

AUBURN

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Chapter 11 - Repair Shop

A few days later Joe asked me for a favor. His main distributor had a truck go down, and they supplied the local schools, too. His alternate source resided two hours west. Would I drive his van the five or six hours the round trip would require? He couldn't pay me much if in cash, but I could have store credit for more. The Sorceress would be pleased if I did, and so would the schools. Everyone needed milk and other perishable foods.

"Uh, sure, Uncle Joe, but why me?"

"You walked in within minutes of their phone call. The people I called were away from their phones or unavailable. Not enough time to find someone, and get to the supplier before they close. Let me show you how to load the van."

On the Interstate that van did catch a cross wind scaring me as I kept from side swiping the car in the next lane. After that I drove under the speed limit.

The distributor's loading dock crew knew how to pack that van and did most of the work. The dry goods went along the two sides, and across the front of the cargo area. The milk and other non-frozen products went towards the front with a little dry ice and plastic wrapped up the sides and across the top. The area for the frozen foods had more dry ice. Another layer of dry goods insulated the frozen food from the sun heated back door for heading east in the afternoon. Plastic pipe vented the CO2 gas from the dry ice out of the van, and especially away from asphyxiating me as the driver.

Joe had a few pop and country music CDs in the van for me thinking I might prefer those over the music he liked. He pegged that right. Bless his heart, his order list included a pack of the disposable diapers with tabs I preferred.

All that milk, liquids, and frozen food weighed that van down on its back axle. It drove differently. I slowed down even more.

A state trooper pulled me over for going too slow, and the way that van sat low in the back suggested illegal cargo. I showed him the distributor's list, and all that plastic wrap with the dry ice. He called the distributor, but they had closed for the day. He scowled, but then must have decided I had to be legit as he let me go. He told me he would alert law enforcement on the route that Joe's truck and license plate would be taking. The police would keep all of them informed of the van's progress. That covered both possible outcomes of I had lied about my destination, and if that truck broke down, they wanted to know and send relief. Milk for children in the schools had their heart felt support.

When I returned Joe rode with me up to the school. He did introduce me as an Anglo two-spirit person. He made a request as we unloaded the schools' part of the order of could I shave and shower in the boy's gym?

Out of their sight in the locker room I put on a fresh diaper under a clean dress. Joe must have talked to them about me. When I came out carrying my backpack with my used diaper in a plastic bag, they told me to come back for a shower any time. I did occasionally.

That visit broke the ice. I found out later I became the conversational topic that evening with their families. As the days went on more people around that little town would smile or wave at me. Not everyone, but enough. I had become acceptable in a small way.

That night of that trip for Joe, the Sorceress had been away overnight. She never locked her door. Her students could come and go as they pleased.

Ginger and the other two dogs became very happy seeing me again. After feeding them, I shooed them out long enough for me to have a wonderful orgasm in my wet diaper. I let them back in after changing myself. That night the outside temperature dropped nearly to freezing. The house had a furnace, but the Sorceress used her wood stove, so I did too. I kept the wood stove going for warmth, and those dogs snuggled all night. Their warm bodies against me made sense of the song *Three Dog Night*.

A few days later after walking many miles with the Sorceress hunting for peyote buttons, I lingered at Joe's over a cold soda. I had become so hungry. I tried one of his pre-packaged sub sandwiches. It tasted better than I expected. Or had I become hungrier than I thought?

I took a bag of potato chips to the counter to pay for them. Joe had a different face. I couldn't tell at first what it meant. "You've worked in motels, a Love's, restaurants, and more. Yes?"

I nodded.

He said. "Ran the front desk?"

I said. "Yes. At night."

He asked. "Ever get into any trouble?"

I told him the truth about being fired at Love's.

He wanted to see my revolver, which he admired. "Put that away before anyone sees it and attracts trouble."

When I had it repacked, he took me by the arm to his front door and went outside. I didn't like being pushed around that way, but he didn't look mean. He pointed across the river, the railroad tracks, and the Interstate. "See that abandoned gas station? And that boarded up store?"

He told me a story about those, and especially about the gas station. He asked me to help him in a different way, which he explained. If I could be willing, he would ask the Tribal leadership.

A few days later Joe arranged for a man to give me a ride to the Arizona county seat almost an hour away. I took Ginger who had her head out the window enjoying herself as her rear paws pounded with excitement on my lap. Her toenails cut me until I dug a shirt out of the backpack and draped it over my legs.

In town we found a vet. I put on my backpack and carried Ginger in my arms. She didn't have a collar. The receptionist scowled. The first vet came out and disappeared. Then a woman came out and took us into the back. She too scowled over how I acquired this dog. She gave Ginger an exam of the mouth, eyes, ears, paws, coat, and back end. She squinted at me in my dress now festooned with dog hair. "Can you afford shots?"

I said. "Yes."

She didn't ask how, and I didn't say in cash.

Ginger's paws were slipping on the stainless steel exam table. I held her against my chest for that terrifying moment of having a shot in the loose skin at her neck. Then a second one. "That's it."

I said. "My money is in my backpack. Can you hold her while I dig it out. How much?"

She called out to the front, and they reported back an amount. That had become more expensive than I had imagined.

The woman veterinarian's eyebrows went up as I counted out twenties from the bottom of the backpack which I laid on the side counter. I packed everything back where it came from. "Thanks." I took my dog in my arms.

