

# AUBURN

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## Chapter 9 - The Sorceress

The old woman pointed at an interior door, and handed me my fresh diaper.

How in the hell did she know about my diapers? Oh yes, she must have seen up my skirt while the dog licked me at my overnight camp, or when I got up.

*Well, I thought, she had been nice to me.*

I went through that door into the bathroom where I changed myself.

When I came out, she smiled at me which I guessed meant her smile for her own success. Or a thank you. Or a something. She had accepted me. Even the most peculiar part of me!

She took my wet diaper and put it in the fire box of her wood stove. Well, that's one way of keeping it out of the land fills.

Those two dogs came to me and went quickly to work on my face before I wondered what diseases they might be carrying. Whatever, as they had already given that to me. I gently scratched them before the friendly one rolled over for a more extensive tummy rubbing session. The more wary one let me rub her tummy too. But the first one had rolled over where tummy rubbing was convenient to me. I had to move the second one around to keep this up without tiring my arms too much and making them ache.

She tapped her walking stick. The two dogs stood up and went to her. She pointed at my backpack and mimicked putting it over her shoulders. She pointed at it again and made the motion for me to follow.

I did get up, fasten the lower flap, and swung that backpack's straps over my shoulders. We had our hats on, and the four of us went out.

She walked a few minutes right back to Joe Nelson's store. Two old trucks were parked behind it with dust declaring their disuse advertising they needed repairs. Three clean vehicles reposed there, too, of a car, a white delivery van, and a modern ambulance.

The dogs sat in the shade as she went inside. I followed her. She talked with the owner Joe in Navajo.

His eyes rested on me. "I see you have met our Sorceress. Did she do that trick of hers of not speaking?"

I said. "Yes."

"Don't believe it" he said. "Navajo is her childhood language, but she speaks English just fine in her own way." He waved his hand at me to come closer as he spoke in a low voice. "How the hell did our Crazy Woman Sorceress find you?"

"I went east on that dry steam next to the tracks until I found a sand patch where I could sleep last night. Her dogs found me first this morning, and then her."

"Strange things happen around her." He looked at me and my dress up and down. "Still wearing dresses?"

"When I can." I slipped the backpack off, where it sagged again leaning itself against his counter.

"You sure you don't want to be a woman?"

"Not especially. It hides what I really want."

His eyebrows flicked. "What?"

*Could I trust this man. Why not? What the hell. She may have already told him.*  
"Wear diapers. I just want to, and that spooks most people, so I'm by myself a lot which is why I work odd jobs, save money, and move on. Every few days I find a homeless shelter, or rent a cheap motel room, for a shave and a bath. Both homeless shelters and jails are baffled by where to put a man in a skirt."

He said. "King of the road. Same as that song."

"Oh yeah." I hummed a few bars. "Sorta kinda. But I don't pick locks when no one is around. I wouldn't know how."

He smiled at the reference in that song. "And she found you."

"Yep", I said. "Tell me a little more about you."

He said. "Did you see that ambulance out back? I'm the Med Tech for this area of the tribe. Have this store."

She interrupted us. Somehow with her hands and Joe Nelson's translating she wanted me to buy a few staple foods I liked and pay for them.

I said. "Help me Joe; sorry, Mr. Nelson. What does she buy and cook? She made a tasty breakfast."

He talked to her in Navajo. She walked around the store returning with cans in her hands and arms which she put on the counter. Plus several edible roots and a bag of rice.

She held up her hands palm out for no more.

When he rang it up, the total price for the whole pile barely came over twelve dollars.

I laid a twenty on the counter. "Keep it. I have to tell you I'm OK. Just a little oddity or two. Good enough?"

His eyes locked on me, but he didn't frown. "You're a good kid. That man with the pickup said so. I saw that in you, too. She saw that in you. I don't know how, but if she likes you; well say it this way. She's important to people here in her own way, so she wants them to like you too. Tell you what. Have a soda and bring a cold bottle of water for her."

When I returned he had taken a slip of cash register tape and written one it. It read 'store credit \$5'. "Her dogs liked you, yes?"

I nodded.

"OK", he said. "Your Indian name is Nati. That's a short made up word from a phrase for a dog caring person. You have a driver's license? Let me see."

Everyone else seemed to want to see it, so why not him too. I gave it to him.

"Age twenty."

I didn't say anything as he examined it. "No police record?"

"No felonies. Written up for vagrancy a few times, but no fines. I don't drive enough for getting caught speeding."

His eyes rested on me. "You beware. The Navajos tolerate her for her Native American Church ceremonies, but they do not all like her. She provides them with peyote and mescaline. Ever hear of peyote?"

"No." I lied, but I didn't remember much. "What about it?"

"It's legal for the Native American Church, but not for you Anglos. It can create visions and hallucinations." He frowned in a serious way. "Don't let her give you any."

"Why don't they like her? Is she too strange?"

"Some are embarrassed, feel insulted, and are angered by her way of life. She lives here away from most of her clan. That's not the tribal way."

He wrote down a few details from my driver's license and handed it back to me.

He didn't say what else had to be on his mind.