is supported is of no consequence if the research was good and the student makes a significant contribution to knowledge base of the subject. Kachina has shown that the Kawaika did live here and she has a phenomenal archeological dig to prove it. She can simply make the case that the idea of a cliff dwelling probably came from the story changing over time and it was originally a village near a cliff. She can also argue that Coyote Tank might have been a spring at one time and has always been a *liná yí'ááh*."

Istaqa loved my idea. I don't think he really understood what I was trying to explain about a doctoral dissertation but he figured out that it solved our problem. Besides, we all agreed, we now have two ancient sites to protect.

A few days later I invited Kachina and Carlo to my cabin. They were a bit surprised to find Felipe there along with horses, including Nizhoni, and two pack horses. Felipe had cleverly made sure that their calendars were open for a couple of days.

"What's going on?" Kachina demanded.

"We want to take the two of you for a little trip."

"But . . ."

"Oh, you have time," smiled Felipe. "I made sure of that. Please just trust and come with us."

We rode up the Narrows trail, which goes through the narrows between Eagle's Peak and Tracker Butte. We stopped for the night at the ford near the northern boundary of my ranch. It was

early enough that we had time to do some fishing and make a Kawaika feast. This, we said, was for Carlo. If he was to become an expert working on Kachina's dig, he needed to immerse himself in the culture. It was a wonderful evening. Felipe played his flute. Kachina made a make-shift drum and started singing. The next thing we knew we were all dancing around the fire.

The second night was spent just inside Kawaika Canyon not too far from Istaqa's lodge. Of course, only Felipe and I knew that it was there. In the morning, Felipe was up early and we were awoken by the smell of white sage burning. Knowing what was up, I immediately joined him. Smudging, as it is called, is a ceremony of cleansing and prayers with the smoke of the sage. Kachina and Carlo looked confused, but they had figured out that all of this was part of whatever reason the two of us insisted upon bringing them out into the wilderness.

Felipe got out his flute and played for a moment. When he stopped another flute could be heard. Kachina and Carlo listened carefully. Felipe played again, and again he was answered.

"Baabaa, what is happening?" Kachina did not demand. She did not even speak as one adult to another. Her voice was quiet and almost timid, like a child standing in awe, knowing that something special was happening.

"Rusty and I were asking forgiveness," Felipe replied in their native language.

"Forgiveness for what?" Kachina asked also speaking Keres.

Carlo watched, having no idea what was happening. He looked at me. I put my hand on his shoulder. "It's okay. You'll know soon."

"Come," Felipe reverted to English so we could all understand, "we must break camp quickly and move on."

Shortly we were making our way up the side of the canyon to Istaqa's lodge. Istaqa was standing there in his ceremonial best.

"Baabaa," Kachina almost pleaded as we dismounted.

"You have known your entire life that I live in the wilderness," said Istaqa. "You only asked me once, when you were a little girl, why I did it, and you accepted my answer. My answer was the truth, but not the entire truth."

"I'm sure you figured out quite some time ago that our dear friend, Tracker Tillman, was your benefactor," Felipe picked up the explanation. "He loved you very much, and while he found it actually fun to be the secret benefactor, what tortured him like a million demons was not being able to tell you what you most wanted to know."

"It hurt us all," said Istaqa, "and we carried the pain like a great guilt for there is no one in the world who deserved more to know the truth. . . . come."

I was happy, yet my heart was breaking. I felt their pain. I had known the truth for a relatively short time but it tore me up inside every time I saw Kachina. Now, with tears streaming down my cheeks, I felt a new pain. It was for Tracker who was not here to witness this.

The two old shaman led the way up the narrow trail the led to the cliff dwellings. I could see Kachina's face when her head cleared the side of the cliff and she could see the village. She put her hands to the side of her head and screamed with excitement. Then came the tears.

"We should have told you before you went to college," Felipe apologized. "Then it would not have become a part of your academic search."