Outside, Ginger squirmed with all her strength to lick my face all over and real hard. She seemed greatly relieved to be rescued out of there forgetting who, myself, had carried her into that awful place.

She made herself a big pain as I struggled to get me, my backpack, and her all into the car.

At a drug store I bought one of those lint rollers which I used removing most of the dog hair from my good dress.

We had to ask for directions several times before we found the home of the owner of that gas station. It was a low one story house in the motif of early Arizona. I left Ginger in the car as the lint roller removed even more dog hair.

I knocked. Nothing happened. I checked the slip of paper with the name and address and knocked again. A car pulled up, and a middle-aged woman got out and walked up the driveway.

I summoned my courage. "Does Mrs. Shawhannsey live here?" I hadn't planned it that my skirt and legs were obscure behind an ornamental cactus and a chair.

She asked. "What do you want?"

I said. "I came to rent that empty repair shop on the Interstate."

She cut me a frown saying 'oh' or something like that. "She's hard of hearing. I'll ask." She went in the side door before I thought of saying 'thanks'.

Several minutes later the front door opened with a frail old woman steadying herself with a hand on the door frame. In the dark front room that other woman excused herself. "You want to rent that gas station?" Her eyes stayed focused on my face. "What makes you think you can run it?"

I said. "I managed a Love's Truck Stop. You know, one of those big gaudy things."

She said. "Ain't worth much. You seen it?"

I said. "It's empty; all the equipment went missing long ago."

She said. "Well, c'mon in, Sonny." She turned inside, and I followed and closed her door. "My eyes ain't what they used to be. That damned social worker wants me to move into assisted living."

With the way she held her eyes on my face I wondered if she had seen my skirt.

She asked. "How much can you pay?"

I said. "You said it all with 'ain't worth much'. How about a hundred a month and 10% of my net? I have to install lots of equipment."

She said. "Ain't that the truth. Where you from?"

I said. "Virginia."

She said. "You Anglo?"

I said. "Yes, ma'am."

She said. "I won't do business with the damned Indians. You got a lease form?"

I said. "No, ma'am. I came to meet you first."

She said. "Well, Sonny, you stay right there while I search around. That damned husband of mine up and died leaving me with worthless junk like that gas station."

Many minutes passed as she cursed and grumbled in a back room.

I kept standing while vaguely keeping an eye on an escape route. She seemed more of a witch to me. A light back there turned on and off more than once.

She came out with papers in her hand. "You pay the taxes, repairs, and all the utilities. Got that hundred?"

A hundred dollar bill came out of my wallet which I handed her.

She held up close to an eye real suspicious like. "Sign. You pay in cash each month, you hear?"

I said. "Only if you'll mail me back a receipt."

She said. "For that you include a stamped self-addressed envelope, Sonny."

The dim light made that lease hard to read. I decided I had better act before she saw my skirt or changed her mind. I could simply not pay if the lease became too awful.

I signed. "I need a copy."

She said. "Sure, Sonny. You just stand right there." She made that slow walk of hers into the back where a piece of equipment sounded like a photocopier. She shuffled back and handed me a copy.

This all seemed weird. "Shake on it?"

She did, and I escaped with that paper in my hand which I read much more carefully at the car.

Ginger, of course, had to lick my face all over.

Over time I found out that Courthouse appeared pretty spiffy as Courthouses go. When we stopped in front of it that first time, I became intimidated and downright scared of it.

I left Ginger in the car, used that roller again removing more dog hair, and walked into the center front door. Inside a desk had an upright folded sign. "No Receptionist" and "Budget Cutback". Next to it had a tri-fold brochure with the floor plan.

I cringed at the back room being labeled Magistrate. Before that and off on one side had a room with several functions one of which read "Business Licenses". I went there.

A young woman a little older than myself stood up from a desk and came to the counter when I entered. She smiled just a little. "What do you need?"

I said. "A business license."

She asked. "Where?"

I read the address off that lease.

Her face signaled something I couldn't understand. She brought out a map of the county much longer than wide. Maybe 40% of the north end belonged to the reservation. "Where is this?"

I put a finger on the Interstate highway at that small town where Joe had his store.

She gave it a closer glance and brought out a more detailed map.

I put a finger on it for the location of that abandoned gas station.

She bent over giving it a very close look. "Huh. When they built the Interstate and the road alongside of it that little part doesn't have a tax number. Just a minute."

She went in the back and came out with a much older woman. The younger one explained what she knew using the same story telling it with more words.

The older one didn't smile as she put her own finger on that map and examined it. "Oh yes. That!" She kept her finger at that place as she turned her attention towards the younger woman. "After the Feds condemned the land for the Interstate, this little stub just sat there as if it had been made a part of the highway. But it isn't. The owner died, and nobody did a thing. Then that awful man discovered the boundary isn't known and this parcel may be in both Arizona and the tribe. This little part dropped off the tax lists."

She tilted her head and made a quizzical expression. "Have you applied for an occupancy permit? You'll need one of those."

I said. "Do they need to know what kind of a business? I'm not so sure myself with all the equipment gone long ago. For starters, how about just as a parking lot?"

She frowned. "Why?"

I said. "Keep someone from abusing the Indians like that last guy who didn't follow any regulations, or get any permits from anybody."

She said. "Guess you don't need a state sales tax number."

I had been about to say something, but she held up a finger. She went in the back and returned. "You say the Navajos want you to do this?"