

# AUBURN

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## Chapter 10 - Ginger

The next morning the Sorceress walked many miles through the desert collecting weird green bulbous plants from down on the ground. She cut them free with her knife.

I got bored with that and became thirsty. As she went through town heading for the hills on the other side of the Interstate, I went into the air conditioning at Joe's. I asked him about her.

Instead of answering he asked me a question. "Since she has been feeding you, have you ever felt light headed? Had any visions?"

I said. "No. Nothing like that."

He said. "Good. Glad she didn't. It could be a Federal crime to give you as an Anglo what she can freely give the Indians."

I said. "Is that Peyote? Is that those green round bulbs?"

He said. "The very ones. They are called buttons."

I said. "What's she doing with those?"

He said. "She leads healing sessions. In Navajo we call that something else."

I checked no one else seemed to be in the store. "No fruits in the diet. Can you order oranges and grapefruits?"

He said. "Sure. May take a few days."

I put a twenty on his counter. "Please do and just give them to her when she comes by. Tell her a gift."

He said. "Yeah. Some of her followers might do that. Sorry, have to order by the box. Make that twenty seven dollars."

I put a total of forty dollars on his counter, and asked Joe how safe she could be.

He said. "Safe? Yes, I think so, but strange. We all think she is strange. The Native Americans wouldn't want to admit there are people like her and her talk of a separate reality. They pay for her healing ceremonies and private sessions mostly with food and wood. You be careful telling anyone what you know of her. The Navajos are a proud people. They may not appreciate being reminded of her by someone from

outside the tribe.”

I said. “Fair warning.”

He said. “Ask her for a book she may have on the *Yaqui Way Of Knowledge*. That way you might get an insight without knowing a Native American language. Look it up on Amazon or Wikipedia.”

A young woman entered interrupting us who spoke Navajo with Joe before turning her attention to me. “Hi, I’m Julia. I’m learning healing.” She held out her hand for a shake in a very modern way. “Your Indian name is Nati? Yes?”

How did she know that? I went tongue tied. I didn’t have a clue what to say to her. I embarrassed myself with being unable to handle how attractive she had made herself.

“But you’re Anglo, right?” She turned her attention onto Joe. “She told me to buy a few things.” She took a hand basket as she walked through the store. Joe rang it up and she paid. “See ya’ later. Bye.”

I watched her body as she walked to the door.

I had been going to ask Joe about her, and how did she know my new nickname so fast. He asked me first if I had found a job.

I confessed that I had only been walking around, and with that Sorceress feeding me, I hadn’t really been thinking of one. My thinking flipped. “Could you help me? This is a little private matter.”

He said. “Sure. What?”

I said. “I carry too much money. Could you safeguard part of it for me?”

He said. “How’d you come by it?”

I explained all of those jobs I’d had before.

His eyes went around his store. “I have a safe, but don’t blame me if there is a theft. The staff also has the combination. Nobody here. How much?”

“Can I come around in a private place. I have to unpack everything.”

He finger signaled me to his crowded back room. I emptied the backpack, surprised myself with how much I had, added \$200 to my wallet, and put all but \$5,000 back. I repacked everything. \$5,000 in twenties is quite a lump of 250 bills.

Returning to his counter I had those 250 bills in my hand.

To his credit his eyebrows jumped in surprise. He held out his hand and counted them. He wrote out a receipt just like one of those store credits. He wrapped them in two sheets of paper from his fax machine, and wrote ‘Nati’ on it. He asked me to walk away so he could access his safe.

I selected a root beer from the upright cooler. I hadn’t had one of those in a long

time.

Back at the counter he suggested wearing a flat leather money carrier inside my clothes. With men that hooks on the inside of the waist. I could sew one into my dress.

I said. "Can you find one for me?"

He nodded. "You've worked in motels, a Love's, restaurants, and more. Yes?"

I nodded wondering how he knew all that. "Can I call you Uncle Joe?"

We were interrupted by a different young woman walking in who seemed more attractive than the first one, if that could be possible. "Are you Nati?"

I think my feelings were somewhere between floored and stunned with a young woman talking to me who seemed so attractive, poised, and smiled like that.

"You met Julia. Yes? Hi, I'm Ruth." She reached out to shake my hand, which we did. "I'm another student of the healing ceremonies. Joe; she wants a small bag of sugar." She spun around in place, went to a shelf, and returned with a small bag.

Joe tilted his head with a slight smile. "No charge. Someone left a little money for her."

Ruth's eyebrows shot up.

Joe said. "Tell her it's a gift from someone on the reservation."

Joe and I traded a glance.

So, Joe and the Sorceress had talked, and one or both of them had told those two young women about me. That didn't settle so well in me so I went outside.

Out there, my eyes squinted against the harsh bright sunlight. Having nothing to do I squatted down on my heels, and leaned against the store with my hat down enough in front shading my eyes. A piece of trash tumbled along by the wind. I had my forearms resting on my knees when a tan dog stopped maybe ten feet away. She seemed a little smaller and thinner than those other two of the sorceress, with her ribs showing. She lowered her head in my direction as if taking a whiff. I slightly wiggled my fingers. She took a few steps towards me. I smiled. Her nose had come about a foot from my left hand when she stopped. She raised a front paw a little without losing touch with the ground.