"By the time we realized our mistake," Istaqa went on, "we were afraid to tell you. It would not have been fair to ask you to purposely fail your studies to keep our secret. We didn't know what to do. Rusty insisted that we must tell you and assured us that it would not make you fail school to keep the secret."

Kachina looked at me.

"They didn't understand that you can write a successful dissertation showing that there is not sufficient evidence to support your hypothesis," I said. "When you found the village by the tank that was our answer. They have kept this village a secret for decades because they know what the white man would do. You know we're going to have a hard time protecting the village by the tank. With the seismic study, there was no way to keep it a secret, so it can become the most magnificent centerpiece of your dissertation, you can know the truth, and be a part of protecting this village."

Kachina just stood looking, shifting her gaze from us to the cliff dwelling. Carlo went up to her and put his arms around her. She buried her face in his chest and cried.

We spent three days at the cliff dwelling. Hence, the two pack horses. Kachina explored every room and when you saw her she was either laughing or crying. Carlo followed her taking notes. We talked a lot about how difficult it is to protect such treasures and she forgave her grandfather and Istaqa for not telling her. She understood their fears. We all knew that there was often good reason for fears.

The village by Coyote Tank is an archeological treasure but it has, not by choice, become the decoy. By giving the academic community and the world the village of Kachina's thesis, we have kept this cliff dwelling safe for a while longer. Protecting

the village below was going to get harder by the day. We all knew that there would be those who would be applying significant pressure to turn it over to the government.



Chapter 13.

Felipe and Kachina went to the courthouse in Farmington every day of Delvey and Mitchell's trial. I have the feeling that the two men probably found it rather unnerving to have the two of them sitting right behind them wearing traditional Kawaika clothing. Their entire gang, including artisans and warehouse workers were rounded up thanks to at least one of the thugs identifying them in exchange for

"consideration." Of course, each of the others, as they were arrested, wanted to provide some information that would help them.

The gunman that had held Bobby and Peggy Jean hostage did survive. As expected, he did lose the use of his right arm. Jeannie's bullet had shattered his shoulder. I don't know that he appreciated how hard she worked not to kill him, but, truthfully, none of us really cared. He went on trial in Grand Junction since his most serious crime was committed in Lewis county. The others all stood trial in Farmington because that's where the warehouse was located. As one might expect, the San Juan County prosecutor got lots of help from counties where their thefts had taken place. Everyone wanted a piece of Delvey and Mitchell. I really don't know the legal reasons, but none of the other jurisdictions held trials.

Quite a number of members of the tribe were in the court room when the two were sentenced. When the judge gave them maximum sentences on all counts; ten years for antiquities theft and two years for unlawful imprisonment, Kachina sat grinning. Mitchell looked over his shoulder at Kachina. There was no doubt what was going through his mind. Delvey, on the other hand, looked at Mitchell looking daggers at Kachina and said, "I know what you're thinking, but this still beats life in prison."

There were evidently few arrests, trials or prison sentences for those who bought the stolen artifacts from Delvey and Mitchell. Once the authorities got into their records it was amazing at how much was recovered. Since it would have taken a lot of time, effort and tax-payer money to try to get a conviction because the prosecutor had to prove that the defendants knew they were buying stolen goods, most prosecutors must have figured that the financial loss for these rich people was probably the worst punishment possible.

Daphnia's tirade at the river ford started us thinking about Tracker's death. I knew it would be hard on Jeannie but I asked her if she would tell us about those few years, from the time the Sisters got power of attorney to Tracker's death. There were lots of tears, but Jeannie realized that rehashing such painful memories could be important.

As she related the story a pattern began to emerge. Firstly, Tracker would get really sick just after the Sisters visited. Tracker's primary care physician and the one who signed the death certificate was hired by the Sisters. He wasn't from the area. A coroner and/or autopsy isn't required unless the death takes place at home, there are obvious suspicious or criminal circumstances, or the death is in some way unusual. A coroner is often called to sign the death certificate if a person dies within twenty-four hours of entering the hospital. Tracker's death didn't fall into any of these categories. The physician that treated Tracker in the long-term care facility was the same one who falsely testified at his competency hearing. There was too much coincidence.

It wasn't as difficult as I expected to get a court order to exhume Tracker's body. That's one of the nice things about a small county. Doc agreed that something didn't seem right. He talked to some of his physician friends and the coroner, all of whom said, if it was okay with Jeannie, they would ask the judge for an order. Technically Daphnia still had power of attorney. She, of course, fought it, but lost.

Someone stayed with Jeannie from the time Tracker's body was exhumed to the time he was buried again. We all knew that it had to be a tremendously emotional experience. Jeannie handled it like a trooper. If Daphnia had somehow killed the love of her life, she was willing to go through hell to catch her.

It didn't take the coroner long to find evidence of arsenic poisoning. While most people know arsenic as a poison, it has been used to treat diabetes, psoriasis, syphilis, skin ulcers and various joint diseases. Although the United States stopped allowing it to be used in such things as rat poison, it can still be purchased from a pharmacy.

The police in Denver didn't take long finding where Daphnia had been buying her arsenic. As a result, the physician she hired was also arrested. Like almost all of the others affiliated with Daphnia, he was more than willing to exchange details for some legal consideration. It turned out that he too had been blackmailed by Daphnia.

Daphnia was a master at finding some indiscretion in a person's life that they felt would destroy their lives if revealed and use it to leverage them into doing her dirty work. The physician had had an inappropriate affair with a patient who ended up committing suicide. Even if he could show that the suicide was not a result of their affair, he was terrified that he would lose his license. Daphnia knew about the affair because she knew the patient. The Denver police office told Sheriff Tendell that he almost felt sorry for the physician. If he had come clean about the affair he might have been punished in some way, but by caving to Daphnia and becoming an accessory to murder he had totally destroyed his life. If she was found guilty of murder, he too was going away for a long time.

While the news that her beloved soul-mate had been poisoned was devastating to Jeannie, it brought closure. Tracker's body was not returned to the cemetery. Jeannie picked out a nice spot at the foot of what I had dubbed Tracker Butte. With most of the county and Laguna reservation in attendance, he was laid to rest as he would have wanted with a Kawaika ceremony of prayers, songs, and smudging. Even though Tracker's body had been embalmed, Jeannie did her best to follow green burial customs

as practiced by the tribe. His remains were wrapped in plain cotton and placed in a simple wooden box that would decompose and return to the earth. Istaqa and Felipe conducted the ceremony in their native language with Kachina translating for those of us who did not know it. Many people had come to show respect by helping to dig his grave and others placed items in the grave with him to show their love.

Unfortunately, I've seen lots of funerals in my life-time, but I've never seen one like this. It was filled with love and hope. Although Jeannie cried the entire time, it was what she needed. She saw her beloved receive a loving farewell, it allowed her to grieve and she fulfilled what she knew were Tracker's wishes.

I was amazed at how well Jeannie was dealing with the knowledge that Daphnia had actually murdered Tracker. We got talking about that over coffee one morning. For a relatively uneducated woman who had spent her entire life in a small northeastern Arizona county, the extent of her knowledge was only surpassed by the depth of her wisdom. The last thing I expected was for her to quote Siddhartha Gautama, known to most people as the Buddha.

"Buddha said," Jeannie explained to me, "holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else; you are the one who gets burned."

Daphnia might have gotten off with the minimum three years for selling stolen goods had she not had her meltdown at the ford and had Henrietta not been so truthful on the stand. Daphnia was heard many times during the trial to hiss "shut up, Henrietta." She was sentenced to twelve years for dealing in stolen goods, three years for unlawful imprisonment and life for the death of Lawrence "Tracker" Tillman.

Henrietta Wellington had been picked up at the hotel shortly after her sister was captured. She surrendered quietly and

explained how she had always gone along with whatever her sister wanted to do. She told about Daphnia giving their uncle something to make him feel sick so that they could force him out of his cabin. She insisted that Daphnia said it wouldn't hurt him. She provided the prosecutor all sorts of information about how they got a physician to give false testimony at Tracker's competency hearing. When they found that the mine near Grand Junction was no good, they figured that Tracker had a mine on the ranch. She told about the spies and how Daphnia had joined forced with Delvey and Mitchell.