I blew softly through my lips without making a recognizable sound.

She took a sniff of my hand. Then a little taste of a lick. She gave my hand a few good licks.

I wiggled my other hand and brought it closer.

She licked that hand which gave me a chance to scratch her shoulders. When I moved to rub her tummy, she moved sideways away from that. She didn't trust me enough.

When I stood up she moved back quickly. "Aw. C'mon. I'm only going into the store."

I doubt she understood a word I said, but I hoped the tone would be right.

She didn't follow me, but she didn't move out of sight, either. I laid another twenty on the counter. "Can you get me a bag of dog food?"

He smiled. "Go see if what you want is at the other end of row three."

I found a small bag of dry dog chow, which I brought to the counter.

Joe asked me for one of those store credit slips, which he marked through and wrote a new amount on it. He made a little smile that seemed all too knowing, or evil.

Back outside I squatted down against the wall. I added water to my canteen cup, took a few sips, and set it on the ground. I opened the bag of dog chow and held a nugget in my fingers.

A few minutes later she came a foot way from me again. She passed her nose over the canteen cup, and came a few inches from that nugget of food.

I didn't move.

I spoke with a soft voice. "Here." I wiggled the nugget.

She took a whiff of that nugget.

She didn't know how to take it from my fingers. OK, she hadn't been used to a kind human. I wiggled my fingers to where I could barely hold on to it.

When she put her tongue on it for a taste I let go.

She dropped it into the dirt, picked it up, and went fifteen feet away to eat it by herself.

I had another in my fingers. We did the drop it routine again. By the fifth nugget she and I managed to transfer it to her mouth without dropping it.

I wiggled my nugget smelling fingers in the water and rested that hand across my knee again.

She sniffed that water on my fingers and licked at that.

I moved my fingers back to the cup which she almost knocked over.

Finally she got it and lapped at the water after those dry food morsels.

I laid a sweat rag on the ground and poured better than a dozen food nuggets on it.

She ate them all, and had another drink.

Finally she let me scratch her behind an ear.

When I stood up she skittered a few feet away. I said a few words trying to make the tone right for her.

I went back into Joe's for another soda.

When I went to pay he spoke in a soft voice. "New friend?"

I nodded.

He said. "You're a kind person. Maybe I had better tell you something before you get hurt. Not many are as kind as you."

He paused. "The Sorceress and her two young students last night saw right through you. Those two are different than the two you saw this morning through here. They saw your skirt didn't hang right and made a shrewd observation you were wearing a diaper. When one of those young woman came over here for a fresh pot of hot water she smelled the chemicals in your diaper. If you're going to stick around, I need to know the size for ordering you a new pack."

I squinted up with a few tears. He had been so accepting of me and my secret. "Tell me more about that two spirit idea?"

He said. "Many Indian cultures, including here, have that term for anybody who does things differently. Gay, lesbian, rides a horse backwards, or your wearing the wrong clothes. You're a new kind of a two spirit person."

I thought that over.

He said. "Not everyone may be so accepting. You might seriously think of leaving before you get hooked up in something and get hurt. Someone could get really angry at you."

My voice went very low and weak. "My dog."

He said. "Yes. The Sorceress warned me you might find a dog. She said you need to be loved. That's why she went looking for you. A dog could be great, but before you get hooked on that dog, it would be wise for you to leave. Go find another dog someplace else."

I said. "Do you want me to go away?"

He said. "No. You're fine by me. Jobs are scarce here. We just don't want to see you get hurt."

I said. "May I go outside and think?"

He nodded.

Outside that dog remained close by. When I squatted down against that wall she came to me. After a few more nuggets of food she wanted to lick me again. She had her paws on my thighs as she licked my face. Her saliva smelled like a young dog. Her rough sharp nails cut my skin. She wanted me too.

I went back in and told Joe.

He said. "Your choice. What size are your diapers?"

I hefted that backpack up on his counter, opened the flap where he could read the size himself.

Outside the Sorceress' house there another problem developed of her two dogs were unhappy. The less friendly one bared its fangs. This new tan dog was a little smaller and backed off.

I squatted down and held a hand out for anyone who wanted to lick some salt.

Shared hand licking became acceptable.

The Sorceress watched as I handed out food nuggets.

She still didn't use words with me when she motioned for me to come in. All of us went in.

Inside I showed her the opened bag of dog chow and held up three fingers.

Three small bowls of dog chow went down on the floor. The one for the new dog went further away on the other side of the door.

Taking a nap that afternoon with me caused growls. In the end my new friend rested on my left on the mattress and against the wall. The others were on my other side.

That night their warmth felt perfect in the chill. If any of them got too warm, they rolled over and pushed on me with their paws making a cooling space between us.

In the morning the dogs needed introductions all over again. We made do.

Back at Joe's I laid a twenty on his counter. "Four bits a night means that's forty nights. Or something. Could you just put that credit to the Sorceress?"

He grinned.

I named my dog Ginger for her tan color.