As life was getting back to normal in our quite little county, the Memorial Foundation became more active and more organized. The System exists only to serve those who control it. People like Tracker Tillman have worked and struggled and fought to protect and care for those who are hurt by the greed of the System. I had come here to escape and hide from that System. I had come here to hide, believing that because I was only one person I was basically helpless. Now I find myself in the middle of a mini-rebellion; a group of compassionate caring people secretly working to save those whom the System is willing to sacrifice for their profit.

This entire experience has taught me that, while I no longer live in the beast's lair, neither can I totally exclude myself from the society I find so basically evil. I guess that, had I been quicker about moving further out into the wilds of my ranch and had I not discovered the gold under the floor, I might have lived out the remainder of my life as a very happy hermit.

Obviously, I learned a couple of things from our adventure. I learned that my cabin is sufficiently isolated. I also learned that there is absolutely no way of totally disassociating oneself from the System, at least legally. That means that one must be

constantly aware of the System in order to keep it from destroying your life.

In this case it meant living as I want to live on the peripheral of society, but being ready and willing to stand toe-to-toe with the System when it is about to hurt someone. It was Edward Abbey who said "a patriot must always be ready to defend his country against his government."

I started by personally visiting everyone who had worked with Tracker. I was surprised to find that there were at least another half-dozen more people than those I recruited to help Terry and Elsa Hudson. As one might expect, they all wanted to continue.

We had a big party; cover for a meeting; at my ranch. Tracker was very efficient but by organizing the Memorial Foundation as an LLC, which keeps our actions above board and legal, we are able to be more creative as we were with Terry and Elsa. We are now able to have money in a bank and distribute it without question or identifying ourselves thanks to the New Mexico anonymous LLC law. There is absolutely nothing wrong, illegal, immoral or unpatriotic about being opposed to the System.

At our first annual meeting, we elected officers and assigned tasks. In truth, nothing had changed. We are just now organized and legal. There is no board. Since we're trying to function as a true democracy, everyone is on the board and everyone has a voice and vote. It was decided that, for the safety of all involved and the welfare of the tribe and community, no one other than the three of us who now know the location of the mine will know where it is. As far as anyone knows, I own a mine called Confidence Mine that I use to fund the foundation.

Kachina now has a successful archeological dig. She found evidence of a permanent village. To safeguard the cliff dwelling she wrote her dissertation making the point that the village she discovered was the fabled city and that any reference that might

have made it sound like a cliff dwelling was a translation error. It was a village near the cliff and Coyote Tank is most likely the fabled iiná yí'ááh.

The existence of the cliff dwellings continues to be a well-kept secret. The dig by Coyote Tank is more than sufficient to satisfy the academics, the collectors and the curious. Istaqa still has his lodge at the foot of the cliff where he protects the cliff ruins.

It took some time for Bobby and Peggy Jean to recover from their ordeal. In fact, I believe that Peggy Jean is still seeing a therapist. After all, she was the one the gunman was holding when he was shot. No one gets over something like that quickly and easily.

They continue to struggle to make ends meet with their new ranch, but they are doing better. The Memorial Foundation finally paid off their mortgage with the explanation that they were providing their community and, in fact, the entire country with evidence of the feasibility of the return to the family farm, new approaches, etc. The importance of their contribution to the welfare of future generations shouldn't be threatened by a debt that really has nothing to do with their work.

While Chief Kanteena is ecstatic about the increase of interest in the tribe, both academically and economically, Dead Horse struggles with its new fame that resulted from the archeological find. Jeannie laughs and teases Mark for building a row of cabins behind the mercantile and carrying a line of souvenirs at the store but both are doing well.

Terry and Elsa Hudson put a small RV campground on their remaining land and contribute most of what it makes to the

Foundation. The diner's business is brisk. To date we have been able to avoid the incursion of McDonald's, Walmart and the giant corporate crowd. For what it's worth, the county council passed a law that businesses in our county must be locally owned. I'm pretty sure that if this were challenged in court, we'd lose, but so far no one has challenged it.

Looking at the big picture, I have to laugh. In the land of fanatic capitalism Lewis County has actually become the evidence that capitalism isn't the only way. I hate to use the term 'commune' because uneducated people do not know the difference between a commune and communism or an Israeli kibbutz. Since there is no way of returning to the original affluent society, this is the best we can do.

And that, ladies and gentlemen, is the backstory of the fabulous archeological dig you are about to see,” Chuck said as he brought the bus to a stop facing the sign saying 'tour bus only'.

As interest in Kachina's find grew and people wanted to see it, Chuck Marmon bought an old bus and, working things out with Kachina, set up a tour business. With my permission, he transports visitors from the diner and reservation to the dig site for tours. There are two places where visitors can catch Chuck's bus; the Dead Horse Diner where Melba is the ticket-master, and the casino. A member of the tribe meets the bus, tells about the Kawaika and shows the people around the site. We all agreed, however, that keeping the road primitive is a part of the learning experience.

“Please don't forget,” Chuck said in his best tour-guide voice, “This is a working archeological dig, so it is important that you stay on the path and with your guide and, ... oh, look. You're in for a special treat. Your guide today is none other than Dr.

Kachina Corn, the lady who discovered these ruins.”

Kachina climbed aboard the bus.

“Good morning, everyone. My name is Dr. Kachina Corn, but you can call me Kachina. Welcome to Kawaika Village. Today you will be watching archeologist and archeological students from around the world working on one of the best preserved Native American village remnants in southwestern United States. Some of the artifacts we have catalogued to date have been over five-hundred years old.”

Disembarking from the bus, the groups' attention was attracted to Kachina's lodge.

“Oh,” said Kachina a bit self-conscious, “that's my home.”

“You home?” someone asked.

“Yes. This is where my husband, Dr. Carlo Russi, and I live.”

“You live here? . . . all the time?”

“Yes. It is actually quite comfortable. This is a typical Kawaika lodge. We build this type of camp when we're hunting, traveling or other short-term situation. In our permanent villages we build our homes of stone and adobe as you will see in the dig. This was my home when I found the village. We just haven't had time to build a permanent house.”

Felipe and I were standing on one of the many mounds of dirt, sand and gravel that had been removed to expose the magnificent, well-preserved village below. An army of archeological students and visiting archeologists were carefully removing sand and stone. The volunteers were carrying buckets of debris to a nearby line of sifting trays where other volunteers and students were carefully sifting through the debris to make sure that no shards of pottery or other artifacts got lost in the dirt. A matrix of stakes and string gave the

archeologists a reference for anything they found. The location of everything found was recorded. When a piece of some significance was found, the digger would flag it, note its location within the matrix, and take pictures so that they knew exactly how it was laying, all before moving it.

Carlo was just below us on his hands and knees, brush in hand, gently moving sand and gravel away from something that had caught his attention. Shortly after Delvey and Mitchell had been arrested, Carlo had figured out that he could not be subtle with Kachina. The story goes that, as they were making plans for the dig, Carlo had just, out of the blue, said “would you marry me?”

While they had a good Italian wedding that made Carlo's family happy, the ceremony they really felt was their wedding was officiated by Felipe and took place with only a handful of people at the cliff dwellings by the *iiná yí'ááh*.

Carlo was now the university's representative at the site and, along with Kachina, would offer classes here. Watching him there was no doubt that he had only two loves in this world; Kachina and the village. As we watched him he went from kneeling to lying flat on his stomach with his nose inches from the item of interest, to sitting up and hanging his head in disappointment. Every archeologist knows that there are many more moments like this than those where they find an exciting artifact.

Felipe actually had a job to do. He and Istaqa, per my stipulations, were the tribal representatives. One of them was at the dig at all times to answer questions and make decisions about items that might be sacred to their ancestors or the tribe. Today was Felipe's turn. We talked about progress, snickered a bit at Chuck's tour, and commented on aspects of the village

that had recently been uncovered.

A student approached with a question for Felipe.

“About time for us to go, isn't it?” I said looking down at Butch who was watching the proceedings with great interest. He is accustomed to doing this with me.

Patting Felipe on the shoulder, waving at Carlo and acknowledging the tour group to which Kachina had just pointed me out, Butch and I made our way to the corral where Janie and Penny were waiting.

It didn't take long to get ready. I am so glad that I'm much better at mounting Janie because I could feel the entire tour group watching me hop, skip and jump. These were city people, few of whom had ever seen a person on horseback nevertheless bareback. Janie must have realized that she was the center of attention and pranced around a bit more than usually to get me situated where she wanted me, then headed west treating the onlookers to her beautiful slow canter with Penny running at her side.

“Where's he going?” one of the tourist asked Kachina.

“He going to sup with the Coyote, sing with the spirits and sleep with the ancestors,” she replied waving.

No one asked what she meant. They just stood there looking after me as though they knew.

I had come to Lewis County seeking to escape and find peace. In reality, my plan was to hide. I had planned on disappearing into the wilderness of my ranch. I had felt so overwhelmed and so helpless in the over-crowded, brainwashed and myopic world around me. When I arrived here it seemed that hiding, which I was erroneously calling

escaping, was my only option. Nature, *verum mundi*, has again taught me a valuable lesson.

As the four of us ambled along I had to laugh at an image that came to mind. You've all heard the saying "going from the frying pan into the fire." Well, it hit me that I had gone from the pressure-cooker into the fire. You're right. It doesn't work philosophically or grammatically, but it does describe what happened. While the analogy of the frying pan describes going from a bad to worse situation, what I experienced was going from a deadly existence; being destroyed by the constant pressures of the social systems; to facing the reality of the fire. That really isn't going from bad to worse. While the fire is potentially deadly, it is reality. The fire into which I found myself falling was not artificial and therefore could be dealt with and survived.

Looking around me at my ranch, which stretches farther than I can see in all directions, I am aware of what great fortune has befallen me. The anarcho-primitivist in me says I don't own this land. No one owns the land. However, living in a world that doesn't think that way, I find myself accepting the responsibility without demanding the rewards. I knew well that I was in this understandably enviable position because, in great part, I'm a privileged white male. At least some of my feeling overwhelmed can probably be trace back to feeling guilty and having no straight forward means of dealing with that guilt.

Perhaps the best part of this fire was seeing that the good-guys do occasionally win. Even though I know it is not permanent, it has made a great difference in my life to witness good people reaping the benefits of their own labor.

I came here with the idea of totally avoiding human contact. Circumstances lead to my being even more immersed in human society. I had escaped the pressure-cooker. Dare I call it ironic

that I've found peace in the fire; peace in all that's happened?

Philosophically I know that the masses are the victims and not innately evil, destructive and greedy, but after a while living in the bastille of modern society it becomes hard to apply that truth to what you see and experience around you. My experience with the people around me helped me make the connection between the philosophical truth and the real world. People are still, at the core, good animals. Like the fighting pit bull, humans are a good animal that has been domesticated to be mean, greedy, violent and destructive so as to do their master's bidding. In Lewis County I have found a place where we can still be real.

Janie, Penny, Butch and I still live in the homestead along with two other horses that Doc saved from the slaughter house. I did end up putting an extension on the back of the barn that opens into a corral. I decided upon both solar and wind energy. Between the two I have plenty of clean energy. (Okay, one of you is going to remind me of the environmental damage done by the manufacture of solar panels, batteries and turbines, but all I can do is do my best.)

I doubt that I will ever build another cabin. I spend my time 'supervising' Kachina's dig, camping with Istaqa at the cliff dwelling, trying to learn to speak Kawaika from Felipe, and, of course, occasionally collecting more gold to keep the foundation going. The most important thing to me is that I have found peace. I have good friends and a good life. I far surpassed my expectations when I first bought The Tillman Place.